BECOMING DIASPORICALLY AFRICAN:

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF WEST AFRICAN CAPOEIRA

Celina de Sá

A DISSERTATION

in

Africana Studies and Anthropology

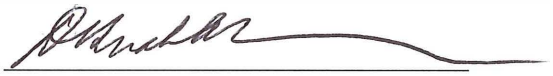
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

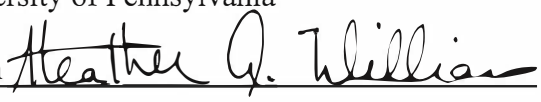
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2018

Supervisor of Dissertation 

Dr. Deborah A. Thomas, R. Jean Brownlee Professor of Anthropology, Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Graduate Group Chairperson 

Dr. Heather Williams, Presidential Professor of Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Graduate Group Chairperson 

Dr. Theodore G. Schurr, Professor of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Timothy Rommen, Davidson Kennedy Professor of Music and Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania
Dr. John L. Jackson, Richard Perry Professor of Anthropology and Communications, University of Pennsylvania
Dr. Cheikh Anta Babou, Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania
Dr. Deborah A. Thomas, R. Jean Brownlee Professor of Anthropology, Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, University of Pennsylvania

BECOMING DIASPORICALLY AFRICAN: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF WEST AFRICAN CAPOEIRA

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my father, Ronaldo Estevam de Sá,

who taught me to be curious,

unflinching in my beliefs,

and not take anything too seriously.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The culmination of this project into a single document is deceptive. It does not reveal how much it was, in fact, the work of so many. I am indebted to the tremendous support network of people that made this a possibility. First and foremost, I want to thank the capoeiristas who so generously shared their worlds with me so that I may better understand the past and the present, and imagine more bravely for the future.

I began this project as a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow at Whittier College. Without the encouragement of my advisors sal johnston, Becky Overmyer-Velasquez, Ann Kakaliouras, Lisa Bortman and Sylvia Vetrone, I would never have considered going to graduate school. My admission to a joint program in Africana Studies and Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania led me to cultivate my scholarly spirit. The Foreign Language Area Studies scholarship, along with my fearless Wolof teacher, Mbacke Thioune, allowed me to do research by my principles. At Penn, I was lucky enough to work with some of the best mentors and colleagues I could possibly encounter. Year after year, from one challenge to the next, Deborah Thomas has guided me with a careful orchestration of tough love and deep compassion, so that I may find my own way as an Africana anthropologist. I am forever grateful to have found my perfect mentor. Tim Rommen never failed to convert all of my ideas (good, bad, and half-baked) into an exciting potential. Your positive attitude kept me going more than you know. John L. Jackson has been one of my most admirable role models, a reminder to always stay grounded in the real relationships of ethnography and ethnographic writing. Cheikh Anta Babou has always treated me with generosity and respect, from inviting me and my family into his home to celebrate *Korité* to challenging my anthropological leanings in seminar. I also want to thank Kamari Clarke for her inspiring work and mentorship.

My colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth College and beyond gave me richly fulfilling interlocutors throughout this process. To my cohort twin Osei Alleyne, my closest friend and co-thinker Layla Ben-Ali, and my first academic partner in crime Zach Mondesire, you all set me in the right direction from the start. A special thanks to Diego Arispe-Bazan and Tiffany Cain, my two anthropology comrades-in-arms: together we were the three musketeers of granting, editing, conferencing, and holding on to one another's sanity when doing it yourself becomes too burdensome. Jeremy Dell and Coleman Donaldson, thank you for always reminding me of the importance of local language learning and loving the complexities of West African living. To Josslyn Luckett, Lyndsey Beutin, Leslie Kay Jones, Samiha Rahman, Grace Sanders-Johnson, Keren Weitzberg, Rasul Miller, Khwezi Mkhize, Alden Young, Garry Bertholf, and Oliver Rollins, I see you all as brilliant examples to follow as scholars, activists, and friends. I would also like to recognize Trica Keaton, Yana Stainova, Emily Raymundo, Summer Kim Lee,

Laura McTighe, Nathalie Batraville, Olivia Lapierre, Jarvis Antonio Green, and Sean Bloch at Dartmouth College, who motivated me in the final phase of this process.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my friends and family that know me beyond the academy. Kassoum Diakite, I appreciate all your patience and support throughout my time in "the field" as well as your insightful input about our three overlapping worlds of Brazil, Senegal and the US. My dearest friend, Emily Taylor, you gave me countless reminders of the significance and difficulty of the nature of this work. I sincerely thank you for the refreshing thought that opting out is always an option, which motivated me to remind myself why I do what I do. Wes Alcenat, in the final stages you have done more than most. I am so grateful for your example of how to live in the struggle, and never stop striving for our people. Finally, to the Davidsons, the de Sás, and the Davidson de Sás: a scholar could not ask for a more interesting family history to fill my mind with endless questions about the world; and a person could not ask for a more loving group.

ABSTRACT

BECOMING DIASPORICALLY AFRICAN:
THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL WEST AFRICAN CAPOEIRA

Celina Aisha Davidson de Sá

Deborah Thomas

Capoeira—a combat game developed by enslaved Afro-Brazilians for mental and physical liberation—has become an icon of Brazilian cultural history and national pride, as well as a symbol of African cultural contributions to the country, despite centuries of social scorn. The African continent is one of the most recent areas to discover this African-based fighting form, and for West Africans in particular, capoeira has entered their lives as a point of focus in their emergent consciousness of the historical relationships between West Africa and Brazil that began with the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By focusing on a network of capoeira schools (based primarily in Senegal, the Gambia, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin), this dissertation examines how West African capoeiristas use the practice of capoeira as a way of 1) reimagining their social worlds in relation to the constraints of postcolonial citizenship and intense intra-continental migrations, and 2) redefining the boundaries of the so-called "African diaspora." Brazil has been resituated as the site of historical and creative "raw materials" from which West Africans draw to reconfigure their social belonging (Brown 2005). This project, therefore, investigates a black diasporic perspective *from* Africa outwards that is colored by internal diasporas and their cultural manifestations. In that light I argue that dominant popular and scholarly narratives of the African diaspora are structured in a way that not only privileges the diaspora—imparting it with complex histories and social processes—while marginalizing Africa. These narratives prevent contemporary Africans and diasporic blacks from being considered contemporaries, as African contexts are either ignored or relegated to a historical, symbolic past. Despite this elision of African contribution,

participation or innovation within diasporic paradigms and practices, youth in urban West Africa mobilize diasporic forms of performance, history and symbolism, not only to write themselves into the diaspora as equal participants and interlocutors, but also as a mechanism of (re)defining their own sense of continental, racial, historical and global belonging. In doing so, they reimagine their social worlds to be transnational in ways that challenge the limitations imposed upon them by postcolonial nationalism, global neoliberal marginalization, and global structures of race.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In April of 2005, Brazilian President Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva and Gilberto Gil, an Afro-Brazilian musical legend and then Minister of Culture,[1] visited Senegal on a tour of the African continent. As these diplomatic trips often go, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade hosted their excursion to Gorée Island, the site of the historic slave port.[2] When the Senegalese and Brazilian heads of state stepped off the dock onto the island, Moctar N'Diaye, the founder of the first capoeira school in Senegal, waited at the entrance with several of his students, hiding behind the traditional Senegalese drummers that, unlike them, received formal permission to welcome the honorable guests. Just as the political entourage was stepping ashore, N'Diaye let out a powerful "Iéé́é!" and struck up his *berimbau.*[3] He was almost instantly seized by the presidential bodyguards. When Brazilian President Lula da Silva shouted "Capoeira!," President Wade ordered the bodyguards to release them. N'Diaye and his students proceeded to play a few quick games of capoeira before they were stopped. At that point, Marcia Kablan, a Brazilian capoeira *mestre* with a school in the Ivory Coast, presented the documents they had prepared for plans for a capoeira event: three copies, one each for Wade, Lula and Gil. As a result of their organized ambush, the Senegalese government offered the martial artists $1,000. The following

[1] Due to a series of destabilizing political shifts in the Brazilian government beginning with the impeachment of the first female president Dilma Rousseff in August of 2016, the Ministry of Culture department was terminated by acting president Michel Temer.

[2] Gilberto Gil's 1995 album "Quanta" features a song in French titled "La Lune de Gorée" (The Gorée Moon). Gil traveled across the African continent in the 1970s. He cites the trip as one that emboldened him to identify fully as Afro-Brazilian and express his blackness musically. The song speaks of the tragedy of slavery embodied in the bold colors of the moon that only exists from the island, while the rest of the world experiences the moon peacefully.

[3] The primary instrument used in capoeira. It resembles a large bow and arrow made of a sanded thin tree stalk (classically the *beriba* species, but many are made of bamboo and other thin, flexible trees) with a metal wire holding the arch and a hollowed out, open gourd attached at the base. It is played by striking the wire with a stick, while a shaker resting on the fingers of the striking hand give an accent to each tone.

year, they hosted the first capoeira *encontro* ("encounter" or gathering) with three Brazilian *mestres* who were fully funded by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture.[4]

Capoeira—a combat game developed by enslaved Afro-Brazilians for mental and physical liberation—has become an icon of Brazilian cultural history and national pride, as well as a symbol of African cultural contributions to the country, despite centuries of social scorn. In recent decades, the mobility of Brazilians around the world (particularly to Europe and the United States) has served to export the martial art, which has since gained the status of a "hot commodity" in the marketplace of expressive cultures appropriated by foreigners in the era of globalization. The African continent is one of the most recent areas to discover this African-based fighting form, and for West Africans in particular, capoeira has entered their lives as a point of focus in their emergent consciousness of the historical relationships between West Africa and Brazil that began with the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

By focusing on a network of capoeira schools (based primarily in Senegal, the Gambia, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin), this dissertation examines how West African capoeiristas use the practice of capoeira as a way of 1) reimagining their social worlds in relation to the constraints of postcolonial citizenship and intense intra-continental migrations, and 2) redefining the boundaries of the so-called "African diaspora." I am interested in how the practice of Brazilian capoeira has become a node within global black subjectivity formation, and in how this process raises

[4] A year prior in 2004, Gilberto Gil visited Gorée on his own, hosted by then Prime Minister (current President of Senegal) Macky Sall. His stated goal of the trip was to develop cultural cooperation between the two countries, and to prepare for the third World Festival of Negro Arts to be held in Dakar in 2006 (https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultnot/afp/2004/12/06/ult34u111995.jhtm). Moctar N'Diaye requested from the mayor of Gorée that he host a capoeira *roda* to welcome Gilberto Gil, but he and they mayor were "fighting" about previous drama and he refused the plans. He then planned a surprise *roda* with Marcia Kablan at the base of the cliff where Gilberto Gil would be taking a tour. As soon as they saw him on the cliff they struck up the berimbau and Gil immediately turned and shouted "Capoeira na Africa!" And ran down the cliff to seize the berimbau and play with them. He joined N'Diaye in a short game. Gil swore he would help them fund the international encontro they were planning.

questions regarding authority and hybridity, the role of slavery in the construction of modern black subjectivities, and the constructions of community across time and space. In asking what it means for francophone West Africans to place a Luso-African-American expressive cultural form at the center of emergent black consciousness movements, I am also querying the directionality of circuits between Africa and its diaspora (Matory 2005; Pierre 2012; Brown 2005; Edwards 2003). This project positions a black diasporic perspective from Africa outwards that is colored by internal diasporas and their cultural manifestations. I will argue that these martial artists are creating new black subjectivities that work to defy the social expectations of a racialized, gendered, and spiritual subject in urban neoliberal West Africa.

(From left to right) President Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva, Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil and President Abdoulaye Wade standing in the "Door of No Return" in Gorée Island's historic

Maison des Esclaves (House of Slaves) looking West. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4446647.stm 2005).

Statement of Research Question

The network of West African capoeira schools I explored during my research gives us insights into dynamic contestations concerning the meanings of history, religion, race, nationality, language and gender that evoke larger questions of national belonging. The boundaries of their transnational community are constructed both through local interactions mediated online (i.e. learning Brazilian cultural habits from YouTube videos or emailing masters in Brazil, France and the US), and in quotidian actions of self-improvement (e.g. working out to advance skills for inclusion into global capoeira standards). This transnational diasporic community also draws our attention to new complexities in relation to postcolonial West African national cultures, as intra-continental migration has imbued these with meanings that are not merely bound by territorial or linguistic points of origin. In this case, Brazil has been resituated as the site of historical and creative "raw materials" from which West Africans draw to reconfigure their social belonging (Brown 2005). This project, therefore, investigates a black diasporic perspective *from* Africa outwards that is colored by internal diasporas and their cultural manifestations.

Because this community of capoeristas is one that marks a convergence of political and linguistic categories both unique for the time and place of their iteration, I have been interested in discovering when a diasporic stance is mobilized towards social and political ends as opposed to a nationalist one in urban postcolonial West African contexts. For example, since the network consists almost entirely of francophone countries, they are united by the French language despite

their national differences. At the same time, while only a few of them have origins from lusophone African countries like Guinea-Bissau, Angola or Cape Verde—and even fewer speak fluent Portuguese—many of them identify as having "lusophone sensibilities" that allows them to align their identity with Brazil. All the while, the overt political ideology of most in the community is one of Pan-Africanism, meaning the cultural and political engagement in unifying like-minded Africans and African descendants anywhere in the world. Defining and understanding these conceptual frames and the tensions they embody —Pan-African, Afro-Pan-lusophone, Francophone, etc.—is at the heart of this study. I intend to explore how and at what strategic point members of this community engage each of these overlapping but distinct frameworks.

The capoeira network not only raises issues related to West African processes of state formation and nationalisms, but also to broader relationships between race, diaspora, and citizenship. What are the political and artistic dynamics for West Africans who identify with a transnational black community? Because racial discourses of self-identification with blackness are complexly hidden in contemporary, urban West Africa (Pierre 2012), this type of artistic coalition-building and the recognition of a shared history with African descendants in Brazil signals a somewhat unique phenomenon. Because these capoeiristas identify as black people practicing a fundamentally black martial art created out of the conditions of enslavement, this project attempts to understand how the rhetoric of diaspora is employed by Africans seeking inclusion in a transnational black cultural dialogue that grants cultural authority to Brazil. What explains some young people's attraction to capoeira in a variety of West African contexts and how do they mobilize it in their daily lives? What insights do we glean from their attraction to Brazilian language, arts, and martial histories, as well as their identification with perceived "Lusophone sensibilities" as francophones, regarding questions of belonging and the current state

of identifying with former imperial powers in postcolonial urban West Africa? More broadly, to what extent do urban West African youth identify with ethnicity, nationality, language, region, continent and a localized or globalized understanding of race? What are some of the pitfalls and contradictions of discussing race in Africa, especially racialized performances and self-identifications predicated on a transnationality?

Capoeira and Racialization in a Global Context

The story of West African youth's mobilization of capoeira in the 21st century is a story of postcolonial belonging, citizenship and racial self-making that requires more than an amalgamation of singular research contributions from every available context. Rather than employing a comparative analytic framework to understand diasporic formation, we should think relationally about how particular events or communities contribute to a diasporic interaction. In the context I am exploring here, this means asking questions about how imperially defined relationships in formerly francophone West African nation-states influence present-day interactions across boundaries, and about how the presence of more recent interactions, such as those between French West Africans and Afro-Brazilians, or the absence of others, (e.g. those between lusophone Africans and Afro-Brazilians) influences the ways people develop a sense of themselves as subjects today. Is there a global hierarchy of capoeira practitioners, and if so, how is it defined? What is the racial landscape of capoeira across the U.S., Brazil, West Africa and France?

The network of capoeira schools in West Africa frequently communicates and collaborates with one another to work towards their individual and collective aspirations of institutionalizing the martial art in the region. The network comprises five countries—Senegal,

the Gambia, Togo, Benin and Ivory Coast— which have a political relationship that reconfigures the historical similarities (i.e. history of European imperialism) and differences (e.g. contemporary economic and political standing) that may otherwise determine their interaction. For instance, Senegal and the Gambia have a historical relationship as their former imperial political formation of Senegambia. Similarly, Togo and Benin have shared a precolonial history of overlapping empires, linguistic groups and ethnic affiliations they continue to share through the colonial and postcolonial periods. However, the current relationships between these five countries through this artistic network exhibit a new kind of social and political configuration shaped by urban mobility, cultural affinities and aspirational projects that are based upon reimagining these older histories.

Capoeira's "return" to Africa in the late 20th century is not a question of Afro-Atlantic dialogues over a shared tradition. Rather, it is an Afro-Brazilian diasporic tradition that came to be an identifiably "African" practice in Brazil's early 20th century national project of valorizing Afro-Brazilian forms as both "folkloric" and "modern" (Assuncão 2005, Skidmore 2010). During the late 20th century, as Brazilians migrated in search of mobility and economic opportunity after the 20-year military dictatorship, capoeira, newly commodified as a neatly-packaged, accessible representation of Brazil and of Brazil's African heritage, also traveled to countries like Angola, South Africa and Senegal. For many West Africans, knowledge of the tradition also traveled via media, such as popular films rather than via a trained practitioner. Once capoeira was discovered to have African cultural traditions embedded in it, many Africans made claims to the tradition as decidedly *African*. Because histories of slavery are reanimated in the physical manifestation of capoeira movements, West Africans' corporeal practice in this case also enacts an embodied knowledge of a racial and territorial identification.

The Creation and Circulation of Afro-Brazilian Capoeira

Theorizing Brazil and West Africa together is not a simple task precisely because the two geopolitical regions are historically connected. This can produce misleading assumptions about their connections and obscure other, lesser known histories of their relations. Earlier, almost rhizomatic migrations throughout history mentioned in the discussion of the "Yoruba Atlantic" make it difficult to see the relationship between our contemporary categories of "francophone West Africa," "lusophone Africa" and "lusophone Brazil." In this modern-day framework that primarily reflects postcolonial delineations, the presence of Brazilian cultural practices in Benin and Togo, for instance, can leave people scratching their heads. Because of this, when telling people about my focus on capoeira in francophone West Africa, I am frequently met with a puzzled look, followed by, "Why not Angola?" This is because most people presume an Afro-Brazilian art form would carry the most historical significance and cultural relevance in the presumed country of the form's "origins" and the site from which the majority of African captives came who landed in Brazil due to their shared Portuguese imperialism. There have, in fact, been many migrations from Brazil to the Kingdom of Dahomey (modern-day Benin) since the mid 18th century (Castillo 2016), with three major waves even prior to the late 19th century moment of return that were brought to light by African diaspora historians (Matory 1999, 2005; Zeleza 2005).

The difficulty in defining the relationship between these regions is particularly apparent in the history of capoeira and the scholarly and popular approaches to defining and locating it. Capoeira is a multifaceted practice, involving instrumentation, song, communal participation and a distinctive dance-fight aesthetic. Like many African-derived spiritual and expressive practices carried out by blacks under colonial rule in the Americas, the martial art underwent phases of legal prohibition and social scorn. Once slavery was abolished for several decades and Brazil

began a project of establishing a national culture, capoeira was institutionalized and hailed as the national sport (Assuncao 2005, Talmon-Chvaicer 2008). Capoeira in Brazil is thus frequently signified as the triumph of an artistic legacy, or a cultural continuity with the Africa of the popular imagination (Assuncao 2005). Historians speculate that capoeira's closest predecessor is the N'Golo Zebra dance, its variations created in the Kongolese kingdom. While certain ideological projects hold these "origins" dear, most scholars start the clock on contemporary capoeira at its stage in colonial Brazil, arguing it is distinctly a form of liberation created from a variety of African practices under conditions of enslavement. The N'Golo predecessor only contributes to aspects of the form and not necessarily the underlying ideologies, principles and social functions (Matthias, Talmon-Chvaicer 2007).

Brazil holds a strong presence in the imaginary of many West Africans, as it does for most of the world. Not only is it the country associated with some of the most spectacular soccer legends in the world, it is also the land of samba and the biggest party on the planet: *carnaval*. But Brazil also captures the attention of many practicing capoeiristas in West Africa because of its successful portrayal of itself as a racial paradise (Smith 2016), a place where blacks, whites and indigenous peoples have always mixed freely and void of racial strife. Indeed, this portrayal is the basis of Brazil's claim to racial democracy, a claim that has been pointed out by many to be a myth (Viotti 1985; Fernandes 1989; Hasenbalg 1979; Hanchard 1999a; Winant 1999).

As the country with the largest black population in the so-called New World, both during slavery (which was not abolished in Brazil until 1888) and in the present day, Brazil's relationship to blackness and to African cultural practices has, in fact, been one formed by selective engagement with Africa. Brazil's distinct relationship to ideological explanations of race, color and culture was constructed by politicians and scholars who wished to position their society in opposition to the United States prior to the 1960s (Winant 1999). The myth of racial

democracy emphasized the African cultural roots of a kind of Brazilian melting pot, while simultaneously downplaying the socio-political structural inequalities that continue to disenfranchise black people (Hanchard 1999a, Winant 1999, Smith 2016, Alves and Vargas 2014).[5] When they move, Brazilian capoeiristas carry with them the racial ideologies and histories of their context, which serves as their entry point into interactions with West African capoeiristas. Despite an increase in political awareness around issues of structural racism and racial identity, Brazilian capoeiristas are often engaged in tracing "roots" rather than building new "routes" when it comes to their involvement with the idea of Africa and relationships with African capoeira. While some West Africans romanticize Brazil's racial democracy, Afro-Brazilians (and the Europeans that tag along with them) similarly romanticize Africa as a site of historical richness and black symbolism, the site of origins for much of what Brazil prides itself on as a uniquely African-infused, but ultimately self-defined creole national culture.

The Landscape of Black Performance in Dakar, Senegal

Ghana has been a central site for thinking through the ways race does and does not operate on the continent (Pierre 2012, Holsey 2008, Shipley 2013, Osumare 2012). The country's history is rich in the circulation of transnational black cultural forms, partly due to independence president Kwame Nkrumah's vanguardist political pan-Africanism. By using Ghana as an ethnographic site from which to demonstrate the ubiquity of structures of white supremacy and global racialization, Jemima Pierre has demonstrated the effects of the erasure of a discourse of slavery in West Africa centered on the African people and the complexity of relationships

[5] The landscape of Brazilian racial consciousness has since changed. Brazilian racial politics have increasingly changed course, particularly since the abertura signaling the democratic "opening" towards the end of the two-decades long military dictatorship that might indicate a trend toward "turning the myth of racial democracy into a reality of racial politics and opposition" (Winant 100: 1999).

different West African groups had to the slave trade. She also directs necessary attention to the unwillingness of Africanist Anthropology and African Studies more generally to analyze the inherent connection between slavery in the Americas and colonialism on the African continent. She asserts that this gap in the scholarship leaves little room to theorize the mutually constitutive (albeit contextually distinct) processes of racialization in the "Old" and "New" Worlds. Pierre concludes that the connected processes of racial colonialism and racial slavery are often decoupled in the present, obscuring their historical relationship and therefore their postcolonial legacies in the contemporary, "global" period (Pierre 2012).

Senegal's relationship to transnational racial processes and their mobilization within the realm of artistic performance is complex and undertheorized. The country is, however, a crucial site for understanding the ways in which colonial structures of race affect the postcolonial period. It also stands as an important vantage point from which to understand how race, diaspora, politics and expressive culture are inextricably linked and yet their connections are somehow erased, misdirected or simply ignored.[6]

Senegal was once home to the headquarters of the French West Africa (AOF), a colonial administration whose policy of direct rule operated through the categorization of the West African masses as *indigènes* incapable of assimilation, and the *assimilié* or *évolué*. The latter category consisted of 5% of the colonized population that had access to French citizenship, education and political participation if they were born in one of the four *communes*, all located in modern-day Senegal (Conklin 1997). This relatively privileged position under colonial rule

[6] A prime example is the fact that Senegal is well known for its uptake of hip hop musical, aesthetic and protest traditions that have changed the socio-political landscape of the country and served a pivotal role during recent democratic elections (Gueye 2013). Despite the first Senegalese rap group's name "Positive Black Soul", the mobilization of hip hop is often analyzed in political and artistic terms, without a thorough treatment of its potential as an object of study for racial self-making and diaspora.

produced a few Senegalese with some of the highest statuses achievable during this oppressive period. For example, Blaise Diagne was the first and only African to represent the colonies in the French National Assembly on and off between 1913 to 1934.

Senegal's "special" relationship to French colonial rule paved the way for the Senghorian ideology of a kind of productive Duboisian double consciousness, a dual identity of being both French and African, to maintain a perceived African essence and to imbue it with civilizational gifts of French colonial rule to define the new Senegalese citizen (Conklin 1997). This duality, while not necessarily taken up so explicitly by the majority, characterizes a continued tension in public discourse about the Senegalese as Africans, but somehow distinct from other Africans. The collaboration between Islamic brotherhoods and the state, in addition to Senegal's relative democratic stability, contribute to the national discourse of exceptionalism that has characterized Senegal as a "civilized" "sophisticated" "modern" or "diplomatic" country since before it even became a Republic. Indeed, Michael Ralph's historical ethnography about Senegal's global reputation as a stable, diplomatic and cooperative country dates its exceptional "forensic profile" back as far as the 15th century (2015).

Because Senegal is relatively stable, due in part to its proximity to the French under colonial rule and for reasons pertaining to its political trajectory after independence, it has attracted labor and educational migration from the region.[7] Dakar is thus a site of cosmopolitanism in the region that pulls from local and global black resources for creative performance. For reasons of its historical relationship to French colonial rule that became embedded in the self-defining mechanisms of the nation as "sophisticated," "democratic" and "educated," Dakar is also a site of attraction for migrants, or others deemed internal or external

[7] Meanwhile, many Senegalese themselves migrate out to other parts of the continent like South Africa, and to Western nations like the U.S., France, Spain and Italy, with about a fourth of the Senegalese population currently living outside of Senegal.

outsiders. Those who migrate to Senegal for school nevertheless experience social exclusion and a generalized sense of being perceived as inferior at times, despite their own position of superiority as middle-class university students. This process has led to seeking refuge in an imagined third space (Bhabha 1990) that is neither their home nor their host "cultures." Brazil, the rising economic star and cultural icon around the world, has become increasingly appealing as an alternative to the disappointments of the Western promise of opportunity, economic advancement and modernity.

Senegal, my primary site, is not an arbitrary space from which to investigate the cultivation of this kind of African-based, diasporic activity. The country is home to one of the founders and main proponents of the *négritude* movement, the first president of the Republic, Leopold Sedar Senghor. Flawed though his racial ideology may have been, his idea of a black cultural essence was an inherently diasporic one that included expressive arts, styles and ideas from all over the black world. Music, dance, theater and literature were fundamental tools in the establishment of Senegalese cultural nationalism since the colonial period (Kringelbach 2013), but most markedly under Senghor's term (1960-1980) with a lasting legacy to the present. As a result, Dakar has been a major black cosmopolitan artistic hub in the region. While Dakar is the main site of the study, most of the players are only temporary residents. And while Dakar is also a unique space that magnetizes those seeking out creative possibilities for building community in the search for belonging, it is only one node in a web of people across West Africa who comprise a transnational network of "brothers and sisters" in performance. Dakar is also a site that produces conditions of exclusion that serve as the impetus for this kind of transnational community. A product of "Wolofization"—or the hegemony of Wolof language and cultural forms over other ethnic groups in Senegal—Dakar is a worldly city for many foreigners. But for some African non-nationals the social scene can be exclusionary towards non-Wolof speakers.

Chapter 3 will go more into depth about the dual nature of this cosmopolitan hub that some experience as a marginalizing social landscape.

In 1966, Senghor held the First World Festival of Negro Arts (FESMAN) in the country's new National Theater, Daniel Sorano. Artists hailed from all over the African continent, mostly in the form of National Ballets (neo-traditional dance troupes), as well as from across the Western hemisphere and Europe. This arts festival marked a new era of African independence and cultural nationalism after seventy years of colonial rule. It was during this festival that capoeira was first played on the African continent. Vicente Ferreira Pastinha, known by his capoeira name, Mestre Pastinha, is one of the most important figures in capoeira due to his efforts to "return" the form of capoeira (*regional*) that had only recently been standardized in Brazil to its African roots through a re-Africanized variation called *capoeira angola* (Varela 2017). Though Pastinha had been invited by the organizing committee to represent Afro-Brazil, there is no documented evidence of capoeira being institutionalized in Senegal until the founding of the current group *Grupo Africa Capoeira—Ilha de Gorée* (previously called *Les Messagers du Vent*) in 1998.

Despite Senghor's legacy of having supported an artistic aesthetic decidedly characterized as black, race itself is rarely addressed as a relevant subject in studies of the social life of the country. The myth of Senegalese exceptionalism often attracts researchers to study Senegal as a polity that defied so many established assumptions about African countries - due to its relative democratic stability since independence, its secular government that successfully cooperates with Muslim brotherhoods for political rule, and its abundant social services that attract migration from throughout the region (Ralph 2015). Despite the popularity of Senegal as an anthropological point of departure, little is written about the continued legacy of racial structures since the colonial period.

Ironies and Silences of Race in African Contexts

Given the inextricable links between global histories of racial formation and capoeira's global circulation, one major aim of this dissertation is to open up a dialogue about theorizing race on the African continent. In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman (2006) exposes her readers to some of the impossibilities of being a black diasporic subject aspiring to reconnect with one's purported "homeland" and people. The book, a meditation on contemporary consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, points to an irreparable rupture between continental African contexts and those of the diaspora. The silences around this history and the different historical trajectories of each context culminate in the ultimate loss of any chance in finding kin, home or closure for the exiled subject (Trouillot 1995). However, to conclude with this impossibility is to overlook the nuance of African postcolonial contexts that are not limited to state discourses or even dominant popular narratives.

Diasporic blackness is seen as complex and hybrid, while African blackness is seen as homogenized (Wright 2016). African blackness should not be taken for granted,[8] and in many ways the continent is one of the most complicated contexts from which to theorize race in another in a growing list of ironies about race and the African diaspora. We must, however, be aware not to impulsively reduce their claims to blackness as an imported, foreign-imposed or mimicry, a trope which African and American scholars have in the past leveled against African youth.[9] By

[8] Some Africanist historians have begun to analyze the history of race on the continent, however these analyses are typically limited to the complex relationship between blackness and Arabness (Hall 2013, El Hamel 2012; Glassman 2011; Weizberg).

[9] Scholars like Zeleza have written about the foreign imposition of a racialized interpretation of continental African life. They are critical of the "racialization and homogenization" of the African continent by categorizing the diaspora as "African" or "black" interchangeably (2005). Zeleza's critique is that the diasporic experience, particularly the cultural and political hegemony of the African American experience catalyzed in part by 20th century US imperialism and its itinerant multinational corporations are responsible for the overdetermination of diasporic racial understandings on the continent. Scholarly and popular discourses like these often belie the persistence of racial analyses in Africa today. Recently, some have begun to theorize African experiences with race and racialization outside of Africa. Many have come

following Jemima Pierre's (2013) recommendation that in order to understand contemporary diasporic relations, we must first recast African spaces as modern, cosmopolitan and unexceptional, we can identify new analytic possibilities that begin with contemporary African perspectives, experiences and projects, rather than perpetuating stereotypes of "Africa in crisis," as the continent's primary contribution to the postcolonial moment and to a diasporic—and ultimately global—project of social repair.

Focusing on modern, ordinary West Africans who are making an exceptional artistic intervention casts a new light on the issue of Africa's role in the diaspora and in global racial formations. Youth in cities across the region who seek to identify as racialized subjects as a way of empowering themselves against the confines of nationality, ethnicity, autochthony, or economic precarity also do so in order to reckon with the history of European imperialism they see as the cause of their postcolonial predicaments. Rather than seeing capoeira as having a predetermined and foreign-driven *influence* on West Africans, this dissertation starts from the actions and aspirations of those (relatively few) West Africans who engage capoeira in the service of their political work to reimagine their social worlds. Thus, my project is ultimately one that uses the phenomena of capoeira's recent but growing popularity in West Africa as an entryway into an analysis of the projects of young metropolitan Africans who are leveraging diaspora in new and interesting ways. One of their aims is to use capoeira as a way of re-educating the public about the history of slavery, and Africans to contributions to modern cultural technologies. By focusing on the cultural dialogues within the black Atlantic through music and movement, they

---

to the conclusion that continental African become racialized through migration (Asante, Sekimoto, Brown 2016; Pierre 2004; Stoller 2002). In other words, it is only within a Western context, in which preconceived notions of blackness based on the existing diasporic black populations, that Africans "become black". Handel Wright's leveraging of Stuart Hall's theorization about race and culture makes the claim about the African blackness that tacks between essentialism and anti/non-essentialism (2016). He argues, therefore, that "Continental Africans currently living in the diaspora therefore constitute an interesting wrinkle on black identity, being both continental and diasporic and always in the process of rendering both categories more complex" (Wright 2016: 96).

begin to break some of the silences around race and the global racial histories that continue to be relevant in West Africa itself into the postcolonial moment. By my own observation, as well as by the self-described engagements of my interlocutors, capoeira in West Africa is more than just the act of training a martial art. It refers to a political framework, an emerging subjectivity, and a cultural technology. It stands, therefore, as an iteration of black modernity (Gilroy 1993, Hanchard 1999b, Jaji 2014, Scott 2004, Thomas 2004).

Exploring the capoeira community in West Africa also provides a window into the ways that Africans who migrate within the continent, or even those who stay put, engage with the idea of diaspora in a way that radically redefines what it means to be African in the first place. For many capoerisitas, being African *requires* a diasporic imagination to begin with, even before any physical migrations—the movement of bodies—takes place (Thomas and Campt 2008). Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (2014[1986]) groundbreaking work *Racial Formation in the United States* gave a historical treatment of the way race has been a foundational technology built into the structure of the country's development that permeates every aspect of our society. Scholars across the social sciences have since taken their concepts (HoSang, LaBennett and Pulido 2012), while African diaspora scholars specifically have looked beyond national specificity to a larger scale. Anthropologists of the African diaspora make the case that racial formation is an inherently global structure and has been throughout the five centuries of European Imperialism (Mudimbe 1988, Wynter 2003, Thomas and Clarke 2006). The connections between imperial systems of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, plantation chattel slavery in the Americas and colonial rule in Africa and beyond have also been erased by academic and state discourses (Pierre 2013). The task of the critical scholar of the African diaspora is thus to put material on diaspora in dialogue with processes of globalization (Thomas and Campt 2008; Thomas and Clarke 2006).

Theoretical Foundations and New Directions

As should be evident from the previous sections, this dissertation seeks to contribute to anthropological and African diasporic literatures on diaspora, global racial formation, performance and globalization. My ultimate aim is to include contemporary West African processes into these discussions in ways that might illuminate alternative archives, and that might give us additional ways to envision the ways knowledges and cultural practices circulate across the Atlantic.

Contemporary analyses concerned with the idea of the African diaspora are often split between Africanists who focus more on recent African immigration and the meanings of African or national subjectivity abroad or religious diasporas (Stoller 2002; Babou 2008; Babou 2011), and African diaspora scholars concerned with African urban affinities with black diasporic art forms (Jaji 2014, Savishinsky 1994, Shain 2009). In both cases, Africans are still often positioned as coming from a sound baseline of defining themselves first within an African context as Africans, only to engage with black diasporic cultural forms as a secondary addition, expressing an affinity for what is ultimately a foreign black experience.

Defining continental Africans as "diasporic," therefore, requires some uncomfortable reconfiguring. Recently, some historians of the continent have begun to move away from the essentialization of an African identity by unsettling notions of African cosmopolitanism or cultural hybridity as recent phenomena (Heywood and Thornton 2007; Jones 2013; Zeleza 2005). Recent anthropological theorization of the African diaspora attempts to reconstruct something out of the rubble of anti-essentialist critiques that questioned the ontology of categories in the postmodern, postcolonial, deconstructionist paradigms (Matory 2005, Apter 2018, Daniel 2005,

2011).[10] In the deconstructionist paradigm, Africa was not only left behind, but actively discarded as either a historical relic or primarily an invention of the Eurocentric imagination (Apter 2018, Zeleza 2005, cf. Gilroy 1993; Mudimbe 1988, Mbembe 2001). The idea of Africa was in essence almost too problematic to be usefully engaged (Mudimbe 1988), or to elucidate anything in the way of how to move forward beyond the colonial moment and the colonized mindset. As James Ferguson has argued, we must as scholars interact with "Africa" as a category because it continues to be salient in the way the concept is used both inside and outside of the continent (Ferguson 2006). It is out of this vein of reconstruction following the problematics (Apter 2018) or "problem-spaces" (Scott 2004) that my project emerges as a way not only to redefine the way we see "Africa's" role in the African diaspora and the making of the modern world, but also to think with and from Africa to shed light on the ways we have come to understand that world and the grammars, categories and structures in place that shape our everyday interactions within it. In that light, I follow the work of Deborah Thomas and Andrew Apter who see their respective research sites in Jamaica and Nigeria to be places *from which* to theorize race, modernity and the making of history, rather than simply places that require these perspectives to elucidate their singular historical experiences.

Anthropology on Diasporic Directionality

Sydney Mintz and Richard Price's landmark essay *The Birth of African American Culture* set out to settle the score of the debate over the existence of African cultural "survivals" or "retentions" (i.e. "Africanisms") between Melville Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier (1972).

[10] Faye Harrison (2010[1991]) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) have both noted the contributions of early black anthropologists such as Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham in the 1930s and 40s whose creative methodologies and ethnographic writing styles predated the postmodern moment in anthropology typically attributed to James Clifford and George E. Marcus' anthology *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* in 1986.

What was at stake in these debates was not only a question of how culture behaves after such a historic and massive disruption as forced migration and enslavement of millions, but also how new cultural and ethnic groups develop in historically unprecedented environments of cultural/racial "encounter" in the New World, conceived of as producing the world's most marked expressions of a new process of "creolization" "hybridization" and "syncretism." Theirs was a significant contribution to the debate on African cultural influence in the Americas, because they nuanced the seemingly whole, bounded categories of "culture-area" and racial groups (i.e. "African" and "European") by suggesting that a historical analysis would demonstrate the heterogeneity of the African arrivals. Thus the "cultural" makeup of newly emerging African-American subjects in colonial societies required a sociological and historical analysis of the African continent and the structures of power that shaped the landscape of new cultural practices constructed as a result of European imperialism.

One could argue that the study of African American cultural practices must necessarily leave Africa behind, following the material reality of the dramatically unprecedented break between millions of people and their points of origin. Yet due to a paradigmatic shift in the scholarship of the African diaspora, we now recognize that "Africa" was never fully severed from the Americas in this way. There is increasing evidence of migrations back and forth across the Atlantic that disrupt the narrative concept of the isolation of these regions. This literature reframes theorization of the diaspora in dialogic terms, rather than simply synchronic or diachronic (Yelvington 2006). Weaving in examples of "routes," rather than tracing and debating the persistence of historical "roots" (Clifford 1997), has shifted the framework from the passive language of cultural 'survivals' reminiscent of the 'diffusionism' days of anthropological thought. Instead, it privileged the agential choices and strategies employed to adapt to disruptive and

oppressive forces, taking the lead from Mintz and Price's crucial insertion of societal and structural effects on cultural outcomes (Gilroy 1993; Scott 1991).

J Lorand Matory's work on Black Atlantic religions provides a historical excavation of the making of the black Atlantic by African and Afro-descendent agents on all sides of the ocean. Matory's work on what is now known more broadly as the "Yoruba Atlantic" opens up new ways of thinking about Afro-Atlantic dialogues, circulations and most significantly, the directionality of "origins" of these historic creations (Matory 1999, 2005; Apter 2018, Cohen 2009). He demonstrates how the migration of agential bodies and the circulation of ideas have constructed modern nations within nations, through, and in spite of, European imperial oppression (Matory 2005). By concentrating on a diasporic religious and expressive form, he troubles the binary of "African origins" and "diasporic constructions" by demonstrating the ways in which the Afro-diasporic desire for an African "core" tradition is the impetus for the construction of ethnicities such as Yoruba (1999). In his words, "The irony at the core of this story is that diasporas create their homelands" (Matory 2005: 3). Moving with his notion that translocality has not only preceded, but has continued to persist despite the hegemony of nation-state formations, I look at the contemporary moment to see the ways in which continental African youth are engaging a similar process by creating their own sense of translocality, reimagining their own "homelands" through an engagement with a diasporic origins source.

Capoeira in contemporary West Africa thus poses a unique problem to scholars of the African diaspora. As a celebrated art form paradigmatic of the cultural collaboration between various African subjects in the colonial Americas (Assunção 2005, Desch-Obi 2008), capoeira's so-called return to the continent in the late 20th century should be a poetic resolution of the tension between roots and routes. However, this framework is fundamentally flawed. In other words, the narrative about capoeira as existing in some prior form in Africa, then becoming Afro-

Brazilian, and comfortably becoming African again reveals a host of assumptions already inherent in the pursuit of tracking these cultural forms in the black Atlantic. "Africa" is not only the historical source of ethnicities, cultural values, movement systems and political ideologies that worked to create these Afro-"hybrid" traditions in the diaspora, but this continental consolidation eventually comes full circle to reintegrate the African context as capoeira becomes a trend across the continent. However, this symbolic return of African energies from the diaspora back "home" did not necessarily do the work of coming full circle as one might expect. Instead, it opened up another set of questions as to the expectations of how a "returned" Afro-diasporic art form should operate by African practitioners that take up these cultural traditions. In this light, Matory's framework of demonstrating the consistent dialogue on all sides of the Atlantic around the strategic and intentional choices of hybridization and purification of cultural practices is helpful in holding African and American contexts in equal renderings of their complexity and propensity to change (Matory 1999, 2005). Therefore, historically contextualizing the so-called return of an Afro-diasporic cultural invention does not lend itself to a straightforward sequence of geographical movements, nor of a cultural legacy that can be attributed to any one category of subjects.

Capoeira's history and trajectory was thus created somewhat "retroactively," by which I mean that West Africans and Brazilians both participate in discursive formations of its origins in the present to connect its somewhat ambiguous and diverse traditions to specific locations and traditions on the continent today. For example, some lay claim to the *berimbau* as Fang from Gabon; others attribute the movement aesthetic to a Diola women's secret ceremony in the Gambia. From this vantage point, capoeira "became African" many times over, even though Africans encountered capoeira and claimed it as "African" for the first time in the 1990s. Tracking the object of capoeira itself can only tell us part of the Atlantic story in terms of the kind

of diasporic work it does in contemporary relationships/interactions. What that exercise does not elicit are the creative ways contemporary West African practitioners are ascribing new meanings to its origins that are revealing of revisionist histories and political aspirations that speak to the conditions of their postcolonial present.

Performance is one of my points of entry for exploring how West Africans' adoption of capoeira generates a new sense of historical consciousness and responds to their contemporary experiences of marginalized populations within urban Africa. I follow the work of scholars of other black Atlantic traditions that demonstrate how dance performance can create political communities through an embodied sense of community that is complexly related to territorial space (Thomas 2002; Ebron 2002; Kringelbach 2013; Daniel 2011). Thinking diaspora and performance together becomes especially important for the African diaspora, in part because much of anthropology's contribution to the fields of study dedicated to those concepts comes out of a long-standing engagement with questions about the distinctive position of black populations in the Western hemisphere. It also becomes a site for the conscious preservation of marginalized histories that are not represented by the "hegemony of textualism" privileging those in control of "legitimate" documentation (e.g. colonial archives) (Conquergood 2002).

Diana Taylor (2007) has argued that while the non-embodied textual archive can provide particular insights, embodied knowledge is not only equally as productive, but also contains insights text can never capture; it is, therefore, an underrepresented epistemology (Daniel 2005; Taylor 2007). Furthermore, embodied knowledge and performance epistemologies should be privileged as the archive of the subaltern in historical contexts in which people are enslaved or oppressed, and therefore do not have access to authoring their own history textually (Daniel 2005; Hartman 1997; Madison 2005; Moten 2003; Taylor 2007). Expressive cultural performance has been central to the construction and study of diasporic formations because of the way people use

it to reclaim the power of self-representation, as well as its unique function as a site of creative possibilities for new subjects and collectivities (Gilroy 1993, Daniel 2011).

The majority of the martial artists discussed in this project are college-age West Africans who have migrated to Dakar for higher education and sometimes stay to pursue job opportunities. These young people primarily pursue degrees in Law, like Ivoirian capoeirista Arnauld, or Medicine, like his sister Celeste and Gabrielle, a Burkinabé. There are others, like Malick from Burkina Faso who is pursuing a PhD in Physics, or Jean who is pursuing a Master's ("Master's 2" in the French system) in Air Transport, at first to become a pilot, but later to learn to manage airports. He hopes to one day become the first Central African to be president of the International Civil Aviation Association. Others study business or hotel management. These capoeiristas primarily hail from Ivory Coast, Gabon, Cameroon, Benin, Central African Republic, and Burkina Faso, while fewer come from more common migration sites to Senegal like Cape Verde, Guinea Conakry, and Guinea Bissau. Senegalese, while not currently the majority in the Dakar-based capoeira school *Africa Capoeira – Ilha de Gorée* (nicknamed Afreecapoeira), are still present and come from a diversity of backgrounds. Ousmane, one of the most advanced students in the group currently, pursued a Master's degree in Project Management and has worked for various NGOs in the realm of development and supporting local entrepreneurship in the country. A long-time member of Afreecapoeira, known as the mother of the group, also worked in international development to empower young girls around the continent. Other Senegalese, like Ndeye, pursue technical degrees for trades like cooking, while also dancing and performing on a semi-professional level. Despite the diversity of socio-economic standings, professional pursuits, and national backgrounds, almost all of these young people described being drawn to capoeira because it provided them with a sense of community they felt was difficult to build as a non-national, due to subtle exclusionary practices characteristic of Dakar.

Senegal is an unexpected location to discuss the marginalization of immigrants. It is a country touted for its peacefulness, its relatively stable democracy, its "moderate Islam", and its welcoming environment for foreigners (Villalón 1995). The capital city of Dakar is also a major destination spot for francophone African university students seeking out quality educational opportunities in the region. According to the International Organization of Migration, Senegal is currently a "pole of attraction" for francophone West Africans due to the presence of the colonial administration historically and the university system (IOM 2009). While Senegal has been a receiving site for war refugees from across the continent since the 1990s, the immigrant populations that come for higher education tend to be young people of financially stable households, as many rely on their families back home to support their education.

Despite this sterling reputation, many of these foreign students in Dakar described experiencing forms of marginalization that leave them strangers to the country, even after years of living there. Subtle forms of exclusion towards immigrants are found in the capoeira school comprised of mainly non-Senegalese students who find their activity to be a way of building community outside of common Senegalese social circles. Violence towards foreigners is relatively rare, and yet a community of primarily non-Senegalese martial artists are arming themselves with the spiritual, corporeal and political weapon of capoeira as a form of self-defense in preparation to fight against a particular menace. The versatility of capoeira's potential allows them to combat exclusion, loneliness or fears on multiple fronts.

Globalization and its relationship to diaspora are keys to a theoretical framework that traces the processes through which capoeira is able to travel, rather than tracing the object itself. As we have seen thus far, postcolonial African contexts are undertheorized in diaspora and critical race studies, and globalization is no exception. How then do we productively think together globalization, race and diaspora in West African postcolonial urban contexts, particularly

with regard to emerging youth cultures that disrupt the tension between "local" and "global" that anthropologists consistently grapple with?

The focus on globalization's "frictions" (Tsing 2005) shifts the rhetoric from easy and all-encompassing global flows to social tensions (Tsing 2005, Ong 2006), exacerbated historical inequalities (Nyamnjoh 2005, Thomas and Clarke 2006, Trouillot 2003, Geschiere and Ceuppens 2005) and capital's strategic "jumps" (Ferguson 2006). While Africa struggles to pull itself out of the "global shadows" of the neoliberal economic world order after the detrimental Structural Adjustment Policies of the 1980s and 90s (Ferguson 2006; Piot 2010), recent decades have seen new avenues for social connectivity and creative economic alternatives. Globalization thus has a hand in new forms of global economic marginalization of Africa, while also being characterized by creative ways Africans are responding to these new connectivities. In some readings, globalization is a disruptive way of framing of African diasporic cultural dialogues, due to the fact that the rhetoric of universal global connectivity obscures older and more historically-precedented relationships that a diasporic framework reveals. However, diaspora has also been one such avenue for reconfiguring Africans' relationship to one another and to the outside world in which they continue to be marginalized. Just as globalization does not express itself with equal freedoms, mobilities and connectivities around the world, diaspora is also marked by internal hegemonies that similarly operate through historical trajectories of social, racial, gendered and geographic exclusion (Thomas and Campt 2008; Campt 2002, 2004; Pierre 2012; Sawyer 2006; Brown 2005).

This project seeks to explain how West African capoeiristas reimagine or respatialize their worlds (locally, globally, diasporically, historically) and how their postcolonial worlds are being respatialized around them. In a sense, that which connotes "the local" (i.e. authenticity, traditionalism, racial homogeneity) is being constructed through an elsewhere. For capoeiristas in

West Africa, international circulations of people through their cities, their own increasing mobility and access to cultural forms on the internet are all a consequence of globalization, yet their political engagements are not created because of it. Developing ideas about the local and the authentic in a globalized setting only determines the forms their engagement takes. The desire for diasporic connection and affinity for transnational black forms is a result of the recognition of the underlying processes of colonialism and slavery that shape the postcolonial worlds.

West African capoeiristas are thus an example of grassroots—rather than state-driven—initiatives of a small portion of the general public that uncommonly aims to define themselves through a *racial* history (Jemima 2013), in part because their involvement in capoeira led to physical and intellectual knowledge about the slave trade as a corrective to public silences about race. I look at West African capoeira schools in part to explore how and why Brazil holds such a strong presence in the imaginary of many West Africans, as it does for most of the world. I argue that we cannot dismiss the racial self- and community-making projects of West African capoeiristas as merely a result of imported (Afro-) American/diasporic experiences of race. Instead, their engagement with diasporic art forms is indicative of a search for answers about 1) their own experiences as historically racialized subjects facing a simultaneous elision of racial discourse; and 2) their own experiences as migrated populations in urban African centers where they are also marginalized politically, economically, and socially. Africans are not just trying to write themselves into modern blackness from the margins, they are also actively contributing to the construction of it (Jemima 2013). Their cultural "work" speaks to the aspirations of young people to enact black Atlantic performances, serving to discredit the myth of race as irrelevant to the African public consciousness.

This dissertation presents two connected arguments. The first is that dominant popular and scholarly narratives of the African diaspora are structured in a way that not only privileges

the diaspora—imparting it with complex histories and social processes—while marginalizing Africa. In this way, these narratives prevent contemporary Africans and diasporic blacks to be considered contemporaries, as African contexts are either ignored or relegated to a historical, symbolic past. The second argument pertains to the fact that despite this elision of African contribution, participation or innovation within diasporic paradigms and practices, youth in urban West Africa mobilize diasporic forms of performance, history and symbolism, not only to write themselves into the diaspora as equal participants and interlocutors, but also as a mechanism of (re)defining their own sense of continental, racial, historical and global belonging. In doing so, they reimagine their social worlds to be transnational in ways that challenge the limitations imposed upon them by postcolonial nationalism, global neoliberal marginalization, and global structures of race based on a logic of White Supremacy. Their dedication to the project of building a diasporic community based on a form of liberatory performance rooted in slavery is a form of racial self-making. These are primarily young people who identified with global forms of modern blackness (Thomas 2004) – popular black American styles, Afro-Brazilian and Jamaican artistic traditions – prior to their resolve to become capoeiristas. Capoeira thus becomes a way of exploring their own racial identification through embodiment of what they articulate as the quintessential Black/African martial art. In this way, capoeira's diasporic and thus somewhat partially foreign element of being commonly recognized as Brazilian provides an opening for exploration of what is too often taken for granted or silenced on the continent.

Methodology

"Where would one locate the global in order to study it?" (Tsing 2005:3)

Throughout graduate school, my interest evolved from a curiosity with an unconventional group of martial artists to an interrogation of systemic inquiries concerning infrastructures of cultural production in postcolonial African metropoles, how they produce new racialized and diasporic subjectitivites, and what these subjectivities "did" for them within the contemporary context of everyday life within West Africa. As a result, this project has truly been a transnational enterprise, in both its geographic range and in the imaginative reach of the people involved in the networks I examined. My methods for understanding these postcolonial urban networks built on George Marcus's articulation of a "mapping strategy" in multi-sited research (1995).

My own strategy was designed to chart a set of interactions and relationships in an inherently partial glimpse into the way dominant narratives of diaspora, racial ideologies, and cultural resources were circulating. Because my object of study was a type of emergent cultural infrastructure built across multiple spaces, the theoretical discussions that animate this dissertation could only have emerged from charting the development of that infrastructure. My research thus followed this people-based network from one of its oldest and most stable nodes in Dakar, Senegal to the larger nexus of capoeira communities in Abidjan, Ivory Coast; Cotonou, Benin; Banjul, the Gambia; and Lomé, Togo. By moving across these spaces, I was able to track local mobility and to follow the links of communities connected through their practice in this network within which many men and women's mobility is highly limited.

I conducted ethnographic research over 17 months in five different urban centers, establishing long-term relationships with members of the network and their itinerant guests from around the world. Practitioners within the capoeira schools with whom I worked visited one another for events, communicated regularly on social media and collaborated to achieve their respective goals of institutionalization. As Afreecapoeira, located in Dakar, was one of the

largest, oldest and most institutionally stable capoeira schools in West Africa, it served as my base site.

During my fieldwork, I participated in training sessions, performances and international events. The pedagogical nature of the classes and gatherings revealed the production of the group's ideologies in action, while also illuminating key dimensions of contestation. By becoming an active member of the induction process into the community over time, I learned about their socialization techniques and requirements for inclusion, as well as about the different types of barriers or tools that expedite entrance. I also conducted formal interviews with members, founders, short-term participants, event guests and other political figures and community members, asking questions about how they understood themselves, their political environment, their relationships, their interactions, their visions and their practice. The micro-dynamics of each group illustrated the construction of a group identity whose process speaks to the circulation of these categories on a global scale. I also took fieldnotes on informal interactions and observations.

The embodied experience of these individuals has been central to my understanding of how they fashion themselves as particular kinds of pan-Lusophone and pan-African subjects through the diversity of activities involved in being a capoeirista (Butler 1990; Cox 2009; Taylor 2007). Regular practice in the schools then not only allowed me access to various levels of discourse, but also gave me an understanding of corporeality as an embodied cognition, a way of knowing through physical experience. In that regard, I focused on three major dimensions of practice: musical regularities in terms of song choice within the capoeira repertoire; gendered dynamics that speak to the role of performative violence; and the training and performance spaces in which displays of their ideologies take the form of pedagogical techniques and overt, public demonstrations of identities. All three levels of discourse were investigated at every site, yet each

one had a particularity to its case that spoke to different manifestations of this diasporic community and exhibited a different relationship to the project of nation-building.

Additionally, I videotaped public performances, training sessions, and informal interactions. These video recordings provided a more bird's eye view of the landscape of movement and interaction, as well as the composition of the spectacular displays for the public to get a sense of how these groups project their image, as well as how they physically relate to one another. These recordings also allowed for a concentration on the music, so that I was able to analyze their strategic choices for their song repertoires as well as the way different languages came into play to better understand how subjectivities are self-fashioned around the negotiation of various languages. For example, I was interested in the strategic employment of Portuguese to perform Brazilianness, and the use of French to unify the diversity of national and ethnic differences.

My own position as I moved between sites was often one of the cultural and linguistic translator. At two of the major capoeira events I attended in the Gambia and Ivory Coast, there were capoeiristas from France, Brazil and various Francophone and Anglophone West African countries who often did not share a common language. Growing up, although English was the main language in our household so my father could perfect it as a new immigrant to the U.S., I learned Portuguese from my parents and family trips to Brazil. I had also learned French and basic Wolof from my research trips to Senegal. Since these four languages were the ones spoken by those attending the events, I became an asset to their functioning, which led to my affectionate nickname "Google Translate." It is important to note, however, that these kinds of events have been going on in West Africa for decades now, if infrequently, and people who share no languages are often able to spend week-long festivals together, and even put on performances with or without the assistance of translators. Above all, they refer to capoeira as their shared

language, a grammar in which they build an infinite combination of mutually understood statements. This physical dialogue is both shaped by the different vernaculars that enter into it, and yet it is universal enough to transcend differences of potentially divisive social categories.

To be a "native anthropologist" is often a double burden. While your expertise is considered by so-called "peer" reviewers to be limited beyond your ability to contribute some imagined "insider knowledge" (Harrison 2010[1991]), your relationship with your informants from the entry point of a researcher puts you in an automatically privileged and thus outsider position. I had moments of ethical quandaries and uncomfortable interactions, suspicions towards my presence precisely *because* I was in some ways an "insider". The fact that I had seemingly more personal, logical reasons for participating in the activities of the groups that I worked with puzzled some people as to why I was also invested in studying them, observing them, interviewing them, or recording them for reasons that seemed irrelevant to our shared goals. This granted me the loving, yet genuinely suspicious title of an "espionne" (spy) among some of the capoeristas in Dakar. My positionality as a mixed race, Afro-Brazilian-American Jew who self identifies primarily as a black woman, as well as a capoeirista, was at times an impediment to turning a critical gaze on myself as a researcher, because I considered myself, and was considered by some, to be more than just a researcher, but an active member of the political and artistic project regardless of my professional obligations. At times, my semi-"native" status meant I took for granted the ways that anthropological methods and categories have inherently colonial vestiges that take active critical engagement at every step to decolonize (Gordon 2010). Meanwhile, my background and familial ties to capoeira were perceived by some more senior anthropologists as an asset that would not only allow me to access insider knowledge into this capoeira community, but is also then an inherently "personal" project.

In her insightful piece calling for a more political economic and thorough reflexivity in anthropological research methods, Deborah D'Amico-Samuels remarked that "the field is everywhere" (2010: 83). In my mind, "fieldwork" is not just an engagement with a distant geographic site, nor even a set of transnational "activities" that follow the researcher before, during and after her official stay to conduct research. Fieldwork is what the researcher consciously considers it to be while carefully selecting what is considered "relevant" or "empirical" when writing ethnographic texts. I say this to provoke the idea that fieldwork is constructed, and while it is comprised of many influences beyond when we consider ourselves to be "in" it, there is a thought process that edits information based on whether or not it occurred in what one decided are the boundaries of "the field".

While the project centers on a martial art, the focus is not on analyzing bodily movement. While capoeira is inherently a process of embodiment of diasporic knowledge, my analysis is concentrated on the politics, contestations and meanings ascribed to those movements, rather than a material evaluation or description of those movements and their connection, or lack thereof, to particular elements of African movement traditions.[11] My interests, instead, are to be in conversation with the new tradition of scholarship developing on the transnational dimensions of

[11] Much of the primary Anglophone literature on capoeira is split between historiography (Assunção 2005, Desch-Obi 2008, Talmon-Chvaicer 2007, Taylor 2005) and semiotic/symbolic analyses (Lewis 1992, Downey 2005) of the movements and instruments. Anthropological debates around African origins, retentions and discontinuities that have gone on for over a century are replicated in historical and anthropological scholarship on capoeira in the speculation of its African elements. Without much engaging the anthropological trajectory of these African retentionist debates or the African diaspora scholarship that theorizes cultural dialogue across the Atlantic, scholars of capoeira land in the same pitfalls of earlier paradigms. By constantly debating the origins of the movements, the vocabulary, the instrumentation and the symbolism of capoeira, most anthropologists and historians of capoeira commit the same errors of Gilroy's anti-essentialism to the consequence of dismissing Africa itself altogether in a claim that the idea of what is Africa is the only relevant information. Sergio González Varela and Matthias Assunção are critical of "Afrocentric perspectives" that they claim disregard historical fact and "resurrect a long defunct diffusionist model" (Assunção 2005; Varela 2017:134). They offer instead analyses on the circulation of meanings and objects, even power and hierarchy in the Brazilian context within the capoeira social structure with little attention paid to the global and historical structures of power that contextualize the practice.

capoeira, that work with the contemporary processes of globalization, consumerism, critical race studies and embodiment (Rosa 2015a; Robitaille 2007, 2014, Rosenthal 2009; Griffith 2016). Traditionally, other scholarships aimed to defined the core concepts of capoeira, document the philosophies of a particular school, and even contextualize the group's practice within a broader social context. These works often lack a critical historical or anthropological lens. In many ways, they tend to propagate the myths and dominant narratives that circulate within the capoeira world. These narratives are often sourced by capoeira *mestres* who themselves authored monographs on the subject of capoeira history, movement and philosophy (see Almeida 1986; Capoeira 1995; Vieira 1995).

While most scholars of capoeira have focused on the history of the practice in Brazil (Assunção 2005; Lewis 1992; Desch-Obi 2008; Talmon-Chvaicer 2007) and the contemporary practice around the world (Taylor 2005), none have written about its dynamics among Africans. Along with a discussion of the topics and symbols of concern for these groups, I will simultaneously create a cartography of the practice in the region for others who follow. More generally, this project aims to chart the ways the "cultural" is also political despite a lack of explicit political ideology and a broadly articulated social movement, and how cultural practice can also be mobilized toward economic and political benefits.

Chapter Outline

In order to demonstrate my argument that urban West African youth mobilize diasporic forms to embody racial subjectivity, reimagine past and present belonging and build regional and international relationships, the following chapters are organized by scale and highlight different types of interaction. In effect, they track levels of ironies or misrecognition that all serve to

critique the dominant narrative of the African diaspora. The first chapter lays out the organizing principle of diasporic networks to define the kind of relationships West African capoeira schools are creating, and what it says about the new forms of collectivity developing on the continent in a context of globalization and postcoloniality. It also outlines a history of this network, as well as characterizing what this African iteration of diaspora looks, sounds and feels like.

The second chapter will demonstrate some of the ways in which young West Africans are putting capoeira to "work", mobilizing the diaspora as a technology to rewrite local histories by writing diaspora into them in order to create new narrative and agential possibilities for major historical events and for redefining their own Africanness. Chapter three takes the puzzling lack of Senegalese participants in the Senegal-based capoeira school as an entry point into the tensions of class, nationalism and visions of transnational black unity that speak to the parallel dynamics of Afropolitanism and Afrophobia that complicate relations between practitioners. The final chapter introduces the idea of diasporic chauvinism, or the idea that despite the potentially Afrocentric nature of their craft, Brazilians and their French students sometimes assert creative authority and explanatory power over Africans under the guise of "tradition" by passively ignoring or actively stamping out African attempts to incorporate new African elements or innovations to capoeira. At the same time, Brazilian aspirations for pilgrimage and spiritual "returns" to the continent clash with African monotheistic notions of modernity.

Conclusion

The goal of my analysis is not to hone in on "internal" divisions between global black populations with the result of demonstrating some kind of incommensurability of agendas within Africa, and between it and the diaspora. This remains a story of the aftermath of slavery,

colonialism, Creole and African nationalism, and the postcolonial disappointments of decolonization's promise (Scott 2004), as well as one of the continuing detrimental effects of global White Supremacy on racialized subjects around the world. This dissertation proposes a new approach to the study of the African diaspora that suggests analytical tools more appropriate for the 21st century. The signifiers of the categories "colonized" and "colonizer" are not so easy to assign as new economic, social and political hegemonies arise, and the language of the Global North and the Global South often obscure more than they clarify. While racialization and anti-black racism remain central to global structures of power despite these shifts, the form of these processes is also not as historically recognizable, and can sometimes appear in "black face" (Fields and Fields 2012).

Since most African states gained independence around 1960, little research has traced the persisting colonial grammars of racialization taken up by these new governments and citizenry, or neoimperialism through the "free trade" relationships with former colonizers now considered equal participants in a collective global economy. Similarly, Brazil's relationship with Africa may continue to be read as a historical solidarity of Global South, former European colonies sutured together by centuries of global capitalist endeavors. However, the contemporary relationship between the two has (and arguably always was) become far more complicated, despite the widely accepted narrative of their cultural kinship and assumed racial solidarity. In the development sector for instance, Brazil maintains very few material investments in Africa while they simultaneously boast of a strong imagination of their duty and solidarity with African development (Cesarino 2017).

This project has a number of broader implications for finding a way through the convoluted nature of the 21st century African diasporic relations in an increasingly unequal global society predicated on "the changing same" of imperial capitalist pursuits and global White

Supremacy. It offers new ways of looking at the limitations of national discourse, and adds a unique element of the unpredictable affective ties and reimagining of social worlds that arise in the neoliberal era (Ramos-Zayas 2012). Whereas much of the literature focuses on black creative practices in the diaspora, and explicit discourses grappling with symbols of slavery, blackness and Africanness, there is little about the explicit, conscious discourse of contemporary Africans to reconnect to the diaspora through embodied practice. This project will contribute ethnographic data and new ways of theorizing this relation to that end.

Many West Africans express their practice as carrying out the legacy and engaging in the pleasure of their creation to honor their contribution and their humanity, but some do not feel the need to rehash the violence again and again through constant verbal references to the dark histories that brought about the conditions for capoeira's possibility. For most West African capoeiristas, this black heritage is equally about joy, a good atmosphere, and friendship. This dissertation is thus also a story of West Africa that concerns elements of fun, happiness and play that are all too often exaggerated, pathologized or ignored in social science scholarship that continues to impoverish representations of black and African people.

CHAPTER 1

Recentering Africa: Postcolonial West African Capoeira as a New Diasporic Network

Introduction

> Many express this, that capoeira is a triumphant story of the inherent value of African expressive cultural finally being recognized. It turns the narrative of slavery on its head. We were not just enslaved, we also had agency. We were not just lacking, extracted from, we also created beauty, and even the conditions for our own liberation out of nothing. We should not just be relegated to the position of the tragic Other in history, but we are now applauded and desired around the world for something that came out of that same condition. These are the reasons for which capoeira must remain "African" in the minds of certain capoeiristas, because it is ultimately proof of the value of the African will, not just a comment on the contribution of African heritage to what is ultimately a story of Brazilian national patrimony (Joseph 2010).

Each of the capoeira groups I worked with takes a different shape; some are registered youth associations, some are more informal gatherings, others are official schools with ties to Brazil. At first glance, these groups seem like not much more than exercise clubs, no more than a dozen people or so working out together a few times a week to pass the time and stay in shape. Yet the existence of these groups is an iteration of a *diasporic network*: a form of collectivity that seeks to popularize black cultural forms of liberation and expression developed from a context of enslavement and adapted to treat the present ills of urban postcolonial life[12]. This chapter aims to document and define the cultural work of a network of African vanguards who are creating new kinds of intra-West African and international relationships that force us to rethink the "practice" of diaspora as it is being done from the postcolonial West African contexts (Edwards 2003).

[12] While my work focuses on a globalization era network, it echoes earlier forms such as Garveyism, Négritude, and earlier forms of Pan-Africanism.

Since the 1990s, anthropological theory has become increasingly concerned with understanding the relationships between people and places, subjectivity and geo-political territory. Not only has migration spiked around the world, but new forms of migration are emerging, forcing social scientists to rethink long held assumptions about the nature of individuals' senses of home, identification and belonging as static and territorially bounded. National and international governing bodies are also experiencing increasing anxiety with new categories of political subjects that do not fit neatly in the two camps of rightful citizen or alien foreigner (of course, whether these categories are or ever were stable is a debatable proposition), and are adapting their own technologies of biopolitical control (van Reekum and Schinkel 2017; Basch, Glick Schiller, Blanc 1994). Many anthropologists have turned their focus to the various forms of deterritorialized communities, in part as a way of using the ethnographic method of detailing lived experience to ground some of the complexities of the era of "globalization." These scholars have looked at new kinds of relationships, and have reexamined known communities with a new lens on social formations and patterns of mobility forged by transmigrants, refugees and diasporic subjects (Marcus).

Social scientists' framing of these groups as "deterritorialized" is somewhat misleading in that it implies relatively recent mobility. As with diasporic communities, defined by an affective, imagined or ideological commitment to their "homeland", they are typically generations removed from the moment of forced exile, as is the case for most Afro-descendants in the African diaspora. For other deterritorialized social formations – like networks – it is a common geographic or symbolic link between disparate sites that is deterritorialized, in the sense that they do not necessarily have territorial origins to begin with. Networks are defined as webs of different geographical sites in which people share ideas, agendas, identification, or communication, not necessarily the movement of bodies (Riles 2000; Appadurai 2006; Thomas

and Campt 2008).

In a sense, the schools that make up the network of West African capoeiristas are all oriented toward Brazil, but each is differently defined by their unique relationship to Brazilian capoeira. Some have more direct links than others. The leader of the school in Benin was baptized by a Brazilian *mestre* and the Ivorian school was founded and run by a Brazilian. Other schools are connected more through historical symbolism or heritage, like the Togolese living in the shadow of the "returned" Afro-Brazilians, or the Senegalese school that claims Gorée Island as their most prominent link to the New World. The school in the Gambia has a combination of these elements. It also partners with a French *capoeirista* who brought his Brazilian *mestres* for a cultural exchange. Interestingly, their relationships with each other are not often discussed so explicitly. While the desire for Brazilian legitimacy is often discussed in planning events and the future institutionalization of the group, other West African groups are discussed and debated less frequently, as their attendance and participation are treated as a kind of default. With all this attention towards Brazil, what makes the few West African schools a network? And if so, what kind of network are they? This chapter etches out the contours of the West African capoeira network, and in doing so, sketches a global hierarchy of capoeira in which West African practitioners attempt to center themselves as contemporary authors and contributors. I address questions regarding how the members create, maintain, and reject relationships with each other, and how they conceptualize, perform, and imagine these relationships. I will show that the network exists both in a somewhat marginal relation to, but also entirely independent of, the global capoeira network centered in Brazil, effectively recentering West Africa in the framework of diaspora set out by the broader capoeira community. I argue that West African capoeira schools use capoeira to do a certain kind of ideological work reinserting "Africa" in the diaspora, as well as a kind of communal work in which relationships between schools and martial artists

provide support by way of physical mobility and mutual realization of their political and institutional aspirations.

Network Mobility

The capoeira communities in West Africa do not only provide mobility by way of travel for those with limited travel opportunities. They also demonstrate how desires for mobility and travel exhibit a remapping of space and invent new ideas around what constitutes opportunities based on this newly imagined social sphere. For example, the Ivory Coast and Senegal share a history of movement back and forth between them. Whereas Senegalese once migrated to the bustling metropolis of Abidjan (once known as "the Paris of West Africa") after independence, the recent sequel to the Ivorian civil war reversed migration patterns with Ivoirians looking to settle in Senegal (cite OIM migration report). In the West African capoeira world, Abidjan is one of the main network nodes due to the stability of Mestra Marcia's highly productive Brazilian cultural center. This was what prompted N'diaye to move to Ivory Coast when he felt stunted in his personal and professional lives. N'diaye had a lifelong dream to institutionalize capoeira in Senegal, but because this had not quite materialized, he wanted to check on the progress of his former students who had originated from other countries in West Africa (such as Gabon and Cameroon), and who had returned after finishing schooling in Dakar. He wanted to assess the potential to develop branches of Afreecapoeira in these satellite sites. N'diaye desired to reverse "normal" patterns of migration, and this is an instantiation of how the capoeira community remaps West Africa, with entirely different "centers" and "peripheries" than those that might be assumed by outsiders.

The capoeira network acts as a support system for the internal creative development of young people devoted to learning this martial art and working towards furthering the connectivity

of like-minded creatives. Through pooling and distributing financial resources, many West African capoeiristas were granted mobility to travel that they might not otherwise have had. As an unemployed man in his twenties, N'Diaye was able to travel to Brazil with a group of other low-income Senegalese for a month of cultural and historical apprenticeship with Brazilian capoeira *mestres*, sponsored by the Brazilian embassy in Senegal. About a decade later, N'Diaye took a similar pilgrimage to France with a group of his advanced students. Moussa, a capoeirista with scarce opportunities as a child from a low-income household in Guinea-Conakry, has taken multiple trips to France and Spain, having also established an independent life in Dakar, Senegal, all due to his familial relationship with a French capoeirista who trained him from the age of fourteen. Togolese capoeiristas who scarcely left their home city traveled to events in Senegal sponsored by Afreecapoeira. Two capoeiristas in Senegal similarly were able to attend an event in which they developed relationships with a Brazilian mestre and his French students on a pilgrimage to Benin, the "home of vodun" in Africa, with funding from an NGO that strictly sponsors Africans traveling to other African countries for cultural events. Several young Ivoirian capoeiristas took their first plane ride to their neighboring Burkina Faso to connect with capoeiristas there. Dozens more have settled in Europe or the U.S. through learning, teaching or having close relationships with capoeiristas they met in West Africa. Whether or not these trips are to a neighboring country or across an ocean, they mark a growing circuit of movement and connectivity based on the shared desire for a new kind of cosmopolitan, Africa-based artistic community.

Mobility as a desire, as well as a physical displacement, marks a new post-independence moment in the postcolonial social reimagining of place and migration whereby African aspirations are reoriented from seeking opportunity from the US and Europe (Piot 2010; Ferguson 2006) to the Global South. This is a generation that does not maintain naive perceptions of

economic success and personal fulfillment in the West as was once propagated by popular and scholarly beliefs in modernization theory in which Western countries were painted as models of social security and progress. Because the traditional "American dream" no longer carries the appeal it once did, Brazil is emerging as a better alternative, a rapidly modernizing paradise free from race hatred, as evinced somehow by its recent economic success. Not only are Brazilian flags printed on almost everything in West African capital cities (e.g. mugs in the supermarket, baseball caps, board shorts, soccer jerseys etc.), but a surprising number of people also refer to Brazil as their dream destination to live, work and even die. Brazil circulates as a symbol of aspirational desire in large part due to its cultural presence in the media, from airing Brazilian telenovelas and films to games of Brazil's globally-beloved national soccer team (Werner 2006; Majumdar 2002). Some West Africans even adapt their lives to be closer to Brazil and Brazilianness, even if they may never set foot in the country, by taking Portuguese classes in the hopes of moving there someday, or by engaging in Brazilian expressive cultural forms. Shifting desires from France or the U.S. to Brazil demonstrates how young urban West African's aspirations to immigrate are not just based on a "rational" explanation of better economic opportunity.

In examining capoeira schools in West Africa, network and diaspora operate simultaneously, although West Africans are not technically diasporans themselves. Rather, as "Africans" they occupy the symbolic position as the "source" of the African diaspora, those presumed to be the authentic originators of black cultural expression reinvented in the Americas. However, their commitment to capoeira is an engagement in diaspora, which I define as a practice, process or consciousness of a scattered people who maintain affective ties to their "homeland" and experience an ambivalent relationship to their "host land" (Brubaker 2005, Campt 2002, Edwards 2001, 2003). Thus, the foundation for their unification as a West African

capoeira network is based upon a diasporic framework, rooted in the transnational community of Africans and Afro-descendants, and, most importantly, forms of cultural expression valorizing and showcasing decidedly black aesthetics. Therefore, these martial artists' agenda is two-fold: they are both oriented externally (read: global) towards the equally diaspora-based network of Brazilian capoeira that has spread around the world, and they are oriented internally (seen as regional and therefore an African "local" in relation to the "global") in terms of developing their own African capoeira collective.

Global Capoeira

Due to the successful transformation of capoeira into a global commodity, the global capoeira network is not necessarily foundationally rooted in the idea of the African diaspora. There is an important distinction between the global (Brazil-based) and the West African capoeira networks, signaling the presence of different or competing orientations toward diaspora. Deborah Thomas' work on Jamaican women who take up seasonal hotel work in Michigan describes two different notions of diasporic community, one based on transnational migration from the same home country, and another a universal sense of black unity (2008). In her work, these two notions were not only often distinct, but also the first notion operated in a way that destabilized the certainty of the second. She argues that "…one of the ideological hegemonies of diaspora in the contemporary period is the idea that one's capacity to affect one's own social mobility always outstrips the 'locals' in diasporic elsewheres" (Thomas 2008: 71). For many Brazilians, capoeira is a space in which identitarian issues of race, class, gender, age or nationality are left behind in the larger social world (Rosa 2015b). Therefore, the idea of diaspora, however significant it may be as a cultural framework for the mechanics of capoeira's musical, movement, and philosophical components, is rooted in African forms. Race, however, does not often factor in an explicit way beyond the vague notion of a past African cultural contribution. In other words, the framework of

diaspora plays with time in a way that does not allow diasporic blacks and continental Africans to be contemporaries.

There are those, however, who are deeply invested in the historical and contemporary roles of Africa and Africans in the creation and perpetuation of capoeira. Foreign capoeira interests (primarily Brazilians and Europeans) in African contexts tend to engage with a development-based ideology. They see the usefulness of capoeira as a tool to alleviate poverty by providing youth with marketable skills and productive use of their time. The prevailing reason that non-African capoeiristas seem to be interested in bringing the art form to the continent is to seek out a diasporic reconnection with Africans, African cultural practices and the geographic significance of "return" to origins for those Afro-descendants (dealt with in more detail in Chapter 4). At times, this rationale is accompanied by an effort to procure a gloss of authenticity for their own capoeira schools. If they can claim to have a branch in a site historically relevant to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, then they can claim more credibility of authenticity in global capoeira circles. Some capoeira schools in West and Central Africa are in fact foreign NGOs (e.g. *Ascende*, a Spanish NGO in Ghana) that use capoeira as a primary method of social development, working particularly with disenfranchised children and young people. These can be categorized alongside a broader trend of the NGO-ization of foreign relations with Africa, in which the continent is seen as a place of malfunctioning societies and failed states that requires foreign expertise and innovation. Rarely do any of these perspectives engage the innovations and desires of living, self-identified African *capoeiristas*, who seek to be in relationships with other capoeira schools in order to exchange ideas and cultivate mutual recognition.

West African capoeiristas often describe their experiences with this Brazil-based global network in terms of charitable relationships in which they are the pitied partners. For example, one day during the beginning of the capoeira school's season, Prospère, Afreecapoeira's

communications chair, posted on the group's Facebook page that we were to meet with a "nice lady" at her house, a phrase that in itself signaled a common trope of a humanitarian woman savior in African contexts (Benton 2016). We met in advance to catch the bus to Parcels, one of Dakar's "popular" neighborhoods that is low income, crowded, and bustling with people in its sandy streets. When we arrived at her door, we were greeted by the "nice lady," Alda, an older woman with dyed platinum blond hair and tanned brown skin wearing capoeira pants and a tank top from the world-renowned capoeira school Senzala. She was Cape Verdean and Brazilian, and lived in Senegal for periods of her life; when we met her, though, her home was France, where she trained with the Senzala branch there. She started a center called "Maison Arts de Culture et Sport du Senegal" teaching capoeira to boys and girls for many years. She now travels to Dakar every summer and focuses her efforts on teaching capoeira for a girls' Qur'anic school nearby. Her house was a beautiful hidden gem in the neighborhood. The front door opened to a courtyard with an outdoor wood burning oven. Going up the steep staircase past three floors of bedrooms, we saw the interior of the house covered in tile mosaic decoration. Finally we arrived at the rooftop terrace. The first wall we saw had a large painting of Iemanja, the Brazilian mermaid goddess of the sea in the candomblé religious tradition.

Alda and N'Diaye called everyone's attention for an announcement. N'Diaye hardly said a single word for the next hour while Alda made a bold speech about bringing three important *mestres* from Senzala France to Dakar the following year for the Afreecapoeira event: "Matar [another version of Moctar] has been teaching capoeira all this time and has not had his belt. This is unacceptable. This should not happen. So they will come to give him his belt. And it's not enough to only have one *mestre* come, there needs to be more. There are a lot of belts to give." She gave the example of Augustin, a highly athletic man in his mid 20's who trained with Alda since he was twelve years old, and has never received a belt. One of the three *mestres* she claimed

to have invited was Toni Vargas, a superstar in the capoeira music world. “He’s a composer and all his albums are incredible. His songs will bring tears to your eyes, they are so beautiful.” After getting the group excited about the inspiring leaders of the global capoeira network who were to make a special appearance in Senegal to crown N’Diaye as the very first African capoeira *mestre* in history, she emphasized how busy and important the *mestres* were. If we do not book them now, she warned, they might not be able to come. The following July, Alda did not attend our event and neither did her three great *mestres*. N’Diaye’s silence at the meeting was indicative of how many times he had experienced that before. Outsiders with some contact with Afreecapoeira make grand gestures and promises, but the group has learned to receive most of these as disingenuous and self-interested. By their account, some foreigners, like Alda, do not demonstrate the connection and trust in more concrete and sincere ways. For example, Alda’s absence for nine months out of the year leaves a teaching vacuum for her students. Some said that instead of locking up her three-story house during that time when she is away, she could allow N’Diaye to teach in her place and use the space. She made a public statement that she would leave the facilities to N’Diaye, but never followed through. Many have made similar grand, public, symbolic gestures that amount to false promises, and N’Diaye remains diplomatic in agreeing to attend the meetings, hear people out in every new proposal and yet hold no expectations.

As is the case with many Asian martial arts in their respective countries, capoeira is still very much the cultural property of Brazilian practitioners, despite the countless foreign schools that have cropped up over the last 40 years. In large part, this is because, since its emergence from the shadow of prohibition in the early 20th century, Brazilians have worked hard to standardize, institutionalize, and therefore legitimize capoeira in the eyes of the state and the general population that often viewed it as a nuisance. The two main figures for this cause, Mestre Bimba and Mestre Pastinha, are still venerated today for developing two major styles of the art

form, *capoeira regional* and *capoeira angola* respectively. Thus, official lineages were inaugurated, with most of the major groups today tracing their school's history back to either (or both) of these two great men. In recent decades, major Brazilian schools have begun to federate in order to gain further recognition from the state and as a way of more formally organizing the various branches they open up in different locations around the world. With a federation, standards are developed, and the school's particular style, mission, rules and regulations become concretized. This aura of bureaucratic officialdom contributes to the weight of the global reputation of certain Brazilian figures in the capoeira world. Furthermore, the few *capoeiristas* in the early generation that migrated out of Brazil for better economic opportunities in the 1970s and 1980s built a reputation for themselves among foreign students abroad, and now they have become larger than life. Some of them are rumored to have not even been outstanding *capoeiristas* in the street *rodas* when they were back in Brazil, but migration gave them a chance to rewrite their narratives and make more of themselves than they could have in the saturated Brazilian marketplace (Griffith 2016).

This phenomenon is echoed in Lena Sawyer's (2006) work on Gambian migrants to Sweden, many of whom were never dancers or dance instructors back home. Many have capitalized on their perceived cultural knowledge and richness to gain economic standing under neoliberal restructuring by Swedish women clients seeking a kind of primordial return to earthly femininity through African dance. Similarly, Laurence Robitaille writes about Brazilian capoeira *mestres* in Canada who are similarly eroticized and racialized through tropes of the black body as characteristically more fluid, sensual and physically in tuned with the psyche than "rigid" white bodies (2014). As Robitaille remarked, globalization has recontextualized the racial and national connotations of capoeira. For her, the black body, and Brazilians who represent blackness abroad as embodiments of Afro-Brazilian capoeira knowledge, are further inscribed as racialized bodies

through globalization and migration. While capoeira has been historically criminalized due to its association with Afro-Brazilians and racialized as black in Brazil, in most urban West African contexts, the martial art is considered by non-practitioners as a luxury activity of the middle class, and subsequently racialized as white for its association with Westerners[13]. For those who embed themselves in the training and devote much of their lives to it, however, capoeira is a practice that allows them not only to reconnect with diasporic kin (i.e. Afro-Brazilians), but also creates a space in which they can embody their own blackness, and discursively write themselves into a transnational black community despite the silence around racialization and slavery in the region.

Who are the living Brazilian icons of capoeira who represent their nation around the world, and what creates the air of authenticity and richness attributed to them as venerated masters? There is a way certain art forms are ascribed to particular kinds of bodies, and the absence of those bodies for the transmission of cultural knowledge can discredit certain cultural actors with a verdict of inauthenticity. On the flip side, the meaning ascribed to the Brazilian body also provides another level of depth and authenticity. Sometimes "being Brazilian" is enough to gain credit as a skilled capoeirista despite a lack of experience. Skilled or not, the cultivation of authenticity is central to Brazilian *mestres* whose bodies, along with their knowledge and experience, are perceived by non-Brazilian students as a representation of that knowledge and of blackness embodied that attracts them to the sport and encourages them to embody this authenticated blackness through apprenticeship (Robitaille 2014).

Take for instance the reputation of Mestre Cobra Mansa, one of the most prominent figures of the *capoeira angola* style today. Friends from Senegal, the U.S. and France have all praised him, boasting of having taken a workshop with him, or with someone who trained under

[13] In most urban West African contexts, Westernness is synonymous with whiteness. A black American, for instance, is often considered to be "white by virtue of the presumption of their "American" cultural education (Pierre 2013; cf. Covington-Ward 2016).

him, or merely having seen him once at an event. He is known for his personal aesthetic both in his capoeira game and his self-presentation, long gray dreadlocks and a bushy beard to accompany it. He and his school wear a classic *angoleiro* "uniform", a yellow t-shirt tucked into black cargo pants secured with a belt. My father has known Cobra Mansa since they were teenagers, and the two of them helped each other navigate their new lives in the United states in the late 1980s. When I mentioned him to my father, telling him about the effect he has had on even the newest generation of capoeiristas around the world, I was met with laughter. "Who is this 'Cobra Mansa'? You mean Cobrinha? Yeah…He likes to dress a certain way like he's this super old *capoeira angola* guy with his big beard and his dreadlocks. He's even younger than me!"

Recently, my father received a Whatsapp message with a picture of Cobra Mansa with an almost-bald head, no beard, and a single gray dread dangling from his left temple. The picture was a big buzz in their circle—a generation of young Brazilian capoeiristas who migrated to the US mostly through a touring dance troupe called *Oba Oba*. How could this patchy old man be the same great symbol of *capoeira angola*? According to Robitaille, "…the capoeirista's body becomes a marketing device, both for the promotion of capoeira and for the promotion of Brazil as a nation-state" (2014: 231). However, the "semantic body" of Afro-Brazilian capoeiristas, like Cobra Mansa and Lua Rasta (to be mentioned later in this chapter), are not just limited to representing Brazilianness and Brazilian blackness. They themselves construct their embodied blackness and air of capoeirista cultural authenticity through a diasporic "borrowing" of Jamaican Rastafari aesthetics and semantics. These men, the embodiment of a kind of "roots" capoeira marked by unapologetic blackness, draw from Afrocentric traditions in the diaspora, that are in turn appealing to young West African youth looking to capoeira to deepen their own racial embodiment.

My father's own aesthetic is a little more eccentric. It involves a small circular patch of hair in the back of his head attributed to his faith as a Hare Krishna devotee, while the two inches of wiry hair sprouting from his ears he leaves undisturbed. He feels it provides him with an air of spiritual wisdom. While in his case it is not a kind of "roots" blackness he seeks to represent, his self-conscious presentation gestures towards another tradition of appropriation of Eastern aesthetics from the globalization of yoga practice (addressed further in chapter 4). And yet Cobra Mansa is not the only one with this *angoleiro* style. *Mestres* often have a specific aesthetic in their self-presentation that connotes a connection to Africa, Afro-derived religions or some status of ambiguous origin, like walking around with a long, decorated staff. This is not to suggest an "inauthenticity" to the stylistic choices of this sub-group, but rather to highlight the power of these images, particularly to those who do not have the opportunity to become acquainted with them in person. These Brazilian figures are also working to perform their own centrality and "Afro"-authenticity, that was shaped in large part by the success of reggae and Rastafarian music and aesthetics in Brazil in the 1970s and 80s (Crook 1993).

There is also a way in which the difference in power that inspires awe from the African students to the Brazilian *mestres* is due to the bureaucratic formality of their schools. Mestre Perna Longa—one of the Brazilian guests in the Ivoirian school Owlavé Capoeira's festival—had the following to say about being the founder and president of the Associação de Capoeira Nação Primitiva in Mato Grosso do Sul (the Association of Primitive Nation Capoeira):

> …I created this group already with all the documentation. A new *mestre* was born [referring to himself] in capoeira with the group with all the correct paperwork to work properly in capoeira…I think it is very important because, eh…a professional, he…a professional that wants to work in capoeira, it serves not just…it's like a helping hand. It helps a lot. I saw in the past, professionals in capoeira that did not have the documentation. The doors don't open. Not because he would not have been a good capoeirista, a good professional but I was tired of seeing guys without the paper, and then they didn't have those openings. I saw people who had the paper who were able to get the vacancy. And my *mestre*

> always said that his desire was working in schools, to do social projects, but for this to happen he needed this and that. So when I created my group, my association, I already had all that in hand. I worked to have all that in hand to be able to carry out the work that I carry out today.

Perna Longa defines himself in this argument as a capoeirista based on the officiality of his title. The moment he became a new *mestre*, he was also formally documented. His professionalism and his status in the world of capoeira shape his career in capoeira and distinguish him from those without "papers". Not only does it provide more opportunities for obtaining resources, support and sponsorship, likely a requirement to survive as a capoeira teacher in Brazil, but it also provides a sense of "professionalism", which becomes particularly useful in displaying his legitimacy abroad. Mestre Perna Longa boasted of his association and the number of students he draws almost every day of the festival. The formality of having official documentation was only relevant when he discussed the founding of the association, but there were other ways in which he attempted to display his value as being a formal member of VIP pockets of the global capoeira network. For instance, he told us countless times that he was in a special Whatsapp group "só para mestres" with hundreds of people from all over the world involved.

Many African capoeiristas have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for the impressive global franchise that Brazilians built with what was once an under-appreciated art form that the state tried to bury in darkness at various points throughout its history. Coming to Africa is also an opportunity for Brazilians to be the first to write an in-person narrative of the symbolism of Brazilian capoeira for interested African capoeiristas. This awe is heightened by the rarity of Brazilian visitors to the continent from the network of global capoeira. So often their presence reads as an extraordinary generosity to take time out of their lives as prestigious leaders of legitimate capoeira schools—schools with perhaps hundreds of skilled students at any given time—to come to the continent and teach a dozen or so Africans what is essentially the basics. In

the Abidjan-based school Owlavé, the Ivoirian students had a more consistent relationship with Brazilians than most West African schools. Their *mestre*, Marcia, is a Brazilian woman who had been living in Ivory Coast for at least fifteen years and who periodically hosted her own teachers, Mestre Caculé, Mestre Lobisomem and others from Modelo Cidadanîa, the school where she got her start in Mato Grosso do Sul and São Paulo. They spend a week living amongst her students in the capoeira school grounds, eating together, going on outings to local markets and running intensive music and movement workshops in the evenings, all leading to a festival with *batizado* and show for the public at the end of their stay. Throughout their stays, the Ivoirian students clung to them, peppering them with questions to advance their own skills and knowledge, but also to discover more about the personal lives of these foreign visitors. *How do you play the Iuna rhythm on berimbau? Did you come from a line of capoeiristas? What are rodas like in Brazil? Do you have another job?* At night the young Ivoirians went back to their dorms and gossiped about what they learned about the Brazilians, marveling at what they demonstrated in workshop that day or some intriguingly foreign fact about their personal habits. Being the only representatives of Brazilian capoeira, they stood in as the physical manifestations of all the stories they heard from their *mestre*, all the videos they watched on Youtube, all the imagery of the majesty of what goes on in the *real* capoeira world.

Yet the Brazilian visitors were also in awe themselves. They had not traveled much outside of Brazil; for a few of them, it was their first time leaving the country. Several shared with the students that they came from poor farming families. They video-chatted with their relatives everyday trying to express the unbelievable fact that they came to such a far and foreign place. Capoeira seemed to do for them the same thing it did for the Ivorian practitioners: it provided a link to a transnational network in which mobility, prestige and an exotic experience all came within reach. Their trip to the Ivory Coast bestowed upon them an air of cosmopolitan

worldliness, a quality the Ivoirians ironically assumed to be innate to Brazilian *mestres*.

Performing Network/Performing "Global"

Several of the West Africans I spoke to referred to Brazil as "The Mecca of capoeira". They saw it as a place in which capoeira is sanctified, produced and preserved, and even as it has been modified over time, it is safely within the realm of pure *Brazilian* innovation, and therefore unquestionably still capoeira. Yet Brazil is not necessarily the physical site of this Mecca. I refer to the term *global capoeira* to indicate the dense web of capoeira schools around the world that branch out of Brazil. While the country is the primary location from which the network stems, the circulation of these important Brazilian figures and their students means the central nodes of the global capoeira network are also in the sites of certain events, typically *batizados* or *encontros*. What is unique about West Africans' relationship to the global capoeira network is the level to which it is imagined. From the margins of the global capoeira network—centered around Brazilian nation, people and schools—some West Africans are performing the network, in the absence of direct connections. Capoeiristas gain knowledge, skills, status and relationships by performing network around their peers without directly "networking" with global capoeira.

Moussa had a deep appreciation for Cobra Mansa. He frequently worked his name into the musical improvisations of praise (*reza*) characteristic of the end of *ladainhas* ("litany," a category of ceremonial songs that mark the beginning of a capoeira gathering) while he led the singing for our *rodas*. Once during his class, he complemented Ousmane on a difficult move he did that we had never seen before. "That's beautiful! It's one of the movements that Cobra Mansa does a lot!" Ousmane let out a wide smile matching the weight of the compliment. Not only did he succeed in doing a complicated movement, but he was also being praised for his knowledge of movements beyond what was available to capoeiristas in Dakar. Moussa then turned to Gabrielle

who was partnered with me, the two of us struggling to replicate Ousmane's fancy move, and he told her it was a signature move of Cobra Mansa's. "Who?" she inquired honestly. "Cobra Mansa," he repeated, until it registered on his face that the name meant nothing to her. He touched his palm proudly to his chest: "Cobra Mansa is my *mestre*." I asked around about this. Isn't Moussa in Ginga Nagô? How does Cobra Mansa factor in, seeing as he has his own group, rather his own global federation called Fundação Internacional de Capoeira de Angola (FICA/ICAF – International Capoeira Angola Federation)?

Ousmane and Jean broke down the lineage for me on the way to training one day, and Cobra Mansa was not named as one of his official *mestres*. They figured he just watched a lot of Cobra Mansa's videos online and admired his style. There were only a few degrees of separation between them, for example, through the Brazilian Mestre Manoel, a friend of Cobra Mansa's who led a pilgrimage to Benin with his group of French students where he met Moussa and other West African practitioners. It is possible, they guessed, that Moussa might have met Cobra Mansa in France, as Moussa had traveled there several times for capoeira events and workshops at the invitation of his formal *mestre*. Regardless, claiming Cobra Mansa as a *mestre* was not the result of extended time spent with him training. Instead, it was about Moussa's deep admiration for his style, his spirit, and what he stands for in *capoeira angola*. Nevertheless, when Moussa enters the *roda*, you would guess he trained extensively under the direct tutelage of Cobra Mansa. Their styles were identical, even their physical rhythm and personalities were similar. Through distant admiration, Moussa became a student of Cobra Mansa and was carrying on his lineage by teaching his movement and style despite not being directly connected.

Pierre, the main instructor and currently one of the highest belts in Afreecapoeira, prided himself on having his foot in many camps. He was undoubtedly connected to Afreecapoeira where he started training capoeira, and where he claimed his mestre, N'Diaye, taught him

everything he knew. Yet he had also begun traveling to Morocco on vacation where he trained with the Fez branch of Abadá Capoeira; his increasing frustration with Afreecapoeira's stagnation (further explored in Chapter 3) propelled him to be baptized by Abadá. As a further form of protest against his home group in which he felt his efforts to sustain the group went unappreciated, he started his own company. He describes his aim as creating an institution involving capoeira, Brazilian folklore and other sports unrelated to his goal of institutionalizing the first capoeira school in Senegal. Just before he left Senegal to move to Berlin, he told me he was giving up on Abadá because there was too much drama. "Camisa is dying and there's so much fighting over who is going to be his successor between the eight possible *mestres*. It's becoming chaos." The famous Brazilian school Cordão de Ouro's Berlin branch was his next target. Pierre was constantly demonstrating his knowledge of the major groups, their in-gossip, their leadership changes, the success of their recent events, their intentions for expansion to new territory.

The others did not understand how he had so many connections and friends in this network, he told me, implying they were jealous that he had not only access to, but proximity to, *real* capoeira *out there* in a way they did not. He was frustrated with the group because of their lack of relationships, or rather their lack of desire to have the kinds of relationships that would give them more exposure and legitimacy. "I was the one who became friends with Abadá, for example. You see how long this process takes?" he expressed to me, referring to the decision to pick a partnership with a major school to gain resources and official status. "But why not just call a meeting? Who's supposed to call it?" I inquired innocently, thinking it was just a matter of taking initiative. "Well, I am. You see? They wait for me to call the meeting, but they won't even make a decision. They never do. It's like you've told me to drive the car but you won't give me the keys!" For Pierre, the choice is unambiguous. If they do not surrender the group to the

legitimacy of the Brazilian system, they will not survive; but, the issue is more than just survival. For him, capoeira does not exist outside of the realm of the global capoeira network. Therefore, his goal is strategic. His allegiance is to that which will give him status, relevance and centrality in the capoeira world.

During the period of my fieldwork, I was the secretary of the association and Pierre was the vice president, so together with the treasurer we opened a bank account at the request of the French Embassy that promised us around $2000 for our upcoming International Capoeira Encounter. Pierre dropped by my apartment one morning to collect some passport photos and a copy of my ID that I had notarized by the *gendarmerie* (state police). When I let him in, he set down his scooter helmet and strolled around the living room, marveling at the improvement I made from my last apartment. Once he saw the *berimbau* nestled in the corner, he walked straight over to it and started playing toque de Iuna, a rhythm signaling a game only for *mestres*. After a few minutes he sat down, and started telling me stories about Morocco. There are multiple schools that have branches there, Abadá, Sul da Bahia and Muzenza among them, and Abadá won the recent regional competition. He knew all the updates: who was running the group now, how that one guy was still there and another one recently came back from France. He was not sure what happened there, but everyone hated him in France and he decided to go back to Morocco, and so on. Then he mentioned that he was baptized with Abadá, which stirred people up at Afreecapoeira, but he was not sure why. Perhaps he felt that he was giving himself the chance to excel in ways he could not do with Afreecapoeira, so why would they deny him that pleasure/opportunity?

Through language and story-telling, Pierre discursively stitched himself into the main stage of the global capoeira network by doing little more than his use of personal pronouns. Here are some examples:

1. “We were all shocked when we saw the batizado of Topazio playing *capoeira angola* when João Pequeno died. They never play angola!”

2. “Even when we do free fight, we are two capoeiristas in the family. The other Baguera, he is from Topazio. We only think about that, beating them up with capoeira. It’s surprising you don’t know them.”

3. Pierre sang an Abadá song and Idrissa joined in until they both stopped themselves suddenly, shouting playfully “We can’t! It’s Abadá!”

Pierre’s use of “we” when talking about being surprised about Topaz demonstrated that he understood himself to be completely inside the global sphere of capoeira, not in the margins. In the first example, for instance, I asked him whether or not he was in attendance at the event in question. “No, but I saw all the videos on Youtube and I chatted with people who were there.” Pierre spoke in a way that strategically positioned himself in the world and obliged the listener to take his full participation in it as a given. His consistent communication with capoeiristas in other countries was a form of networking that was primarily digital, which speaks to the primacy of social media to the current generation growing up in the digital age. It is interesting that on one hand, Pierre both successfully performed the network by aligning himself with Abadá and other big-name capoeira schools, and on the other, his performance often fell flat as a result of the fact that the Africans were in a capoeira world that was either peripheral or apathetic to the global Brazilian network. Pierre and Idrissa (a member of Abadá’s New York branch) often joked with one another by starting a song that glorified the infamous capoeira school, and then suddenly stopping to shout “Oh no! We can’t! It’s Abadá!” But their playful cries fell on deaf ears. Sometimes they demonstrated a particular sequence of movements as a way of signaling internal knowledge about Abadá’s uniquely combative tactics; still, most of the capoeiristas around them were blissfully unaware to what they were referring. Nonetheless, the failure of their audience to receive their jokes was of no consequence in the end. If anything, their knowledge of the potential controversy of invoking Abadá through songs, aesthetics and gossip in such a way proved their

superiority as members of the "real" capoeira world all the more against the contrast of their friends' ignorance. Regardless, their performing of network in this way flaunted their insider position despite the fact that there seemed hardly a reason to do so. In a way, it was a metaphor for the imagination of those in the peripheral West African network reaching out to connect to the larger capoeira world despite the infrequency of that connection.

Take for instance Pierre's description in 2015 of the International Rencontre they hosted in 2016:

> We have tons of contacts. The difficulty now is to have a good packet of money, in one single block to be able to set up an academy. That is the only problem we have right now. And for that we have to do it as quickly as possible. So we will try to see with the International Rencontre project, if the partners that we are targeting for the budget are be able to put some money aside to be able to make the academy and that next year we can create the capoeira academy. The first one in Senegal, which is what will be great about it. And that will go in the same direction as…the rencontre will permit us to institutionalize capoeira in West Africa. That is key, because we want to make an African capoeira federation. And Senegal will act as the headquarters. For the event next year I believe we have 27 invited guests. So all the West African countries that do capoeira will be invited. So you have the guys from Abidjan of Marcia's that have to be invited, Gambia, Joss that will bring the guys from the village in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau will come, Guinea-Conakry, Morocco with Abadá, Topaz for Tunisia, Cape Verde with Zé, uh Fassassi for Benin, we have to get the guys from Togo to come, Cameroon with all our gradés so Cameroon, Kinshasa, [inaudible] Gabon, Angola, uh…Guinea-Equatorial. So we'll try to have all these folks come, Mestre Lua Rasta from Brazil and other Profs from Brazil that we'll try to bring, uh, Boneco from Capoeira Brasil L.A., Muzenza, we want to bring Contra Mestre Mula, Ginga Nagô of Nantes, Luxembourg, Braz of Brussels, so we try to bring people that are key from each of the different groups with another mentality. It would be nice to have Barrão of Axé, Turkey. That way it will be magnificent because we need all these masters to come, and that will allow us to have an official legitimacy in relation to all the groups in Brazil, whether it's in the world, that there is a capoeira that exists in Africa [inaudible] they see all the representatives of all these groups in Africa in Dakar, you see. And so if these Profs play, already with the 10-day program we have, we will do a tour of Senegal and all that, that will allow for the validation of the nomenclature of each club, if a club has its colors, we are all in agreement with the level of their game. If there are rectifications that will allow them to have partners with whom they can go [inaudible] to do that. And then from now on you can't say that capoeira doesn't exist in Africa, you see. [inaudible] We would do a Gorée visit, and it would be the official return of capoeira [inaudible] with all the Brazilians

> because of all the big groups that are there in Dakar. So that is the project at the moment. So we cross our fingers that "yes", that will come. And then that's when I can go to Brazil, calmly with no worries. Yeah, everything is already stable and taken care of.

The group planned on funding this event through various channels that never quite panned out. The French Embassy promised a sum of around $2000 to support the event, but they never delivered the money. Corporate sponsorship and free or discounted flights from certain airlines that support cultural events did not come through either. They planned on performing in local restaurants to raise the money to bring the local West African groups; the few shows that were realized all the way through went to road transportation and housing for the next-door neighbors from the Capoeira Association of the Gambia and a few folks from Ginga Nagô in Guinea-Conakry. This is not to imply that performing a network implies a sort of delusion on the part of the "performer", or a naive desire to make an implausible connection. Rather, it is precisely through this naming, invoking and discursive aligning that the network is created (Riles 2000, Jackson 2005). Just like how Moussa invoked the name of his *mestre*, it was through singing his name and claiming him as such that Cobra Mansa becomes his *mestre*.

Furthermore, this quote not only demonstrates alignment with central capoeira groups such as the famous capoeira composer Mestre Barrão, but it also shows how Pierre is re-centering the global capoeira network in Senegal. He pronounces the event the "official return of capoeira" to its African origins, and in Dakar in particular, because of the historical significance of Gorée Island. In his conceptualization, there is a specific order of events in which the scale pertains to both his individual life and the global significance of this diasporic landscape. The Brazilian network should return to the source of capoeira in Senegal, which would then create the proper conditions and timing for him as an individual to make his pilgrimage to Brazil for the first time. Pierre is of Congolese and Angolan descent, and so his interest in traveling to Brazil is significant

on many personal levels. Not only is it the Mecca of capoeira, the activity of his life, but it is also meaningful as a country in the lusophone diaspora. Simply by describing the plans for an upcoming capoeira event, he aligned his own personal journey, the relationships between capoeiristas in Brazilian, European and African countries, and the significance of the perpetuation of these historical relationships of the Atlantic.

The Dream of the African Federation and the Fear of Being "Swallowed"

Despite the pride in demonstrating network connections, a dark side also existed to those relationships. I regularly encountered the phrase, "We don't want to be swallowed." Despite the sincere intentions of some visitors, many of the capoeiristas, particularly in Afreecapoeira, feared that agreeing to a partnership with a Brazilian school meant they would lose all creative control. The personality of the group, its unique history and its delicate dynamic would be discarded or perhaps stifled in pursuit of resources and a more structured model. Instead of networking, they felt a partnership was in fact a "swallowing," in which a foreign school would take over what they built indigenously. This somewhat voluntary "takeover" is often expressed as a neocolonial pursuit. This was happening in the very same moment in which Africa was being painted as the new economic frontier with all of its untapped market potential in the *Economist* (cite the article), while political conflict and economic instability on the ground left some nostalgic for the colonial period. A CEO quoted in Stanford's alumni magazine "recount[ed] how many Ghanaians still believe that the only solution for their country is to be recolonized" (2017). A citizen on the streets of Bamako interviewed by France24 after an attack during the resurgence of the Tuareg rebellion in 2014 called for the French to return and regain control of Mali. The discourse of the relative benefits or fears of neocolonialism is a lens through which West Africans today are making sense of their relationships with foreigners on every scale.

As we have seen in the example of the story of Alda's empty promises, Brazilian (and French) assertion of cultural authority over African innovation and desire for inclusion ironically comes from within an ostensible framework of diasporic kinship and honoring African capoeira. Meanwhile, West African capoeiristas are often marginalized in their very attempts to develop that sense of kinship. This problematic relationship demonstrates how the predominant capoeira rhetoric of inclusiveness, brotherhood and the valorization of African "roots," is more than just a 21st century continuation of the various iterations of little "p" pan-Africanism over the last century. (Drake 1987, Edwards 2001). Neither is it, then, as simple as *not* calling it a form of pan-Africanism. Instead, these emerging relationships in these overlapping capoeira-based networks inaugurate a particularly postmodern problem for West Africans: they are teetering on the line between the desire for pan-African unity and the simultaneous fear of neocolonial takeover.

The assumption may be to think this is a result of the proximity of French and Brazilian authority to legitimate African capoeira. French and other European teachers in West Africa are "authorized" by their training with Brazilians, as capoeira is highly developed and institutionalized in Europe by Brazilian immigrants. This may be true in part. However, the capoeiristas I spoke to seemed surprisingly uninterested in, and most importantly unthreatened by, Europeans. The frequent repetition of the phrase "we do not want to be swallowed" occurred *solely in reference to the possibility of being taken over by a major Brazilian school*. Therefore, the neocolonial gloss of these fears of being consumed by apathetic outside forces was ironically applied to Brazilians, the very Global South, diasporic brethren at the center of this pan-African pursuit, and ironically not necessarily to the French capoeiristas who came to teach or run the African associations. There was only one exception. Marcia, the Brazilian *mestre* who left Brazil and started her own capoeira school in Abidjan, used the language of imperial conquest in reference to a West African head of another capoeira school. She feared his goal was to use the

guise of an African federation to "conquer" all the existing West African schools in order to put forth his own stylistic agenda and make himself "king". In this case, there is a Brazilian woman fearing the masculine, dictatorial takeover of what is currently a collective of individual, but connected and mutually-supportive schools.

For many of the leaders in this regional network of schools, the final dream was to establish the first African capoeira federation. The idea of federating came from the example of many Brazilian capoeira schools that have done the same in recent decades. There is even a World Capoeira Federation, an international non-profit organization that holds yearly competitions (in Azerbaijan?) and whose mission is convince the Olympic Committee to recognize and include capoeira in their games.

Yet thinking more broadly, one wonders if the move to federate West African capoeira schools is not within the epistemological tradition of pan-African collectives, like that of the geo-political vision of Kwame Nkrumah's ideal of African unity, and even unexpected forms of continental unity such as the protection of those on trial with the ICC by other African heads of state (Clarke 2009). The difference here is that the West African network is ambiguously defined; it exists between formal and informal, between a cohesive interdependent whole and a few isolated groups. It is also caught between a clearly defined pan-African ideology of indigenously defined goals and a replica of a foreign system of standards. This ambiguity is reflective of Africans' precarious relationship with capoeira itself. While "Africa" is lauded in the global capoeira network as the foundation for the existence of capoeira's unique set of aesthetics, principles and circumstances, African capoeiristas today find themselves feeling trapped between marginalization for reclaiming and innovating Brazilian capoeira, and mimicry, swallowing the Brazilian styles whole, which in turn erases their seemingly privileged/proximal position as Africans in the Afro-Brazilian art form.

This begs the question: why should Africans feel particularly privileged in claiming some ownership or innovative rights to capoeira? Does the historical evidence of the enslaved Africans who created it bear any weight on the relationships between Brazilians and West Africans today? What is most interesting about this network is the fact that it is primarily comprised of francophone countries, with little connection to the major sites of capoeira in Africa. Angola has been singled out by prominent Brazilian *mestres* interested in visiting the "source" of capoeira's roots. For example, Mestre Camisa, the leader of the notorious regional school Abadá Capoeira and Mestre Cobra Mansa, one of the top angoleiros of the contemporary generation, have each taken trips to Angola to "discover" the Kongolese ritual Zebra dance, N'golo, which is believed to be the antecedent to what became capoeira in colonial Brazil. (Cobra Mansa made a documentary about his trip with prominent capoeira historian Matthias Röhrig Assunção called "Jogo de Corpo"—Game of the Body). Due to Angola's more direct historical connection to Brazil through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as well as being colonized by the Portuguese, capoeira has been more established there. South Africa is the other African country in which there are a number of established capoeira schools. This is most likely due to the cosmopolitan nature of South Africa's expressive cultural landscape and its developed infrastructure that allows for a diversity of artistic industries better able to accommodate and institutionalize global trends like capoeira. However, the quietly growing project in various pockets of the West African francophone world over the last twenty years forces us to ask: do West Africans in particular have a privileged position towards capoeira that creates the conditions for them to be able to make claims about cultural authority, proximity to the source of an Afro-Brazilian tradition, and a familial relationship with Brazilians?

As an anthropologist, it is not my place, nor my interest, to definitively answer these questions, to make a value judgment regarding the nature of African authenticity of self and

cultural expression. These questions, however, are central to the larger significance of something as seemingly trivial as a bunch of youth exercise clubs. What is truly at stake here is the nature of diasporic relationships in an era in which there has been much scholarly writing and popular discourse surrounding the unification of self-conscious members of the African diaspora. In many cultural traditions that are oriented both from and toward Africa, pan-African unity is now being upheld almost as a taken for granted principle. We assume Brazilians practicing a centuries-old Afro-Brazilian art form would show an interest in Africa, and would be particularly invested in collaborating with Africans interested in learning that art form today. This assumption is based on another: the assumption that Africans today possess some innate proximity to those of the past, those connected with the cultural traditions that capoeira drew from, or those who were captured and shipped across the Atlantic into Brazilian *senzalas* (slave houses typically on a plantation). This is an issue of the assumed relevancy of all "African traditions"—which are usually code for rural and ethnically-specific practices like N'golo—to the desires and identification of young, urban West Africans who have more in common with other cosmopolitan, global-oriented university students on another continent then they do with the Kongolese (Angolan) practitioners of N'golo.

In looking at the realities of the relationships within the West African network, some uncomfortable truths force us to do away with certain assumptions of what pan-Africanism means to Africans, and what diaspora means to those involved in the "practice" of diaspora (Edwards 2003). Pierre, for example, was skeptical of federating for a variety of telling reasons. According to him, the first hurdle is that a federation requires the presence and approval of three *mestres* from three different existing federations. That means that not only would they need to have digital connections to folks in the global network, but they would have to convince them of the value of an African federation to the point where they publicly sign off on the project. Beyond that are the

logistics of unifying the main West African schools. He went over his list. The Togolese group Nukunu are strong in acrobatic movements. However, what they do is not real capoeira and they have never come to Dakar. Contra Mestre Fassassi from Benin only came one time. The Gambians don't have any money, "which is why *we* always have to go to *them*," and even then, with their currency so devalued, "When we go there [with cfa] we are like gods," he joked. And finally, he said, to federate they would have to agree on standards, movements, belts etc. "How could we possibly do that?" he asked. According to Pierre, the idea of a West African network was implausible because of 1) the practicality of creating a uniform set of standards for all these different groups 2) the economic differences between the countries 3) the lack of a previously established relationship and 4) the authenticity of everyone's "capoeira."

Still, N'Diaye, Pierre and others imagined Dakar as the ideal base if such a federation existed. N'Diaye has made efforts to realize the dream of the federation. In recent years, he gathered several regional leaders and they held a meeting to discuss the possibility of federating. The realization of that possibility is yet to be seen; however, the occurrence of these meetings speaks to the seriousness with which these leaders have made an effort not to abandon their pursuit. Furthermore, the meetings themselves are historic. These are the beginnings of a regional partnership from a diverse background of West Africans, who might otherwise have nothing to do with one another. The leaders of these groups have devoted their lives to the development of capoeira in their corner of the world. Despite the lack of recognition, lack of resources and other financial support, and perhaps most significantly, despite their repeated marginalization by insincere outsiders who control the "real" capoeira world, they have persisted for almost 20 years to work toward the creation of African schools and an African capoeira federation. They do so because they believe the presence of capoeira in West Africa to be a historic phenomenon, and they recognize the precious legacy that they essentially came to on their own, without consistent

outside support.

T-shirts and the Tangibility of the Network

The circulation of certain objects literally materializes the transmission of knowledge and provides a tangibility to the network. In this world of perpetual but impermanent visitors, event and group t-shirts act both as a form of currency and as a material record of these temporary moments of exchange, marking the establishment of a relationship even if those people never meet again. Not only are t-shirts valuable in invoking a certain status within the world of capoeira, but they are also in a sense sacred, cherished objects soaked in the sweaty trace of the energy of a shared moment, imbued with the memory of mutual connection. T-shirts mark a moment of exchange, an event or a connection that expresses a fictive kinship among *capoeiristas*. Profesora Amazonas was a black American woman of high standing (hence her title of Profesora) in her capoeira school in New Jersey, where she leads her own classes. She visited Afreecapoeira for the same reason many other capoeiristas visit; she wanted to discover "Africa," visit the historic slave site on Gorée Island, attend a few traditional drum sessions, and since she was a *capoeirista*, stop by to teach one workshop at the local capoeira school. Her instructions were in English, but enough Afreecapoeira members understood to grasp the basic ideas. It also did not hurt that she was extremely expressive and energetic as she demonstrated the sequences. Once she realized I was American, at the end of the workshop, she opened up about how she had always wanted to go to Africa, how important it is that we as diasporic blacks return to the continent and make connections, and even more so as brothers and sisters in capoeira. In the middle of the open practice space teeming with young dancers, rollers, drummers and capoeiristas, she stripped off her t-shirt and handed it to me. It was sopping wet with the collar cut out, and on the front had the name of her school and a drawing of two hands breaking out of chains. I beamed with gratitude, and noticed her name written towards the bottom, "Profesora

Amazonas". This launched me into a romanticized feeling of black warrior sisterhood, from the all-female army of the Beninese king, to the women of the Brazilian Amazon, and then this woman, whipping her long dreadlocks in a furious frenzy in a *roda* in the woods of New Jersey. That became my new practice shirt. It gave me confidence whenever I wore it for a *roda*, and helped me overcome the fear many *capoeiristas* experience before entering into a game.

The symbolic weight of certain t-shirts allowed them to operate as a certain currency. The exchange and gift giving of these capoeira artifacts impart a symbolic yet tangible record of the construction of relationships that make up the network. Moussa once motivated his class to do a handstand competition during training in which he promised the winner a t-shirt. The competition became fierce, likely because Moussa was known for having unique and beautiful shirts. It was a signal of his mobility and therefore proximity to important capoeira figures. Moussa just got back from Barcelona; maybe he will give away a shirt from Spain! He has also been to France several times, and sings often of Mestre Cobra Mansa; perhaps the shirt he dishes out belonged to him!

In other instances, instruments act as this kind of currency. Jean, an Afreecapoeira student from the Central African Republic, returned from a trip to the Ivory Coast with a small *pandeiro* from Olodum (one of the most prestigious drum schools in Brazil based in Salvador, Bahia). Mestre Caculé, the Brazilian visitor for the capoeira festival, gave it to Jean as a reward for his eagerness to learn. T-shirts, instruments and other little tokens are constantly circulated, and they continue to circulate after the initial giving with every new connection. The object is imbued with more meaning with every new story, person and location as it continues to move. These objects both document these burgeoning relationships and actively create them simultaneously.

"Work": Freedom and Self-Sufficiency

Adama came to Dakar to visit Afreecapoeira. He left his family, and his responsibilities

as President of the Capoeira Association of the Gambia, to spend a few days training with the Senegalese group. As is tradition with a visitor, the group held a *roda* to welcome Adama. His style is playful and friendly. Even if he flashes a kick towards your face, he delivers it with a big smile and always ends his games by hugging his opponent before they both rejoin the circle. Continuing with tradition, the group makes a speech and allows the visitor to respond. Jean and Malick insisted that I deliver the speech because I was one of the few English speakers. When I tried to translate it to French for the crowd, however, they stopped me, implying the speech was most importantly to be received by Adama. They wanted him to feel at ease and meet him on his level linguistically, probably because many of them had participated in workshops in which the visiting teacher either did not speak their language or did not bother to find someone to translate. After I welcomed him, he responded to the group, saying he was honored to be there with his brothers and sisters. He talked about how we shared such a great moment in the Gambia during an international capoeira event,[14] and *did a lot of good work there that he hopes we can continue here, which is important for capoeira in West Africa, in Africa and in the whole world.* As soon as he got to Dakar he felt at home. They ended the *roda* with the group's traditional salute, "Right hand in the air. Chaveu capoeira!" before everyone shook hands. As Adama shook each person's hand, he mumbled to himself "Jah Bless," demonstrating how Jamaica's aesthetic influence of black vernacular, aesthetics and even bodily comportment has also reached the West African shores (Savishinsky 1994).

Aside from sporadic talk of building an African federation, West African capoeiristas are carrying out a much more substantive project that seems to exist independently of more formal forms of networking on a global or regional scale. Many have respect and admiration for the efforts of Brazilians to institutionalize their art form around the world. As West Africans newly

[14] The happenings and dynamics of this event are further elaborated on in Chapter 4.

entering that system, they often do not have access to it, and feel actively excluded from it at times. Instead, they have created their own value systems of charting their students' progress. Why should it even be assumed that they require outside approval at all? Yet beyond the self-sufficiency of these schools is "work," the idea that African capoeiristas are charged, or perhaps charge themselves, with a special set of tasks to cultivate a sociality, education, and intimate network around capoeira in West Africa. This task force does not only exist to answer the call that African groups deserve respect and recognition despite their lack of legitimacy. This work consists of unpublicized visits to one another's schools, and pedagogical interactions that privilege affective rather than material concerns. While the aspirations to create an African federation, or to have their schools be legitimated by the Brazilian system, seem to fit the description, this "work" is more nuanced, characterized by its lack of a clear end goal other than perpetuating the work itself. It is a project that does not require outside authentication. Despite the subtlety of these seemingly unspectacular trips, events, or friendships, these networkers find their work to have global implications of historical proportions. In this case, connectivity to a global sphere starts by building with neighbors, using a diasporic cultural tool of liberation created by enslaved Afro-Brazilians over two hundred years ago. It continues to liberate West Africans from entrenched ideas of them as frozen historical subjects.

The global capoeira world stops in to pay a visit from time to time, but few from that world have invested in building a partnership with the West African schools. Their continued survival and hope of being institutionalized seems to depend on that legitimacy of a direct link to the Brazilian schools, since their own countries do not seem interested in funding their kind of cultural project. And yet, many West Africans have refused foreign partnership. Their goal is freedom, something they believe to be a central principle in capoeira itself. Look at history: enslaved Africans were chained by their hands (or so the pervasive myth goes) and they had the

will and ingenuity to use only their legs as a mode of defense, eventually crafting a martial art disguised as a dance. Once-chained men thus transformed their bodies into weapons, and used them against their oppressors as a means of obtaining freedom. The vanguards who created their own capoeira groups in West Africa did so practically out of thin air. In Gambia, Senegal, Togo and Benin the story is almost identical: a young man started training a few moves on the beach that he learned from a short-time visitor or a popular film, and one by one he recruited others, until a group was formed. Ten, fifteen, or twenty years later, you have the African capoeira groups you see today, that have developed generations of capoeiristas without so much as infrequent visitors from the global capoeira world to guide them. While some of these African founders have actively sought out Brazilian *mestres* to baptize them into the formal Brazilian system, others have resisted offers from big name schools in the name of "freedom." They want to route themselves into the network, but without giving up the unique identity and control of their autonomous creation. In demanding these terms, they are risking the survival of the group. Without a stable practice location, or funding to host and attend events, the numbers of these schools are dwindling. Some fear that many of the people who show up now are more interested in meeting romantic partners, or getting in a fun workout, than advancing in the capoeira world.

Antoine is a former member of Afreecapoeira who has a lasting reputation in the group as one of their most skilled players and effective teachers. Not all are interested in working towards Brazilian-granted legitimacy. Neither do they particularly aim for any kind of state-based recognition as professionals, even if it were based in their own countries. What these folks have put forth is the concept of "work," as opposed to professionalization. In criticizing the Brazilian phenomenon of the "uniformization" of capoeira, Antoine states:

> …Capoeira at its origin, and not even that long ago, there wasn't this system of hierarchy where you had to…it was people coming together to do it. There is [inaudible] that capoeira is being developed in Africa. Well, uh…it's true there

> are people who came, who went back. And then, what makes it so that, you could say, what makes a *mestre* a *mestre*? What makes a capoeira school a school? Is it necessarily because this school is attached to a school that makes this school a real/true (vrai) school? And, I believe that…what is important…first, is…the transmission of knowledge.

Antoine's rhetorical line of questioning brings up an important criticism of legitimacy that could be applied to the Brazilian schools themselves. What does it mean to be an official school or not, and who decides? In questioning the pervasiveness of formality, he feels that Africans—the newest global recruits to capoeira—are actually returning to the original tradition of capoeira that existed without a system of legitimation and ranking. In other words, Africans are discovering capoeira for the first time in the way the first Africans and Afro-Brazilians created it. He is, therefore, admitting to the novelty and creativity of unattached African capoeira, as well as making parallels from that process to capoeira's most original form. Africans are new to it, but they are closer to the purity of the art form's true nature than the modern Brazilian adaptation. This is then a reversal of the claim leveled against West African schools - that their lack of formal connections makes for inauthentic capoeira.

For people like Antoine, what matters more than access to the global network is the substance of learning, rather than the formality of status, particularly for African capoeira schools. Here he outlines how the Dakar school has created a strong identity based on the fluidity of inconsistent teachers, instead of seeing the permeability of the group as a weakness:

> And, I believe that…what is important, first of all, is…the transmission of knowledge. Knowledge is transmitted, but, after it should also be somehow with people who will give you good knowledge. Because, there are some who can, who come and teach whatever/nonsense. Well, me I look at the context in which I learn here. I am already happy/content because, here we have the opportunity to work with people who come a little bit from everywhere. Different schools. And…at some point you have to talk about recognition because it is a question of recognition. Recognition, I believe, is not necessarily created by a specific school, but I believe that it is all the people there that see the work and judge the

> relevance of the work. That can, somehow, encourage you all to do that work. Because, in capoeira there are also certain rituals, there are certain things you must respect. Certain things you must know. Uh…and that is why it is important to meet people. Uh…I have had the chance to travel, and generally people ask me "but which group are you from, are you…" but I tell them where I come from. I will not say what my worth is, but I will show my worth in the *roda*. And outside of the *roda* I will show my worth in singing. I will show my worth in terms of culture and knowledge of capoeira. And that is what makes it so that there are groups in which I will never say my level. But there are people who, based on what they see, they will say 'yes he has this level' or 'he has that level.'

The main function of the network, according to Antoine, is the transmission of knowledge. Capoeira, and the knowledge it brings, is then no longer thought of as carried solely in the bodies of Brazilian adepts. Focusing on the legacy of work, as opposed to the contemporary system of hierarchy and the guise of bureaucratic formality, in turn de-*person*alizes the source of that knowledge. Rather, it infinitely distributes it so that it exists in anyone who comes by to offer something of value. Antoine recalled a visit from a well-known capoeirista from Salvador, Bahia, known for his Afrocentric rhetoric and his iconic instrument shop. **"**Lua Rasta," he used to say, "Don't wait necessarily for someone else to come and tell you, here, you guys have the right level. You all are doing a certain work…and at some point, capoeira will see the work you are doing and he will give back what you did." One of the most important lessons he drew from this Brazilian capoeira elder was the idea of "work" and self-sufficiency. No one else can do the work for them or decide what level of recognition they deserve.

Outside groups come and go, and as Antoine suggests, his group uses this fluidity of visitors to create and maintain their own unique style in the spirit of communication and freedom from the constraints of fixed external standards.

> …I learned capoeira here in Senegal and it's a context a little particular. Because…my prof he learned with a master from, from Senzala, after that [the master] left. *And he stayed to do a certain work*. Uh…he, taking off (like breaking away or starting from?) from this base he received. But Senegal was a

> country where a lot of people pass through. There are people from Capoeira Brasil, there are a lot of groups that pass through. There is Capoeira Brasil, Abadá Capoeira, Senzala, Cordão de Ouro, and…each time these people pass through, each time they bring their little contribution to capoeira. It's like that that our style today was made, from contributions, from each of these people, from each of these groups. And…I believe that, when I learned capoeira, my prof always told, he always taught us to not limit ourselves to one single group or one single style. He wanted us to be able to communicate with everyone. And I believe that it's that spirit that we are trying to stick with today.

Clement, a former Afreecapoeira instructor, who now lives in the Ivory Coast, had a similar view of the spirit of the group in relation to others:

> Like for example for us at Afreecapoeira, not everyone plays the same way. You know, if you take Abada, at Abada they are all, they are all the same. Afreecapoeira, every one has their own style. Those who give class. Each one has their touch. Each one develops their own style *in* the group. I find that it makes us richer. It enriches the group that each one has their own touch.

It is no accident that he chose Abadá as his counter example. They are one of the most well-known Brazilian schools with a reputation of rigid standards and a business model that replicates the same style in all of their players in over one hundred branches around the world. In a way, they are a symbol of the rigidity of Brazilian capoeira, which Clement strategically juxtaposes with his own Senegalese school that he positions as more diverse, organic and free.

Malick, one of the more advanced students currently at Afreecapoeira, believes that holding their group accountable to the formality of the Brazilian system is not a useful venture. Instead, he talks about a certain kind of work or "application" as he calls it, that shows their commitment to capoeira itself, something that stands alone, separate from the way Brazil operates with it:

> This side of things, being connected to that doesn't interest me at all. Because I find that the freedom aspect of capoeira should not impose that we come really from a known mestre or not. Capoeira, we appropriate it, and we develop it. For

> example, here with the former experienced players, people were surprised to see that they achieved a certain level without having a sufficiently recognized master. And that I think is a real shame because, I don't think that's really the capoeira spirit, these issues of connection. I find it a real shame that people find themselves so focused on that. But I think it's important that we make ourselves known but it's not a priority. If we can make ourselves known, it's even better. In the opposite case, well, we always evolved without that and it's not very vital for us. To make ourselves known by other groups. But on the contrary *we must be able to apply ourselves*. It's important for the dynamic of the group itself and then, also to *give energy to Africa*. Because they also have to know that [inaudible] moves once we start to appropriate capoeira. And that they know that *we claim it*.

Malick and Antoine do not acknowledge the global network as the legitimating authority. Instead, they turn to the "freedom aspect of capoeira". They refer to the history and principles of capoeira itself that demonstrate a legacy of freedom fighters (men who used capoeira as a means of manumission) and a spirit of freedom, an openness and acceptance of creative expression and improvisation. Rather than holding themselves to the 20th/21st century standards of bureaucratic legitimacy—that is based as much on a network of personal relationships as objective qualifications—set forth by the Brazilian schools, capoeiristas like Malick, Antoine, N'Diaye and Adama take the principles and historical role models inherent in the art form as their guide. This is similar to Antoine's notion that their only loyalty is to the transmission of knowledge and their own "work" to carry out the original spirit of capoeira as freedom.

Malick emphasizes the impact their work can have for Africa: "…we must be able to apply ourselves…to give energy to Africa. Because they also have to know that [inaudible] moves once we start to appropriate capoeira. And that they know that we claim it." The reality is that the West African network is not entirely self-sufficient. The folks who "pass through" are a substantive part of their program; sometimes outsiders stick around long enough to seize some control of their groups. The Capoeira Association of the Gambia, for instance, was created over 10 years ago by Gambian Adama Badji. In the last few years, the group's main teaching and

administrative responsibilities seem to have been taken over by Simon, a white French financial consultant. Through his own connections, Simon set the group up with a regular sponsor, a company that produces an energy drink called XXL, which pays them to host a public *roda* once a month wearing XXL gear to promote their product. Outside of the Gambia, the perception is that Simon runs the association. He is often the main contact for the group. Yet Simon and his wife Sandra often travel in the region in their quatre-quatre (4X4), and Simon will lead a training if he stops by Afreecapoeira. It is then he announces upcoming events in the Gambia that he primarily has found the funding for. I made the mistake of asking Adama how Simon came to be the leader of the Capoeira Association of the Gambia if he is a temporary French foreigner. He shot back:

> But by the time he comes, we give him chance. Because we…we want to have some knowledge. So that's why he give him the chance, for him to lead us to train. There we can get what he is having. But not that he is our leader. I am the leader. And my assistant is Ousmane [not the same as the one in Afreecapoeira]. Joss is trying to su— to help us to stand like any other capoeira groups in the world, and support us. When he leave tomorrow, we can sustain for ourselves.

Adama's association currently receives major structural support from Simon's presence due to his connectedness and his status as a relatively well-off white European diplomat. Despite this, Adama made it clear that the aim of their group is self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

West African capoeiristas have created a pan-African, cosmopolitan network through which people, artistic practices and ideologies circulate. This network serves in part to combat the region's marginalization within the global hierarchy of capoeira that privilege Brazil and common sites of Brazilian migration in the U.S., Canada and Western Europe. Their ideological projects

have moved to recenter West Africa in the landscape and historical narrative of capoeira's circulation, effectively uprooting the region from its position as a historical artifact. Rather than simply digging into the "traditional" local practices to indigenize their practice, they assert their authorship as Africans by permitting creativity, openness and hybridity of form, blending Brazilian, Jamaican and local aesthetics. While they continue to seek legitimacy from the authoritative position of Brazilian capoeira schools, and in this light, at times, consider their project of institutionalization to be unsuccessful, I argue that this network has been successful in doing a certain kind of "work" - to build regional pan-African ties, provide support and mobility to its members, and even "provincialize" Brazil (Chakrabarty 2000).

CHAPTER 2

Becoming Diasporically African: West African Capoeiristas' Search for Origins

"Diaspora is simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings."

-Paul Zeleza "Rewriting the African Diaspora" (2005: 41)

Introduction

Sitting down in my host family's stiffly decorated second living room that houses their nice leather couches and chinaware more often than people, I settled in to interview Afreecapoeira's current instructor Pierre, whom we met in chapter 1. When I inquired as to what initially attracted him to capoeira, Pierre responded by saying it provided him with "the possibility to know my own culture," "to know Angola," "to know Lusophone culture." I pressed on: why did he choose to primarily identify as such - given that his father is Angolan, and yet Pierre himself was born in the Ivory Coast, grew up between the Congo and Senegal and spent little time in Angola? He replied:

> Because it's the only country that I don't know. It's the only place that I don't know, from my origins. I already went to Congo, I did 5 or 6 years in Congo because I went there to work to understand how things work. Ivory Coast I know because I was born there and I still have friends there. Senegal OK, there's no problem. But I didn't know Angola. And we never set foot [there]…So that means that even our grandparents, all the family on the other side never saw us. So now what I'm trying to do, and the reason why I got into capoeira, is because that allows me, bit by bit to relearn the culture, to learn Portuguese, to see how that goes before going back [to Angola].

For Pierre, Brazilian capoeira and Angolan culture were synonymous in their mutual membership in the shared lusophone world. Immersing himself in, and eventually devoting his life to, the study of capoeira was a way for him to engage in a practice of origins, continually filling the void

of a part of his background with which he is not familiar. Having grown up in primarily francophone African spaces, Pierre aspired to become Angolan like his father, to become fully lusophone in both language and cultural proficiency like his ancestors. He hoped to accomplish this in part by training Afro-Brazilian capoeira.

This chapter investigates the idea of origins in contemporary West African contexts. What is the reckoning point of one's national and cultural origins, and who decides? What kinds of symbolic resources do African youth draw on to define themselves as African in a highly globalized moment of cultural production? How do we understand ethnic and national positionality when it is constructed and performed through a transnational project?

I take up these larger philosophical concerns in my ethnography of small artistic communities to highlight how young West Africans draw on personal and historical narratives to exercise their agency in defining themselves. The process of searching for one's origins and therefore one's sense of place and belonging is an active and ongoing one. The goal is not to locate the national and cultural origins of particular capoeira practitioners, for that presumes a singular possibility that requires "uncovering" with respect to their origins. Rather, I explore what the search for origins tells us about the way origins are conceived of for Brazilophilic West Africans, those who see Brazil as central to their understanding of themselves. Just as many diasporic blacks look to Africa to fill a void in their personal and collective history, these African youth look to the diaspora, and in particular, to Afro-Brazilian expressive arts like capoeira, to find a sense of regional, national, and familial belonging within West Africa. For them, capoeira, a martial art developed by Afro-Brazilians under conditions of enslavement, helps them to redefine (and sometimes discover anew) their own sense of Africanness, nationality or ethnicity.

Capoeira, like other Brazilian cultural exports - samba, *carnaval*, soap operas and

soccer - is currently a very popular sport gaining global traction (Robitaille 2014, Werner 2006). Its popular appeal is due in part to its vibrancy and energy of the acrobatic movements, but also to its status as one of the many diasporic art forms of longing, of creativity under duress of exile from Africa (Gilroy 1993). Traditional capoeira songs tell stories of the brutality of daily life for the enslaved - like unusual love between the white plantation owner's daughter and a manumitted black man who works for her father, or the two-sided metaphor of the sea as the vehicle of distance from their homeland and the site of spiritual awakening. A growing body of literature about capoeira around the world mostly focuses on capoeira as the object of study itself; it seeks to decipher the structure and history of the rituals, or the meanings behind the movements (Assunção 2005; Talmon-Chvaicer 2007). Other ethnographers have concentrated on the dynamics of a single school, often led by a Brazilian *mestre* (master), in order to carve out the pedagogical dynamics and cultural transmission of the Afro-Brazilian art form (Robitaille 2014; Wesolowski 2007). In other words, the vast majority of scholarship on capoeira to date focuses on the history and changing meaning of Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions for Brazilians.

This chapter asks about the diverse ways in which contemporary continental Africans leverage the Afro-Brazilian art form to situate themselves in their social worlds. West Africans have a particular relationship to capoeira, because of the historical weight due to a fraught, centuries-long and complex relationship between West Africa and Brazil from the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Matory 2005). West and Central Africans practicing it today, therefore, often conceptualize capoeira's emergence in contemporary Africa as a "return" of those creative energies of the exiled and lost kin to their geographical source. For capoeiristas engaged in developing the martial art in Africa, their project represents both the end of those conditions that brought about the need for the fighting style (i.e. combating conditions of enslavement), and the valuing and remembrance of that history by Africans themselves. Often this occurs in the very

sites from which the enslaved were captured and shipped to the Americas.

The power of this symbolism is central for those West Africans who formed their own capoeira schools. While capoeira has become popular all over the continent of Africa in the last 20 years, the most well-known and active schools are in sites that were significant to the trans-Atlantic slave trade: Senegambia, the Bight of Benin and the Angolan coast. Standard Brazilian capoeira is practiced in all schools in the region; the function and ideological basis for their practice, however, is indicative of each country's distinct relationship to Brazil, both in terms of current affiliations and historical ties. This exploration of capoeira in Francophone West Africa illuminates a special relationship beyond the more traditionally explored black Atlantic connections with historic sites - such as commercially-mediated relationships surrounding slave tourism in Ghana (Holsey 2008).

In this chapter, I draw on examples from the network of small capoeira schools I described in the last chapter. Their individual efforts to promote the martial art in their regions happened in large part because they supported one another through attending events, despite difficulties related to time and resources. Primarily in coastal Francophone countries, the main schools in this network are linked in part due to a shared language from former colonial rule, and their location in once historical sites of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These capoeiristas actively mobilized these sites in their political project, calling attention to a painful time in history that they felt popular and state discourses had primarily chosen to forget, or simply ignore.

Colonial discourse, and its postcolonial uptake on the trope of "Africa," positioned the continent as the site of "origins," "authenticity" and "tradition," despite the ironic historical fact that these categories were primarily "invented" and concretized in political structures, legal discourse and cultural life by colonial forces (Mamdani 2012; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). This

idea of Africa as the site of origins simultaneously circulates in discourse among various Afro-descendant socio-political projects centered around a diasporic framework in which blacks outside of Africa were forcibly removed and their descendants are in exile. In this framework, Africa remains the lost home, the point of departure from which all black people, cast out by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, originally belong. (Matory 2005, Hartman 2006).

The diasporic discourse surrounding Africa developed as a tool of combatting exclusion from social and political institutions, and to give historical depth to the subjectivities of black people said to be void of history, tradition and, therefore, civilizational merit. Despite these seemingly contradictory purposes, both colonial and diasporic discourse have at times contributed jointly to the idea of Africa, not only as a place of historical origins of Afro-descendants elsewhere, but also as a place where ethnicity and its accompanying cultural traditions are clearly delineated. Furthermore, popular discourses from the continent—also stemming from a colonial project of ordering African populations into new autochthonous categorizations of "tribe," "ethnicity" and "indigeneity" (Geschiere 2009; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Mamdani 2012)—tend to reinforce the discreet categorization of people by their ethnic and national "identities."

I argue that the search for a more fitting and broader description of self and community is central to the lives of many West African youth living in urban, cosmopolitan environments, and looking for belonging and self-identification. Contrary to Western assumptions about the homogenous or singular identities of African youth (Werbner 2002), I further argue that while this search for origins is central to the process of Afro-descendants in the diaspora, who often look to Africa, West African capoeiristas position themselves as similarly "diasporic." In other words, they carry grievances regarding the incomplete projects of postcolonial nationalism that cause them to feel marginal to an imagined "center," "home" or "origin." The origin they aspire to "relearn" (as Pierre put it), or discover for the first time, is a sense of being culturally,

nationally, linguistically and historically situated in Africa. Drawing on Brazilian cultural forms then acts as the vehicle through which they work to reconnect with this sense of self and home. For some, it is the proximity of the Portuguese language that makes Brazil a likely candidate for this circuitous journey to origins. Others see Afro-Brazilian capoeira specifically as the ultimate symbol of black resistance, connecting their own local histories and contemporary struggles with those of the enslaved. Yet some see the project of reclaiming this Afro-diasporic martial art as integral to their own cultural nationalism. In all cases, the historical relationship that binds West Africa and Brazil is a basis for those becoming diasporically African; however, it does not encompass all that is creatively constructed anew by these young people.

This engagement with Brazil as an entity - imagined as both racially, linguistically and historically familiar, as well as nationally and geographically foreign - allows them a kind of abstraction from their own differences as West Africans from various countries, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. I term this reflection *Brazilophilia*—a coming together over the love of Brazilian culture that subsequently unites them as West Africans. By engaging with this diasporic black art, they create pan-African communities that force us to rethink what it means to find African origins by way of the diaspora.

Three Diasporically African Reworkings

To illustrate some of the ways Brazilophile West African youth engage with their national and cultural origins through a black diasporic cultural framework, I work through three distinct approaches to this process. The examples in this chapter point to different levels of narrative (re)construction using capoeira: self/family, ethnic migration, and national cultural heritage. Each of these spheres speaks to a narrative reconstruction primarily centered around different scales of belonging relevant to these martial artists' construction of an "origin," a project that addresses the

familial, the ethnic, and the national as they are retooled with the diasporic.

The first approach comes from capoeiristas living in Dakar who have grown up in francophone countries, but whose families migrated from lusophone African countries, primarily Angola and Guinea-Bissau. These young people often identify as having a kind of lusophone character, despite their unfamiliarity with their parents' country of origin. The fact that they feel out of place in Dakar as Christians, from minority ethnicities and nationalities, as lusophones, might be why some feel compelled to search for their origins. Their stories reveal a unique engagement with Brazilian capoeira traditions as an avenue towards discovery of their own luso-African backgrounds. In this framework, Brazilian cultural practices become a proxy for what they perceive to be a gap in their luso-African cultural education based on the francophone cultural hegemony and often the silences of their parents about their background.

For the second approach, I analyze a Togolese capoeira group called Nukunu, who insert capoeira "anachronistically" into their theatrical performances of local Ewe history. In so doing, they reframe the central origins story of the Ewe people by privileging Brazilian capoeira in their retelling, and thus centrally situating diasporic black liberation in their own ethnic origin narratives. Their transnational innovation on a local mythology challenges notions of a seemingly localized African authenticity.

The third example is an approach taken by the group Afreecapoeira in Senegal, in which they position their capoeira practice as the quintessential "African" martial art, in relation to both the foreignness of East Asian martial arts and the ethnic-specificity of the national sport, *Lamb* (traditional wrestling). Through the embodied practice of artistic performance, capoeiristas across West Africa are drawing on corporeal and discursive epistemologies of liberation that stem from a martial art form and cultural tradition from enslaved communities in colonial Brazil.

These three examples of diasporic reworkings of self/familial, ethnic and national narrative constructions in West Africa provide a rich complexity the meanings of Africanness in this contemporary moment in that resources of redefinition are found in cultural practices located in the diaspora. In this way, young people are asserting their rights to cultural specificity, ethnic and national origins, and historical significance - by locating their claims in the ideological and aesthetic frameworks of a transnational black project, disrupting existing notions of authentic African identities.

Renarrativizing the Self: Luso-Africans Engaging Brazil

In this section I explore some of the experiences of young people who grew up in the francophone environment of Dakar, but whose family background is rooted in luso-African nationalism and cultural practices. Some of these capoeristas can claim a luso-African nationality, but lack first-hand experiences with the cultural practices of their parent's country. They then use Brazil as a cultural proxy for what they feel is an educational void in their cultural repertoire, their rightful heritage. For lusophone West Africans, involvement in a capoeira community is one vehicle through which they can pursue a relationship with their own background, a background that they feel distanced from due to their upbringing as francophones in a francophone environment.

For much of the 20th century, and especially during the 1960s as most African nations were gaining independence, political, popular and scholarly discourse was grappling with the question of national cultures and provenance. Were those African-born citizens educated for years in Europe still considered African? Were there still cultural traditions that could be revived or reconstructed given centuries of imperial conquest? What does it mean that linguistic categories that mark former colonial occupation (such as "francophone" "anglophone" and

"lusophone") are today experienced as inherently African? These questions index an important shift in terms of how, and in relation to whom, West Africans have come to define themselves. Discourses about these categories no longer strictly rely upon a European versus African binary, but rather take into account different types of nationally, regionally and culturally imagined communities that nuance what it means to be "African."

Senegal has been a central destination for West African migrants in pursuit of educational and labor opportunities since well before independence (OIM 2009). While Senegal is an almost entirely Muslim population, the small subset of Christians is in large part a result of migrants from surrounding nations with demographically Christian populations. Therefore, many migrants find themselves doubly distinct from the majority of the Senegalese population, by nationality and religion. Dakar specifically boasts of a vibrant Afro-lusophone cosmopolitanism that exists in and around the dominant Wolof francophone social scene, quietly influencing Church culture (Samson 2016), as well as young people's music tastes and extracurricular activities (e.g. the popularity of Angolan *kizomba* dancing). These cosmopolitan elements receive little attention in scholarship about the city. Guinea-Bissau, Senegal's lusophone neighbor, is responsible for 11% of the migrants in the country. A vast majority of refugees during the Bissauan Civil War of 1998-1999 sought asylum in Senegal, while Guinea Bissau has also previously taken in 90% of Senegalese refugees during the secessionist crisis in Casamance (southern Senegal) in 1980 (OIM 2009). Guinea-Bissauans also make up one of the largest tourist populations to Senegal.

A small subset of capoeiristas in Dakar identify as lusophones, because they have parents who hail from Portuguese-speaking African countries, primarily Guinea-Bissau. Many are Christian, and grew up speaking French and Wolof. Some speak some amount of Bissauan Creole, but often little Portuguese. Among some of the capoeiristas, the category "lusophone" came to mean much more than a Portuguese speaker. Those who identified with it talked about

lusophone as a personality type, a person with distinct characteristics inherited from their cultural background. This characterization of people with lusophone origins operated as a trope in their anecdotes, an evaluative narration about why someone acted a certain way, or how they might act in a given situation. Despite the prevalence of lusophone expressive cultures, this lusophone characterization felt oddly out of place in a city like Dakar. The same people who self-identified and identified others as lusophone used another foil for explaining their relationship to broader Dakaroise society that seemed in direct opposition: the overly conservative, Senegalese Muslim. This trope was defined by a hyper-sensitivity around taboo subject matter (e.g. sexual intimacy,) as well as a self-righteous religious moralism concerning religion and cultural practices. Whereas the lusophone was sexually impulsive, the Senegalese Muslim feared even breaching the subject of sex in casual conversation. Lusophone character in francophone West Africa serves as a counterpart to religious conservativism they perceive to be arresting "freedom" in Senegalese society. In Prospère's case, for example, having lusophone origins sometimes worked against him. He was born and raised in Dakar, Wolof and French being his main languages. Yet his parents were of the Bissauan ethnic group, Manjaco who hailed from Guinea Bissau, and he grew up in a Christian household where Bissauan Creole was the standard.

Outside of the Centre Culturel de Blaise Senghor, after a long evening of training, a few of us started chatting with one of the artists who uses the bustling practice and performance space of the public cultural center. Ndeye was a Wolof capoeirista and jack of all artistic trades - from singing in a Cape Verdean Creole church choir to Brazilian batucada drumming (a kind of marching band used to parade and provide music for the dancers in carvanal). She knew everyone because of her artistic endeavors, so she took the initiative of introducing us all. When she uttered Prospère's name, Moustapha, a Senegalese artistic peer, immediately reacted jokingly, "You guys with your strange names: Prospère (French for "God-given)." He proceeded to list

other names that were also French words as well, which he interestingly mocked despite being from a francophone country himself. Names such as these are most commonly attributed to Christians, therefore most often foreign Africans. I joined in adding: "Prospère," and Moustapha grew excited "Yeah! Prospère. You guys have God-names like that and we are only Mamadous and Idrissas." I responded with a reminder that many of these Islamic names similarly were those of prophets and other phrases referring to God, and Ndeye agreed. I realized Moustapha's use of "*vous*" as in "you guys" signaled he assumed Prospère was a non-national, so I remarked that Prospère is Senegalese as well.

"Oh yea? You don't look Senegalese," Moustapha stated matter-of-factly.

"I was born here and I grew up here." Prospère defended.

"Oh ok. What's your last name?"

"Prospère Tavera."

"Tavera? But you're not Senegalese."

"I'm of Bissauan origins."

"Well, there you go. But you're lucky, I love Bissau. Have you ever been there?"

"Yes, only once, but I was really little."

"Ah, I would love to go," Moustapha shared. "I dream of dying there. Either in Guinea-Bissau, or Cape Verde, or in Brazil."

I jumped in to ask him why.

"Because," Prospère offered. When it became apparent I was not satisfied with the response, he added, "There are some things you just shouldn't say!"

"Yes!" Moustapha agreed with him. "There are no words."

Their shared love of lusophone countries, a kind of amalgamated lusophone paradise where one might happily end their days, brought the two young men together in an odd turn of events during a conversation that began with a subtle marginalization, denial and distancing. By withholding an explanation, they expressed the profound weight of the idea of this paradise in

their minds. Whereas Moustapha saw Prospère's Bissauan background as a barrier to being Senegalese (despite his stating that he was from Senegal), he then rejoiced in the imaginative space of a transcendent aspiration that seemed to render the once hard-lined fact of nationality suddenly irrelevant.

These same lusophone origins that made sure he spent his life defending his membership into being Senegalese, gave him a significant advantage in the context of capoeira, a kind of cultural cache that provided a richer texture and a sense of authenticity to the group. Prospère's background in Portuguese meant that he could not only pick up capoeira songs much quicker than most, but he could also learn those that were much longer and more complex. He was one of the group's musical strengths; his mastery over the *berimbau* and his seemingly endless repertoire of songs made him a figure his capoeira peers relied on to carry the musical aspect of the *rodas* so crucial to the energy and structure of the ceremony. Despite his constant struggles with the subtle reminders of his outsider-ness of the Senegalese society he calls his own, Prospère's life as a capoeirista seems to provide a space in which he can bring his fullest self to be celebrated. He is at once Senegalese—in fact, one of the few native Wolof speakers in a group made up of primarily African foreigners—and Bissau-Guinean, as his love of capoeira music helps him to improve his developing Portuguese inherited from his parents.

Some of the capoeiristas never explicitly shared their lusophone background. Their dedication to Afro-Brazilian capoeira, however, suggests a possible connection between their origins and their attraction to the art form. Claude, one of the more advanced and long-time students at Afreecapoeira known to surprise spectators with his ability to do complicated moves while upside down despite his deceptively hefty figure, rarely spoke about his family. It was only when his mother passed away, and members of the group attended the funeral proceedings in the Church, did some of us learn that his mother was from Cape Verde. The Pastor glowingly

described Claude's mother's character, remarking that she worked diligently not only for the Church, but to support many other Cape Verdean women in Dakar.

For Sophie, it was the loss of her mother that sparked her curiosity about what her mother contributed to her sense of lusophone African personhood. A member of Afreecapoeira, Sophie started training in 2014. Her mother, who raised her and her sister on her own in Dakar, was originally from Guinea-Bissau before she immigrated with her boyfriend in 1968 when they were both young. They were later married in Senegal; but Sophie's father passed away not long after she was born. Her mother passed away earlier in 2014, never having taken Sophie and her sisters to her country. Sophie always asked about why they never went, but her mother only gave her cryptic answers and consistently refused to elaborate. When she passed away, Sophie was left with the task of trying to distract herself from the grief. A friend told her about capoeira and so she joined initially to get out of the house.

Two years later, Sophie has her second belt from Afreecapoeira, and she holds a special position in the group, a significant, but subtle contribution that often goes unrecognized. Through family connections, she found a man from Guinea-Bissau to make the belts the capoeira group uses for graduation ceremonies. Bissauans have a traditional way of square braiding that they use to make belts worn for ceremonial funerary dances. The style is intricate, sophisticated, and unique. Without enough members in the group who know how to reproduce the traditional Brazilian styles of braiding yarn for capoeira belts, they use these local Bissauan braiders to provide a close substitute. Lacking legitimate Brazilian knowledge, they resort to another African technique. In other words, within the "failure" of accurately mimicking Brazilian traditions, they end up creating a more diverse and unique pan-African cultural tradition for their own school. Their innovations are based both on a shared sense of lusophone-ness, and a desire to reconnect with their lusophone background in a francophone environment. This is what drives their

connection to Brazil.

Sophie thus brings a kind of cultural capital, valuable to the group for her ties to the Bissauan enclave in the Grand-Dakar neighborhood where the group has their belts made for the capoeira *batizado* (baptism) ceremony. The fact that they are from Guinea-Bissau is partly just a coincidence. They are the people with convenient yarn braiding abilities. However, this process also reflects the importance of a kind of lusophone cultural proximity. The woman who orchestrated the belt making was also in a position of power for her cultural knowledge. As she put it: "If we move back to Guinea-Bissau you guys are screwed! The Senegalese don't know anything about this!" She recognized the cultural cache of lusophone cultural proximity with the desired belt patterns. As the authorities, this belt-making family called most of the shots on which yarn to use, which colors went well together, how they should be braided, etc. These Bissauans helped shaped what ultimately became the Senegalese school's representation of an Afro-Brazilian practice.

Sophie and Prospère do not follow the trend of transmigration common to the generations of Manjaco before them (Gable 2006), likely due to instability resulting from the Civil War of 1998-1999. Sophie took her first trip to Guinea-Bissau in 2016, despite her mother's misgivings. She met with family members she had never seen before in her parents' home village. She fell in love with the city, the beaches, the welcoming atmosphere, and admired the strong pride Bissauans had for their culture. "I feel so at ease when I'm there without really knowing why," she wrote me on Facebook followed by two emojis: one smiling with tears and the other with googly heart eyes. She told me she hopes to move there someday. This heritage trip, one taken across the border from where she grew up, was emotionally fraught; it was only after her mother's passing – and likely as a direct result of it – that she could undertake it. Before she took the actual journey to find her origins, Sophie engaged in the partial practice of origins through

capoeira, seeking out lusophone family ties to special cultural knowledge that contributed to the "authentic" Brazilian aesthetic of her new capoeira family. The practice of capoeira itself was not always what kept her engaged in the group. She often finds the trainings physically strenuous, and sometimes even dangerous. Instead, it is the sense of community, family, and ultimately the sense of herself as a Guinea-Bissauan that shapes her relationship with the diasporic art form, that extends to the lusophone (and francophone) world more broadly. These kinds of heritage trips and search for origins within West Africa across different cultural and linguistic lines are not always so visible under monolithic rubrics of singular "Africa(n)" as a trope of fixed and clear traditions, or the site of origins.

Renarrativizing Ethnic Origins: The Story of Ewe Migration

Some West African capoeira groups tackle the issue of origins more explicitly, by taking common origin stories of their particular ethnic groups and reframing them within a diasporic perspective. In so doing, they combat essentialist discourses about African ethnicities and render them ultimately transnational. *Nukunu*, the major capoeira group of Togo, is a small group of artistic visionaries that look to both the past and the future through their creative endeavors. Beyond being simply martial artists, their aim is to educate the Togolese public about their own history through performances featuring dance, capoeira and theater. Many in the group feel strongly about the fact that local histories are rarely taught, while a Western-centered agenda under the guise of "World History" is the status quo in primary school education. In one of their shows they wanted to tell the history of fleeing the brutal king Agokoli, whose legend explains the migration of the Ewe people from the historic town of Notsie in present-day Togo to eastern Ghana.

Historians who have written about this particular story argue that the dominant narrative

around Notsie as the place of origins for Ewe people is oversimplified, a constructed notion of Ewe singularity by the German occupiers in the mid 19th century. They argue that the group has a much longer and more complex history involving various sub-groups that extends deeper than the Notsie migration epic. While the singular migration narrative is contradicted by historical variation amongst Ewe people today, many still hold the story of the king very centrally in their conception of themselves as a people, in their recognition of a historical plight that is still relevant today, and in the symbolism of that town (Greene 2002). The migration story of this subset of the Ewe people from Notsie to Eastern Ghana is of interest to historians of the *sous-region* of West Africa, because it has been operative in colonial discourses and ethnic national movements. It persists to this day as a central framework for understanding the changing political desires of many in modern-day Togo and Ghana (Greene 2002; Wyllie 1977; Yayoh 2002). This particular exodus story is also significant because of its persistence from precolonial times to the present day. It speaks not only to the importance of the actual historical events that took place, but also to the ways in which origin stories are constantly re-adapted to make sense of people's contemporary circumstances (Greene 2002). Theatrical reenactments that celebrate the Ewe/Anlo-Ewe migration and freedom from the evil King are commonly performed in festivals in the region (Wyllie 1977; Greene 2002), however *Nukunu*'s interpretation involves a unique element: capoeira as the key to liberation.

Around seven one Sunday morning, after a warmup on the beach where hordes of Togolese come to exercise before the day's heat became unbearable, the group headed across the beachside boulevard to a clearing in a thick of bushes behind Hotel du Palme. Newcomers to the group fell away to the sides of the space, while the active members fell into their places for a rehearsal of the migration reenactment. Koes, one of the *Nukunu* founders, explained to me his version of the migration story:

> *There was a king in the 1600s, an evil Ewe king. He created a tall barrier around his kingdom made of clay and human blood. So, the wall became a living thing. Then a general came along and defeated him to free the people of their oppression. This general took some sort of water and softened a part of the wall to the point that the people could break through. To escape the kingdom, everyone walked backwards to make it seem like they had entered instead of left. African history, in particularly Togolese history, is insufficiently taught in schools. Our goal is to play out the 'good old days', which we can only learn from old people, but there aren't so many left and the stories are not being passed on properly.*

Koes went on to lament that "Western culture" continues to encroach on "local culture" and stamp out their history. Will, another of the group's original founders, chimed in saying it is not just that people prefer Western culture to their own, but rather that they do not know their history because they rarely have the opportunity to encounter it. People do in fact want to learn, he insisted, and when they do, they are pleased to know.

In *Nukunu*'s dance-based theatrical interpretation of the battle scene, the general defeats the king through an artistic expression of capoeira movements. His characteristically capoeira movements, such as high kicks and cartwheels, are what ultimately lead to his skillful dominance of the powerful despot. During rehearsal, Koes, who played the part of King Agokoli, complained about one of his fight scenes with Will who was playing the general. Koes felt his choreography was too "martial" and too "aesthetic." He turned to me, the curious onlooker, and laughed, "Like the Europeans, right?" It should be more "rude," he suggested. Sass, another long-time member, contributed that before evolution, things were more "animalistic."

After rehearsal, I questioned Will about his primary concerns of the authenticity of their reenactment. As a way of responding, he asked me to help with the research on their migration story. The group was having a hard time finding relevant information with only the internet and a few elders as their sources. Their funds for books were limited. Most bookstores were filled with

French literature, and they did not have access to the University of Lomé library, as none of them were registered students. I mentioned some titles I could get hold of, but I also asked Will if his main concern was with authenticity. Did he find it authentic, I wondered out loud, to include capoeira in the battle reenactment, since capoeira was a form of combat developed in Brazil sometime in the 17th century? "Not exactly," he responded. "We don't know what form capoeira took in Africa. We only know it started in Brazil. But it is an African thing nonetheless, so I see no contradictions in using it for our fight scenes."

Nukunu's reinterpretation of this narrative stems from a long tradition of spoken, written and theatrically performed discourses aimed at defining a group that cannot be neatly categorized by shared language, shared migration patterns, or a shared place of origin. Their definitions of "people-hood," therefore, required constant negotiation. *Nukunu*'s contribution to this historical dialogue, however, was unique in that it drew on a black diasporic art whose form resonated with local traditions of theatrical performance, and whose content provided a model of material liberation from oppression. This transnational elision of Southern Togo/Eastern Ghana and Brazil signaled these artists' perspective of their own local history and plight as running parallel with that of Afro-Brazilians today. This elision is based both on an anticolonial agenda, as well as a mobilization of blackness to combat what they lamented as the pervasiveness of "Western education." Capoeira was a symbol of fighting against racial oppression, and in their context, this struggle was mirrored in the imposition of Western historical narratives that silenced regional histories more relevant to the Togolese population (Trouillot 1995).

There is another subtler move happening here as well. This symbolic tying together of disparate geographic spaces also works to combat entrenched ideas about understanding African ethnic histories as deeply *local*. Rather than simply reaching deeper into the past, and further towards discrete specificity (as tended to be the mode of colonial categorization), their diasporic

framework resisted the notion of African ethnic essentialism. Their perspective rejected the notion that to locate ethnic identity, history and ultimately pride, they would need to continually portray local purity, whether that be tied to the idea of place (i.e. the powerful symbolism of the town of Notsie) or to the authenticity of cultural traditions (that would therefore dictate capoeira not have a place in this narrative).

Here we are dealing with layers of origin stories. Those propagated by colonial powers sometimes shaped or disrupted people' s own narratives of where they and their people came from (Bhabha 1990). With *Nukunu*, we see a reinterpretation of events that structurally resembles the popular reenactments performed in Ewe migration festivities. In these martial artists' conceptions about this expressive form, so central to their own ethnic and national identification, capoeira is not in fact a foreign addition. For *Nukunu*, as hazy as the details may be as to which 17th-century traditions on the western and central coast in fact contributed to what was later concretized as the capoeira we know today in Brazil, the African roots of the martial art were not only enough to define the sport as ultimately African, but they also made it relevant to a very specific, local history of ethnic origins.

Capoeira thus transcended historical time and geographic space. It was not only an artistic symbol of universal black liberation, but possibly, in an earlier and therefore undocumented form, an actual mechanism by which heroic figures in the past defended themselves from any and all forms of oppression. *Nukunu* was discontented with both the lack of local, relevant history in formal education, as well as with renditions of the story performed in annual festivals in the region. In their opinion, both neocolonial and indigenous frameworks for thinking about this very central origins story were inadequate. In other words, their unique reinterpretation of this widely circulated narrative was one in which drawing on a diasporic context became necessary to understanding themselves as Ewes, as Togolese, and as Africans.

While the physical migration of this subset of Ewe people routed only through the African continent, the epistemological framework from which they drew required transnational thinking. This opened up seemingly site-specific processes to a more diverse repertoire of symbols.

Despite the cosmopolitanism of their framing, their reenactment was still somewhat couched in essentialized notions of African ontology. After years of performing in various venues in Togo and Benin, and even in France, *Nukunu* was familiar with the aesthetics of what they considered to be "European" or "African" forms of expression. Koes and Sass put these two categories in dichotomous opposition as they somewhat jokingly contrast European martial/aesthetic to African rudeness/animalism. For some Africans in contexts of neoliberal marginalization, commodifying the trope of Africa as "closer to nature," "primordial" or even "animalistic" could provide economic benefit for industries in which Westerners readily consumed "Africa" as a cultural commodity (Ebron 2002; Sawyer 2006). In this case, *Nukunu*'s imagined audience was not necessarily curious foreigners, but rather the Togolese public, whose European educational system perhaps made them just as susceptible to stereotypical renditions of a performed "Africa," even in their own origins stories. Their goal was to send a message that they believed their audience would easily understand. They therefore engaged a common trope of African bodily comportment and sought to cut out any trace of Europeanness in order to achieve what they perceived to be aesthetic authenticity.

Authenticity thus came to mean different things. Both oral tradition and academic documentation signified the purest forms of knowledge that are scarce and unavailable. Weaving capoeira into the physical and symbolic fabric of the central Ewe migration story was not a result of a lack of knowledge of the local fighting forms of the period. Instead, capoeira entered their narrative as the most appropriate model to fit the symbolism of freedom from oppression, the quintessential African tool of liberation. Thus, *Nukunu*'s definition of capoeira as an African form

made it the most fitting form through which Ewe migration could be depicted. In addition, their use of universal tropes of Africanness as primordial/animalistic, while seemingly problematic, further demonstrated their desire to create a sense of an authentic performance of an African ethnicity. Their blend of tropes from colonial discourses about Africa and diasporic symbolism signaled a continued tension in defining ethnic background, one they tackled innovatively by looking at the past through a more global lens.

Renarrativizing the Nation: Africanizing Martial Arts in Senegal

In 2010, I spoke with Joseph—a Gabonese student living in Dakar who became one of the group's most advanced instructors—about the difference between capoeira and other martial arts popular among Africans. He painted a picture not of what Africa has contributed to the Americas in art forms like capoeira, but rather the significance of capoeira for what it says about Africans:

> Capoeira is a martial art that Africans should be practicing a lot more than other martial arts like Karate or Judo because it's closer to Africans, it was created by Africans in Brazil. So we should be closer to it than those eastern martial arts but the problem is people don't know it very well. Here, when we practice it, strangers who approach always ask the same things. First they ask "What is that?" "It's an Afro-Brazilian martial art." "So it's Brazilian." "Well it's Afro-Brazilian." "So it's Brazilian then." I understand because the language is in Portuguese and the instruments people don't recognize as from here. But what we do is paying homage to those who were enslaved and created this art to express themselves and all that. It serves to keep the history alive so we don't forget it.

Afreecapoeira strategically deployed a pan-African solidarity through the valence of capoeira as a black/African tradition to assert their practice as central to the Senegalese cultural nationalism. They did so in part through participating in an annual showcase of the country's martial arts called *La Nuit du Tatami* (The Night of the Mat) held in the Grand National Theater, Daniel Sorano. The group considered themselves a kind of singular African diasporic David amidst the

Goliath popularity of Eastern Martial Arts that have captured the Senegalese imagination for decades and that make up the other dozens of groups that perform. In this case, the Afro-Brazilian martial art is mobilized as a crucial intervention to recast the Senegalese cultural landscape in an authentically African direction by way of martial arts. They did so despite their minority position in the sport/martial arts community, who saw their practice as unpopular for Senegalese youth, as well as Brazilian, and therefore foreign.

As already mentioned, *Afreecapoeira* attempted to write capoeira into the national array of expressive cultures in Senegal. For years Moctar N'diaye had fought for his group to perform capoeira in big national stadiums, along with the many traditional dance performances for wrestling matches (*Lamb* in Wolof), the official sport of Senegal. Despite his considerable efforts, the group had never been accepted to perform due to the highly ritualized specificity and religiosity of the wrestling industry that conservatively protected its neo-traditional framework. Although excluded from the sphere of these kinds of popular, national cultural representations, capoeira was well-known throughout Dakar, in large part due to the group's visibility in the education system. N'Diaye and his experienced students had been teaching for years in almost every private French elementary school in the city. He taught the children of famous stars, like world-renowned singer Youssou N'Dour, the current president Macky Sall and many other political figures over the past twenty years. Afreecapoeira members also worked extensively with disenfranchised children, through NGOs as well as their own initiatives. Capoeira, therefore, has an emerging place in Dakar's social and political fabric.

According to Sensei Lô, martial arts first came to Senegal in 1957 with a Frenchman, Robert Picard. "He passed away a few years ago," Lô added softly as the shouts of the training session in his *dojo* filled his small office across the hall where we sat to chat. Yatma Lô is an exceptional figure, in spite of his joke that he is unable to judge his own exceptionalism when I

mentioned my assessment of his story. He was one of Picard's students, training in his early twenties with a Senegalese man, and soon singled out by Picard as having the qualities of an administrator. Sensei Lô said that Picard came to Senegal to work towards cooperation between Senegal and France (despite Senegal's status as a French colony in 1957), and he happened to be a *judoka*. Picard began to teach *judo*, *aikido* and *karate*, eventually establishing branches all over the AOF (colonial French West Africa). Some of his students, primarily Lebanese and Lebano-Syrians branched out and created their own *aikido* clubs that exist in the country to this day[15]. As the years went by, more martial arts followed, such as *viet vodaho* and *tai kwan doe* as the country got a taste for them. *Kung fu*, one of the most popular forms in Senegal alongside *judo*, was first introduced by a Jamaican man who showed up at Yatma Lô's club at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD). "He came to challenge us. We beat him so badly that he disappeared," Sensei Lô recalled with playful pride. A Franco-Vietnamese man followed the Jamaican, showing off incredibly difficult moves and acrobatics the Senegalese fighters had never seen before. "He looked just like Bruce Lee!" They invited him to stay, and he taught *kung fu* for a few years before taking off, leaving the responsibility in the hands of his new trainees. It goes without saying that Senegal, and the region in general, were not immune to the infectious global trend of the cheaply franchised *kung fu* films of the 1970s. Senegal in particular can boast of several world champions in *kung fu*.

In addition to running his own *dojo* and mastering six different martial art forms, Sensei Lô has been a banker for 30 years, and a journalist for 37 years, all at 63 years of age. In recent years he has run his own TV series highlighting martial arts around the country. His ongoing project is to join all the different forms into a single national federation. In that vein, Sensei Lô has known Moctar N'diaye of Afreecapoeira for over 20 years, and has an admiration for

[15] Anthropologist Mara Leichtman (2013) has documented Lebanese residents in Senegal who claim to use martial arts to protect themselves against xenophobic attacks against them in their shops in Dakar.

capoeira. “I really like capoeira. I really like it,” he shared, elaborating that his respect comes from the fact that it is a legitimate “Brazilian” martial art that fits his criteria of being centuries old, centering around philosophy and having “a history.” He does not seem to have the same respect for traditional Senegalese wrestling (*lamb* in Wolof) or soccer, which are, interestingly, the two most popular sports for the Senegalese masses. He used traditional Senegalese wrestling as a foil against martial arts to say that existing local “combat sports” were in a different category from other sports like soccer, in that they are individualistic, unintellectual, and primarily for the purposes of gaining money and fame. In his assessment, he managed to reverse the more common understanding of what is considered elitist and foreign (e.g. *karate* or capoeira) and what is considered local, indigenous or for the masses (i.e. *lamb* and soccer). According to both capoeiristas and non-capoeristas alike, the martial art suffers from a reputation as a foreign import, and possibly an elitist activity, because many of its members are middle class African foreigners. This perception is also likely because most anyone who is familiar with capoeira knows it to be a global Brazilian trend.

The spectacle of religious ritual connected to sports in Senegal is also a factor in determining whether or not the sport is considered indigenous, and therefore for the masses, or foreign with connotations of elitism. Soccer[16] and wrestling fall under categories in which traditional religious ritual is an integral component to the potential success of the victor (Peano 2007/2008). Many Senegalese like to joke, for instance, that in *lamb*, the religious spectacle of

[16] Soccer is perhaps the single most popular sport in the world, conceived of as “local” to almost every country. At the same time, its meaning for local populations can shift depending on the most triumphant team on the global stage. In Dakar, for instance, young people who reclaim geographic “empty” spaces in the suburbs of Guédiawaye and Pikine tended to name their spaces ‘Maracaná Stadium’ after the famous Brazilian stadium. Once much of that land was taken over by the city and the organic neighborhood teams had to consolidate into larger groups, the names shifted from foreign teams like Brazil’s ‘Flamenco’ or racial symbols like ‘Harlem’ to names that reflected a more local character with Wolof titles such as ‘Gouye gi’ (Baobab tree) or ‘Walli Dann’ (come together and win) (Baller 2007: 221-222; Sylla 1974). Similarly, residents of Kolkata, India consider their area to be a “Brazilian colony” due to the world cup craze and the effects of globalization (Majumdar 2002).

the pre-fight ritual—much of which takes place in the stadium arena where the fighters perform a preparatory dance with their posse and are dosed with potency-giving milk—lasts far longer than the fight itself. Other more individualistic sports, considered to be foreign and elitist, such as Karate, Boxing, and Judo, do not have the same social requirement of a traditional religious component. Thus, capoeira, in the opinion of a majority of the West African practitioners I spoke to, falls under the category of sports that operate outside of the realm of traditional religion. However, unlike the other sports in this category, capoeira is not considered by its practitioners to be elitist. Although they primarily train in closed areas, and joining a group requires a nominal fee (that few even pay regularly), the historical significance of capoeira as a legacy from enslaved kin across the ocean and a symbol of black triumph imbues in it a sense of indigeneity. It is imagined as the quintessential African martial art, despite its foreign status by the wider population who are unfamiliar with capoeira.

For over 20 years, Sensei Yamta Lô, now president of the National Association of Marital Arts in Senegal (L'Anams), has organized *La Nuit du Tatami*[17], a night to display almost every martial arts group in the country, in front of a large audience and an even larger one through TV broadcasting of the event. While the night was designed as a showcase for all martial arts in the country, only Asian martial arts are represented[18]. This bias towards East Asian traditions is evident in the name of the event, The Night of the Tatami, which refers to a Japanese

[17] The event used to be called *La Nuit des Arts Martiaux* (The Night of Martial Arts). Sensei Lô revamped the program in 2014 and gave the event its current name.

[18] The only exceptions are two martial art forms developed by a Senegalese and a Senegalese of Vietnamese descent respectively, both of which are based on existing Eastern martial arts. Sensei Yatma Lô expressed a tremendous amount of pride in these forms. He expressed that so many cultural forms and commodities are imported from outside the country when they in fact have the capacity not only for self-sufficiency, but also to create things to export. He cited these martial art forms as a potential symbol to the West of the inventive capacity of Senegal. He seems less interested in looking to precolonial Africa to develop a sense of African martial arts capacity, despite the reason of a long standing philosophical tradition he gave for the value of Eastern martial arts. The 20th century Senegalese (and Senegalo-Vietnamese) martial arts are an example of Senegal moving in the direction of proving itself to be culturally self-sufficient and creative like countries such as Japan.

martial arts mat. The backstage coordinator even asked me to tell my group to hurry and put on our "kimonos," despite the fact that we were already suited in the traditional capoeirista uniform of white pants fastened with a rope belt and matching white t-shirts with the group logo. This came as no surprise, given Yatma Lô's extensive training in Asian martial arts; but it also reflects the explosive popularity of Eastern Martial arts in Africa since the mid 20th century. Looking around at the hundreds of martial artists stretching and shouting battle cries backstage at the major Daniel Sorano Theater downtown, I asked N'Diaye if there were any African martial arts represented. He responded, "Only capoeira." N'Diaye had a clear aim in participating in this annual televised event beyond simply gaining exposure for his group. Afreecapoeira's representation of capoeira at *La Nuit du Tatami* was a subtle gesture to reestablish black artistic forms as central to the nation's cultural profile of expressive martial arts forms.

Our group performed towards the end of the event at around 1:30 a.m., when half the audience had packed up and gone home. Following the Kung Fu group that went before us was tough. Their group of about 20 young people jumped on top of one another to smash wooden boards and apples with their feet to a dramatic recording that sounded like a movie soundtrack. We had no recorded music, just a *berimbau* (the principal capoeira instrument resembling a stringed bow), a *pandeiro* (large tamborine), an *atabaque* (drum), our clapping hands and fourteen voices. We sang a few songs from the classic Brazilian capoeira repertoire (in Portuguese) while we cycled through the plan N'Diaye laid out for us. First, we demonstrated choreographed takedowns, starting with two young boys around ten years old - to open with an image of capoeira's future. Their demonstration was followed by two pairs of men showing the more martial side of the art, using quick sweeps and scissoring the other's waist with their legs to dramatically slam their opponents body to the ground. These takedown sequences were a gesture to the nature of the event itself. All the Asian martial arts groups gave presentations showcasing

the utility of their sport for functional purposes of self-defense. Many groups with women enacted scenes of a random attacker, to give a sense of real life danger in an everyday scenario.

For Afreecapoeira, the goal seemed two-fold: to prove the utility of capoeira in a fight/self-defense situation, but also to educate the public to value the multifaceted beauty of *their own African art form* in the midst of these flashy foreign styles. The group displayed an African universalism in its consideration of itself as "the only black martial art" on stage that night. Additionally, the group was primarily non-Senegalese. Instead, we had a wide representation of West and Central African performers, as well as Western ones (French and American). Although our group was relatively small, N'Diaye had women open and close the solo performances; a Senegalese woman held a *queda de rins* (a pose in which you rest your side on your elbow with both hands on the ground and both legs in the air) at the end of our set. Our performance was the only one with musical accompaniment, which the capoeiristas (along with most scholars and practitioners) believe to be one of the key features that distinguishes capoeira as African-derived, as well as movements that were as much for beauty and collaboration as they were for self-defense and aggression. Thus, our group was a curiosity backstage before and after our performance. Some people came to mock us for what they saw as dance trying to pass as a form of combat. Yet there was also a certain respect for our group and the unique aesthetic of the practice. All the other Senseis and masters came up to bow and pay their respects to N'Diaye. Dozens of students told us how much they always wished they could learn capoeira, despite their limited knowledge of its meaning.

Afreecapoeira's project in presenting capoeira at *La Nuit du Tatami* was not a matter of slotting in a Brazilian martial art alongside the scores of other foreign Eastern martial arts in a display of the popular global media since the 1970s (i.e. the slough of Kung Fu films and in capoeira's case, "Only the Strong"). In fact, while both are products of globalization in how they

are imported to West Africa, capoeira resonates with its practitioners as having great historical significance and connection. They were, instead, using the Afro-Brazilian art form to "re-blacken" Senegalese martial arts culture in the face of an East Asian monopoly of that cultural market. The national and gendered diversity of the group, in conjunction with their self-acknowledgement as being the only ever "African" martial art at the event every year, speaks to their postcolonial commitment to a cultural pan-Africanism, in which an Afro-Brazilian object created out of African diversity in the Americas, belongs not only to Senegal in defining its cultural nationalism, but to all African countries.

Conclusion

Africa has long been associated with the discovery of origins. European imperial powers instituted a global economic system, relying on enslaved labor of Africans in colonies around the world that are now home to generations of Afro-descendants. Many of these descendants experience a sense of exile from, and longing for, Africa in general, as most are unable to pinpoint exactly from which groups, or even regions of the continent their ancestors originated. Scholarship on what Paul Gilroy famously identified as the "Black Atlantic" (1993) has sought to parse the complexities of Black experiences in these diasporically-oriented communities of Afro-descendants searching for belonging in the face of a hegemonic historical narrative that either erases their particular history in the homogenizing rhetoric of national citizenry, or diminishes their contribution to the body politic through a narrative of national cultural "folklore." The significance of this approach to the African diaspora lies in its recovery, and re-discovery of non-dominant histories of how national body politics came to be. Here, light is shed not only on social movements and other political projects, but also on forms of self-expression, and more importantly self-identification through transnational, diasporic perspectives that force us to rethink the fictions of how we came to be bounded "citizens" (or non-citizens). This perspective

reveals Africans and Afro-descendant diasporans as having been engaged in a cultural dialogue through expressive art forms and Pan-African political ideologies that suggest alternative imagined communities to those presumed to be grounded in place, language, nationality, and ethnicity.

Like diasporans, young Africans today are creating their own relationships with Africanness, their ethnic backgrounds, and their engagement with national cultural projects through hybridizing West African political, cultural and historical frameworks with other Atlantic practices. Exposed to a world of seemingly endless cultural possibilities and avenues for self-expression, building a linear narrative of self by way of "tradition" requires a creative ideological dynamism drawing together cultural "substitutes" that bring together pan-lusophone, pan-francophone and pan-African worlds as they redefine the confines of the postcolonial world with new relationships amongst the same major players in the making of the modern world.

CHAPTER 3

No Senegalese in the Senegalese School: Mutual Narratives of Exclusion

Introduction

For nearly a decade after I first encountered Afreecapoeira, I asked repeatedly "Why are there hardly any Senegalese in the group?" For years, I got roughly the same answer, "We don't really know." Occasionally I would get, "Senegalese don't really know about capoeira," or even, "they don't like it." Yet Dakar was exploding with expressive arts groups and youth associations with local and global popularity like hip hop, neo-traditional sabar, popping, house dance, spoken word, karate, kung fu, viet vodaho to name a few (Gellar 2005; Kringelbach 2013). And while those were held in upscale dance studios that were often frequented by foreigners, the majority of these groups were Senegalese youth. Why would capoeira stand alone in not having substantial local participation?

In light of increasing incidents of unrest due to globalization and global terrorism, as well as ethnic and religious conflict in the country, some scholars have begun to argue that the notion of Senegalese exceptional stability and tolerance, which is both rooted in material fact and unconsciously developed, may potentially be under threat. Irene Osemeka (2014), for instance, has argued that pluralism and tolerance in Senegal could now use more explicit national dialogue. While relative democratic stability has translated into a pervasive understanding of Senegal as being religiously plural, as well as socially accepting of minority groups, the self-described experiences of non-Senegalese university students suggest that "Wolofization" in contemporary Dakar social landscape

is no longer a neutral force. Those outside "Wolof-ness" – in particular, migrated West and Central Africans – face subtle discrimination at best and sustained social exclusion at worst. Those who experience exclusion are perhaps overrepresented in capoeira, and therefore may not be representative of the majority of treatment towards foreigners. Nevertheless, for them, capoeira becomes a space of acceptance, creative self-expression and reinvention. In the last chapter, I identified the ways West Africans from different countries of origin fused a kind of pan-African practice of capoeira in relation to a variety of hegemonic ideologies that included not only Eurocentrism but also the assertion of Asian exceptionalism in the martial arts. In this chapter, I explore another side of this diasporic process by delving into the forms of marginalization migrants to Senegal experience, and how these experiences are addressed through their participation in capoeira.

At its inception, the school was developed by a group of Senegalese men with the hope of training to strengthen ties to their country's shared history with Brazil. Afreecapoeira—while defining itself as a youth group characterized by its "openness" and "diversity"—oddly consists of few Senegalese participants. This is because in recent years, the school has become a kind of safe house for non-Senegalese West African university students who experience social marginalization based on their foreign nationality that sometimes is equated with an "uncivilized Africanness". This foreign majority enjoys a "free" atmosphere that acts as a bubble of youthful expression in a relatively conservative country, and yet their overrepresentation within the studio is at times intimidating and exclusionary to the few Senegalese capoeiristas who continue to practice there.

Two strong narratives of exclusion reside in the Senegalese capoeira group Afreecapoeira, narratives that compete with one another for legitimacy. Both involve grievances around language, skill, socioeconomic status in a broader discussion about national and diasporic belonging. The first comes from West African foreign national university students, who currently make up the majority of the membership. These are students who feel excluded from a Wolof-speaking social landscape that can be, in their experience, neglectful of non-Senegalese. The second narrative comes from Senegalese members of the group, who experience the French-speaking foreign majority as privileged and discriminatory against lower-class Senegalese participants. How do we reconcile two narratives of exclusion, both expressing a feeling of marginalization based on being targeted as unwelcome outsiders who do not conform to hegemonic social standards? These narratives arise out of material realities, and co-constitute each other. Intra-African discrimination is not new, of course, but in these seemingly national and regional contestations of belonging, the space of diasporic possibility the capoeira school provides becomes a vehicle through which young people work out these tensions.

Afropolitanism and Afrophobia

Until the 1970s and 80s, scholars of newly independent African states viewed "pluralism" as a negative consequence of colonialism's imposed borders, dividing up what were ultimately viewed as discretely bound "tribes" that were to be the foundation for a modern nation-state society (Balakrishnan 2017). In the 1990s, debates about the effects of the Cold War and cosmopolitanism in an era marked by the term "globalization" began to apply the term to African contexts, eventually shifting the discourse to a valorization of plurality and migration that indicates a heterogenous and

thus more sophisticated polity (Balakrishnan 2017). Thus, in the early 2000s, Africanist scholars employed the term "Afropolitan" to designate the multi-racial -ethnic -linguistic and -cultural social dynamics of African metropolises, with Johannesburg as a flagship example (Balakrishnan 2017, Nuttall and Gevisser 2004, Mbembe 2007). Taiye Selasie pioneered the term in a different way, to describe a new generation of Africans living abroad who identify with African aesthetics and values alongside Western technologies and metropolises (Balakrishnan 2017; Selasie 2005).

Similarly rooted in historical processes of South Africa, the term Afrophobia began to circulate to describe the targeted violence and exclusionary rhetoric of black South Africans towards other African migrants (and sometimes even internal ethnic minorities) post-apartheid. While the term has been taken up in contexts outside of the continent (e.g. Afrophobia in Ireland report), it is primarily used to theorize purportedly exclusionary practices between nationals of an African nation directed at African foreigners (Tshishonga, Mkhize, Saayman, Mbembe 2015, Haigh and Solomon 2013, Nyamnjoh 2005).

These two terms are rarely theorized together explicitly; however, they are arguably inextricably linked. As Sarah Balakrishnan remarked, "Invariably, the most 'cosmopolitan' areas in Africa are those which suffered the greatest colonial penetration, leaving behind white settler populations, imported Asians diaspora or a medley of African labourers brought to feed colonial industries" (Balakrishnan 2017). Afropolitanism is, thus, produced out of a colonial legacy that required plurality of labor sources, while that same legacy left in place structures of maintaining and conceptualizing difference (Mamdani 1996, Pierre 2012). Those who touted Afropolitanism see it as progressive

move away from ideas of African cultural authenticity through purity. At the same time, the idea of Afropolitanism ironically reinforces the centrality of the nation-state, particularly if cosmopolitanism is primarily conceived of as occurring through the crossing of people, goods and ideas across national (and continental) borders. The plurality of these Afropolitan spaces is also theorized primarily by way of a multi-*racial* presence, which serves to reify the notion of an African or black essence, rather than by highlighting the ways in which Africans themselves have always been culturally, ethnically and linguistically multidimensional.

Afrophobia and Afropolitanism are not mutually exclusive. They are contingent processes in which an engagement with transnational diasporic practices and modes of being takes place through a distancing from, and even subordination of, pan-African regional affiliation. In this section I discuss how these increasingly circulating academic concepts are connected in unexpected ways that trouble the relationships between the national, international, and diaspora in new frameworks of belonging. Recent scholarship has seen Afropolitanism as ripe with possibilities to work against a growing nativism in the 21st century, since it implies a global orientation of multiplicities in being "African" (Gikandi 2001; Mbembe 2007). Yet, I see the nature of the hybrid "Afro-" and "cosmopolitanism" as perpetuating a notion of modernity achieved through international engagement that, in fact, produces a local nativism that casts regional neighbors as outsiders.

Recent ethnographic work on the continent and elsewhere has shown the ways in which the increasing trasnantional circulations of people and capital has in fact strengthened nationalism and xenophobia. The majority of scholarly work around what one scholar tentatively hyphenated as "xenophobia-Afrophobia" (Tshishonga 2015) has been situated in relation to post-apartheid violence in South Africa towards other African migrants to the country. The term references a postcolonial form of racism that manifests in discrimination, and/or violence, towards other African subjects, often labor migrants, deemed unwelcome outsiders (Haigh and Solomon 2013; Mbembe 2015; Nyamnjoh 2005). The perception that a "new" wave of migration is economically displacing native South Africans is the impetus for scapegoating Africans from South, East and West of the continent, despite the fact that many of these groups have been a part of labor flows in and out of South Africa for centuries (Nyamnjoh 2005). While xenophobia is on the rise worldwide since the Cold War (Appadurai 2006; Geschiere 2009; Nyamnjoh 2005), the Afrophobic variant requires special attention due to the seemingly illogical perpetration by Africans themselves. These discriminatory dynamics also disrupt notions of a unified Africanness so widely accepted throughout the post-Independence period as at least a partial, yet inherent, fixture of African subjects' self-identification.

Analyzing socio-political dynamics in Senegal in relation to this global trend towards xenophobia might seem only to provide an opposing example of an "exceptional" African country with democratic stability and relative absence of xenophobically-motivated crime. This variant of Afrophobia is therefore distinct from that of the spectacular violence that accompanies the phenomenon in South Africa. In Senegal, targets of xenophobic sentiment are often middle-class student migrants rather

than working-class labor migrants, and violence is not often a feature of these exclusionary practices[19]. Senegalese Afrophobia instead manifests in subtler, and sometimes not-so-subtle, forms of discrimination in Dakar's social landscape. As one Congolese university student and capoeira instructor described it: "They [Senegalese] aren't violent to foreigners. They're exclusionary." Amongst youth, this mostly takes the form of segregated spaces of leisure, the circulation of cautionary tales and insulting remarks about foreign African ways, and the use of the derogatory Wolof term *ñak*[20] to refer specifically to sub-Saharan African foreigners, a term that indexes a lack of "sophistication," making them inferior to Senegalese citizens. In the past, *ñak* was used within university student circles, and marked with a kind of paternalism likely rooted in a sense of envy due to their significant scholarship funds, their ability to dress well (possibly due to their financial security) and, therefore, had more leverage with courting women. The development of the term seemed to operate in order to imbue Senegalese with a sense of cultural superiority in the face of other disadvantages[21].

Popular discourses of subordination towards ethnic, religious, and national minorities have always sought "outsiders," an inherent part of any process of nation-

[19] Senegal has also hosted hundreds of thousands of Guinean immigrants for decades and black Mauritanian refugees. While all black African populations may not experience the same form of social exclusion, I suggest there is more work to be done to track which specific groups are targeted, at what historical moments and what kind of expressions of exclusion are faced by migrants to the country. Likely a legacy of the Four Communes that privileged only those view living in urbanizing colonial French West Africa at the expense of the masses, Dakaroise and Sant-Louisians have been documented exhibiting a paternalistic attitude toward people from rural areas through designations such as "kaw kaw" and "Bawol Bawol" since at least the time of independence (Labrune-Badiane 2013).

[20] While this term originated in the University of Cheikh Anta Diop with the influx of Africans from the region and other former French colonies, there is no comprehensive study of its origins. There are, however, similar terms that preceded *ñak* such as "makafoutes" and "makatchembe" particularly directed at people from the francophone West Indies that began in Paris and migrated to Dakar (Labrune-Badiane 2013).

[21] Personal correspondence with Cheikh Anta Babou.

building in which citizenship is always constructed through discursive opposition against internal and external others (Chatterjee 2004). Afrophobia, however, specifies an insider/outsider binary in the postcolonial present in which the charge of being "African" is weaponized against those deemed outsiders, while African countries simultaneously grapple with positioning themselves outside of their precarious status in neoliberalism's "global shadow" (Ferguson 2006; Zeleza 2005). Achille Mbembe (2015) asserts that no African is an outsider on the continent; however, I concur with Mahmood Mamdani (1996) and Jemima Pierre's (2012) call to see racially-motivated hostility in South Africa as merely an extreme example of what is endemic to all postcolonial African societies carrying the legacy of colonial structures of racial hierarchy. Senegal is no exception to these processes, despite popular and political rhetoric of Senegalese people as being more "sophisticated" or "civilized" than their African neighbors, a rhetoric that stems from a historical proximity to French colonial state power and its civilizational Enlightenment principles (Conklin 1997). Subject to similar principles of a civilizational rhetoric that is inherently racialized, the French colonial logic of applying "indigènes" to their colonial West African masses, and reserving access to political advantages through French acculturation for "évolués," granted privileges to some only in the four communes of the AOF headquarters located in modern-day Senegal. Today, an epistemology of Senegalese superiority has thus been constructed relative to the idea of an African other.

If Afrophobia is a worrisome phenomenon gaining traction on the continent and beyond, Afropolitanism is purportedly a celebration of the positive effects of globalization on Africa and the Africanizing of the global. The term "pan-African" may slowly becoming obsolete, as debates over the idea of "Afropolitanism" unfold in

journals and blogs alike as an attempt to define a new generation of African youth's process of identification in the context of globalization. Simon Gikandi, a Kenyan literary critic, defines Afropolitanism as:

> "…prompted by the desire to think of African identities as both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them. To be Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; but it is also to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states" (Gikandi 2001:9).

In Gikandi's framework, the rootedness in local specificity is an embrace of Africa as a starting point with which to construct new cosmopolitan identities that are at once incomplete in their collage of cultures, and also overflowing in their potential to transcend their specificity. Recent interrogations of the concept have called into question the specific composition of what does and does not constitute this neologism (Balakrishnan 2017; Mbembe 2007; Nuttall and Gevisser 2004). Afropolitanism is often a construction of Westernization *plus* Africanization, an insertion of African aesthetics and interpreted values to what is ultimately a construction that privileges Western modernity. In other words, Afropolitanism requires international connections that often overlook the space of the African continent itself as inherently cosmopolitan. Thus internationalism is read as cosmopolitan, while regionalism is read as a hindrance to those aspirations. In this framework, engaging in African regionalism—at least on the level of self-fashioning and cultural identity—is framed as at odds with an internationalist Africanity achieved in large part through the adoption of black diasporic aesthetics and practices.

Engaging with blackness in the diaspora, in this case through the practice of Afro-Brazilian capoeira, then serves to update the local rootedness of "Africa". If Africa is situated in the symbolic past in the hegemonic framework of diaspora, then the practice

of diaspora through capoeira is a way of circumventing that limiting specificity. Having access to Afreecapoeira is thus having access to a space of self-transformation. Becoming a capoeirista and having representation in the capoeira school is a form of reinvention into Afropolitan subjecthood, an alternative modernity made with black transnational aesthetics and practices. Their approach to a kind of black worldliness signals a discrepancy between two things: first is the lived experience of Afropolitanism—in which this orientation towards transnationality is empowering and yet can also foreclose more local relationships; and the second is the elite academic formulation that presumes more contexts drawn together means more social connections established.

The co-constitution of Afropolitan and Afrophobic positions illustrates how analyses of postcolonial urban Senegal require an understanding of underlying processes of racialization. The myth of Senegalese exceptionalism, of a welcoming and generous attitude towards "foreigners," is useful when comparing the track record of lack of formal civil war and interreligious conflict to other countries in the region. However, the focus on the relative absence of spectacular acts of violence in the country's history glosses over more subtle processes, such as the production of a Senegalese popular discourse of difference. The historical process of Wolofization, for example, no longer accounts for the experiences of social exclusion of foreign nationals who are also subjected to this cultural-linguistic hegemonic force. Due to the lack of an "explicitly raced referent" at times, expressions of superiority and subtle acts of exclusion become difficult to see (Pierre 2012). This is also why the process of building community in a context of exclusion can in turn be exclusionary. Foreigners who feel inexplicably marginalized in turn marginalize locals in their sanctuary spaces, which perpetuates animosity on the part

of excluded locals who then feel justified in their original beliefs about foreigners.

Senegalese Exceptionalism

The discourse of tolerance and peaceful coexistence does not match the reality of the capoeira training center. Language is one of the key themes through which foreign capoeiristas articulate their exclusion. In his analysis of "Wolofization" as a process in which Wolof language and social norms become hegemonic across the board for minority language and ethnic groups in Senegal, Leonard Villalón states: "To be Senegalese, for many, implies automatically to speak Wolof" (1995). Speaking Wolof becomes synonymous with Senegalese national identity, whereas speaking other languages in Senegal, such as those of Sereer or Diola ethnic minorities, becomes identified with regionally-specific sub-groups of the nation. The pervasiveness of this shared language allows for communication and communalism across ethnolinguistic lines in a country as diverse as Senegal. Wolofization, however, poses a potential threat of homogenization at the expense of a rich texture of histories and identifications that scholars are still waiting to see play out. As Villalon put it, "Learning Wolof is thus a two-edged sword" (1995: 45). Ultimately, the vast majority of scholarship debating the unique relationship between religion, ethnicity, language and politics in Senegal up until this point is concerned with dynamics within the confines of the nation-state. Looking at tensions between nationals and non-nationals has thus remained mostly outside of this purview.

In Senegal today, there are various categories of people generally fitting within hierarchies of belonging. One is that of a *tubaab* (white European, now also applied to white Americans) used in contrast to "African." Although many people who have resentments towards the presence of whites/Westerners may use the term to say negative

things about them, generally the term as it operates in day to day social life is not automatically derogatory, but merely playful or neutrally descriptive. The next binary also implicitly uses "African," but in a derogatory sense as an outsider, rather than signaling a local or insider or continental kin: *ñak* versus *senegale*. I once asked a former Afreecapoeira student Alexandre if his first capoeira teacher, Alda (whom we met in chapter one), was African. I knew Alda was partly of Senegalese and Cape Verdean descent, but she also lived much of her life in France. Resentful of her withholding behavior towards her students, Alexandre contrasted the two, saying she was a *tubaab* because she always promised them practice space in her home studio while she was away ten months out of the year, but never did. "If she was African, she would have given us access". By juxtaposing the two binaries of African/*tubaab* and *ñak*/Senegalese, we see that in the first "African", against *tubaab* or (usually white) Westerner, is glossed as an inclusive spirit universal to the continent. In the second, "African" (read: *ñak*) is at times even a racialized outsider, positioned against a civilized Senegalese whose exceptional colonial relationship with the French and Islamo-Wolof (Diouf 2001) governing structure gives them proximity to Western conception of advancement and modernity.

This reading of racialization as expressed through national difference and grievances of insider/outsider or foreigner/local also calls into question the widely accepted national myth of Senegal as a country relatively devoid of discrimination. This myth has been grounded in historical scholarship that has portrayed Senegal as an example of ethnic tolerance and religious pluralism, and therefore as a beacon of democratic stability in West Africa (Diouf 2001; Diouf et al 2013; Gellar 2005; Ralph 2015; Villalon 1995). Scholars are not always in agreement about how this discourse

developed, but most locate Senegal's exceptionalism in the unique way in which its secular government has incorporated religious leaders and institutions, making governance and social development a tripartite system between Sufi brotherhoods, the state and the people by way of democratic associations (Diouf 2001). The reputation of "moderate Islam" in Senegal comes in part from the historic collaboration between Sufi brotherhoods and the colonial and now independent state. Some believe this collaborative system of sharing power between the brotherhoods and the state is responsible for the country's stable democracy (Villalon 1995), while others are critical of this narrative of the "Senegalese social contract" (O'Brien 1992; Coulon 1981) that assumes the public to be passive followers of religious leaders with political power (Babou 2016). In addition to this scholarship, popular and political discourses of Senegalese exceptionalism have also centered around the perception of a precolonial character as represented by popular Senegalese axiom of the country's character of "teranga" or welcoming.

Senegal's colonial relationship with the French stands out as politically cooperative (Babou 2013) and assimilationist (Conklin 1997), leaving behind a legacy of civilizational rhetoric. Senegal's first president Leopold Senghor was the exemplar of how African traditional values (and Senegalese national culture) might be combined with the French ideal of civilization to create a proper modern state (Diouf 2013; Harney 2004). A figure like Senghor stands in contrast to a *ñak*[22], the non-Senegalese African subjects, however the connotations that most often accompany the term imply that these

[22] An older Senegalese woman shared with me that the word *ñak* technically means fence/border (as both a noun and a verb) and referred in a non-derogatory sense to people from the countries neighboring Senegal. I have yet to find out when people first began to use the term in a derogatory sense.

types of foreigners are "uncivilized" or "bush people" relative to the Senegalese. The prevalence of the term *ñak* used in a derogatory way speaks to the tension expressed by many West African university students who find it difficult to integrate into Dakar's social scene due to some common perceptions of non-Senegalese Africans as uncivilized.

Religion and democracy have contributed to the landscape of associational activity, that is used primarily for democratic participation in religious and political institutions, as well as for cultural and artistic life (Gellar 2005). The spirit of the safe space of the Dakar-based capoeira school is evident in the language of "freedom" and "openness" with which they describe their group and their practice. Using the discursive framework pervasive in capoeira schools everywhere, they see capoeira as a "nonhegemonic space" (Rosa 2015b) of diversity and non-discriminatory inclusion. In fact, many describe capoeira as an active tool for dismantling difference, whether it be gender, age, race, nationality, etc. This language of openness and diversity used in Afreecapoeira also operates in contradiction with a common rhetoric in the group of their space being partially in opposition to a perceived Senegalese conservatism attributed to the country's deeply Islamic character. From the vantage point of non-Senegalese participants, Islam is more of an exclusionary and "rigid" force, rather than a "flexible" one, as Senegalese Sufism is so described in the literature as it relates to other Muslim countries. Because of the liberal framework of Afreecapoeira's values against a particular understanding of Senegalese as "closed" "conservative" Muslims, the school becomes a hostile environment for Senegalese who are also eager to access the safe creative space that is the capoeira school. The manifestation of these debates pertains to the number of active members, those teaching class, those featured in shows, and which neighborhood

and institutions are targeted for teaching, performances, recruitment. Furthermore, debates around the way the group publicly represents itself through displays like their logo, demonstrate their shifting, ambivalent relationship to Senegalese nationalism, diaspora, and universal/generic "diversity." Contestations over representation and symbolic ownership over the school speak to the ways in which Brazil is mobilized as grounds for negotiating the grievances of belonging between nationals and non-nationals.

Losing Brazil

Alexandre is a former member of Afreecapoeira who grew up in the densely populated suburb of Parcelles where he learned under the instruction of Alda's brief visits to the country. He described having negative experiences with Alda, whom he perceived as someone exploiting the community for her own gain because she taught infrequently while authoring books in France about her work with Senegalese children. In his mind, she did little to institutionalize their practice and help them to develop their own skills or training centers. While they trained briefly with the new group in Alda's absence, he and many others eventually quit for good because they felt mistreated by the African non-nationals and cast aside in their favor by N'Diaye, the Senegalese founder. I met him accidentally when I went to the major electricity company Senelec to pay a bill. Alexandre was working there as a clerk, and he overheard me chatting about the group with a current member in English. He suddenly interjected in English to say, "Are you talking about Afreecapoeira? I used to train with them." I proceeded with a host of questions, and Alexandre, seated very still with a calm grin on his face that countered my unfettered excitement, explained to me the events of a particular show years back. He believed this event to be the final climax of building tensions between Senegalese and the

new incoming population of foreign Africans in the capoeira group:

> We rebelled. We stopped. Because they said we are indispensable, without us the shows would be less interesting. That's why we stopped. We went to a show. At Petesene. There's a house, there's a cultural center. There are guys doing art there, I forget the name of the place. We left to do a show there, downtown, not far from the Grande Mosque. We left to do a show there, there were some differences between us and the foreigners, then N'Diaye took to their defense. So seeing that things were like that, we decided not to do the show. I don't exactly remember [what the problem was] anymore. It was an issue with that one guy, Ança. Because he is insolent. He didn't insult anyone. He wanted everything to go the way he wanted it to, actually. He wanted to organize everything "Yeah, we're doing this and that," you see. And we didn't want to. So…N'Diaye didn't defend us. We weren't discouraged we were just mad. We left. We said if it's going to be like this we won't come anymore. And they didn't try to stop us. They really didn't give a shit.

Alexandre asked who was in the group now, since he had not been around the studio in eleven years. We decided to go through pictures on Facebook, alternating between him showing me the Senegalese who were there before my time, and me showing him the new generation. As I pointed out the current members, his assessment of Afreecapoeira was expressed in the rhythm of a single repeated phrase: "Nothing but foreigners. Nothing. But. Foreigners. *Nothing* but foreigners, you see? *Nothing* but foreigners. You see no? Nothing. But. Foreigners." In order to get more detailed about who he meant by "foreigners", I asked his opinion on the frequency of white people's participation in Afreecapoeira, to which he responded: "Diversity." Alexandre then elaborated: "It's cool. In our time it was cool. We all got along; we didn't have a problem with the Europeans." His resentment towards the foreign majority in the group was thus solely directed towards Africans.

More than ten years later, Alexandre still displayed bitterness about the mistreatment of him and other Senegalese *distinctly in relationship to other Africans*, whom he believed were of a lower skill level. Not only was he still upset about the events

of the 2005 show that resulted in the demise of his capoeira career, but also about the negligible Senegalese representation in the group today. Moreover, Alexandre recalled his considerably deep connection to capoeira while also indicating that the ostensible central significance of the art form—particularly its connection to the history of slavery and therefore to a liberatory form of black resistance to oppression—was not a part of his attraction. When I inquired about his interest in capoeira's historical context, he responded that it "doesn't interest me. I don't know the history." While disinterest in capoeira's history as it relates to the history of slavery and Afro-Brazilian culture more broadly is not representative of all Senegalese participants, there seems to be less interest in that aspect on the part of the majority of foreigners. This difference in interest in capoeira's traditional significance raises the question of what they are fighting for. Why does it matter to Alexandre that Afreecapoeira continue to be a majority Senegalese endeavor, and what does it mean to him to have foreigners take over the Afro-Brazilian martial arts school in Dakar? What is at stake in terms of national representation in the group on the part of all the members? The answers to these questions lie as much in the grievances over misrepresentation as they do in the way people talk directly about what attracts them to capoeira in the first place. Furthermore, while foreigners and nationals alike mutually express marginalization, each at the hand of the other, they both find a precious solace in the unique universe of capoeira's music, movement and atmosphere.

With this chapter, I would like to zero in on these tensions in order to understand how discourses of foreigner and local continue to be relevant to understanding social relations in postcolonial urban spaces, and how these two categories can be mutually excluding, going against the denotational stability that foreigners are outsiders and locals,

insiders. This has consequences for recent scholarship interrogating claims of autochthony as a persistent, unstable and troubling foundation to claim rights (Geschiere 2009; Nyamnjoh 2005). What does this concept mean when ownership and belonging are not about material territory, but rather, a claim of ownership and representation in a youth association, when the prize people are competing for is a claim to be the propagators of an Afro-Brazilian martial art? Afreecapoeira's internal group dynamics are an example of how diasporic communities are also fraught with internal hierarchies; these hierarchies both originate in Eurocentric colonial notions of racial and ethnic inequalities, and in other local epistemologies of difference. There are practices of marginalization amongst West Africans themselves, based on existing notions of ethnic supremacy and uneven access to a "free" global cosmopolitanism. Thinking about enduring forms of domination and solidarity, both at play in diasporic interactions, demonstrates how expressive art forms that operate in the present as a practice of racial pride and equality are simultaneously sites of community building, as well as tools of perpetuating other forms of discrimination. I argue that the imagined Brazilian space of the capoeira school becomes a site of contestation over belonging, and local practices of inclusion and exclusion.

Membership Fees and the Economics of Belonging

Much of Afreecapoeira's membership was comprised of students of Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), the first francophone African university. UCAD is also known for being a "highly politicized space and avant-garde in its fight for democratization" (Gellar 2005). An influx of students in the 1980s, without resources to support them, caused a series of protests and a national discussion about the value of

higher education when the job market did not grow alongside the number of qualified students. In 2003, the university underwent reforms that brought in new financial resources, while new programs proliferated. Between 1994 and 2000, ethnic associations among students took shape for the first time since the university was established in 1957. These associations were primarily based on ethnic and language groups within Senegal. In recent years, however, there were new cultural and national groups as well, to accommodate the large proportion of other African students who came to Senegal to study at UCAD. While not formally registered with the university, Afreecapoeira has been a cultural home to UCAD students for many years, likely in part because it is not bound to an ethnic or even national premise, but rather is seen as an international youth club.

What attracts many to the training grounds of Afreecapoeira is something people describe as the "ambiance". The same people who air grievances about Dakar being an exclusive space that leaves non-nationals feeling like perpetual strangers glowingly praise the atmosphere of the studio when they are engaged in capoeira practice. For these West African university students, capoeira creates a certain landscape, comprised of "human warmth" "people" "connections" "movement" and "energy". Three times a week, these young students come to Ecole-Franco Senegalese to be a part of this ambiance of lively energy and safety, escaping fears of social missteps, expressing themselves through movement, music and relentless joking, and pushing their, and their peers,' physical boundaries simultaneously. Everyone is rendered a capoeirista, where your belt level matters more than your age, gender or nationality. Even with the hierarchy of experience materialized in the different colored belts, the goal of creating an "ambiance" is a shared,

egalitarian effort. Some of this is inherent in the structure of capoeira as an activity. A good portion of the group is responsible for playing instruments during a *roda* at any given time; everyone will eventually play an instrument, play a game, or clap and sing. Everyone mutually contributes their body, their energy and their music.

Nevertheless, class distinctions between the majority of the foreign university students and the more working-class Senegalese are embedded in the tensions that ensue in the group. One way in which class-based exclusionary practices become visible is through issues related to association membership and exclusionary practices, and in particular, the way the group handles the monthly and inscription fees. Typically, those practitioners who paid their fees regularly would be allowed to stay in the group. Those who couldn't pay, would not or could not stay. Many of the Senegalese who went to Afreecapoeira did not have disposable income to pay for inscription, monthly fees and a uniform. Almost all foreigners, on the other hand, came from the university, where they often received a stipend, and/or they were receiving financial support from their parents back home. Landed in a new country for their studies, many of these African foreigners were away from their families and central social networks, so they often had a lot of free time after classes, and some disposable income for activities such as capoeira. The divide between the paying foreigners and the non-paying Senegalese seemed to be the most reasonable explanation for why Senegalese didn't last beyond a few trainings.

Alexandre also revealed to me, however, that while there used to be about thirty regular students compared to the barely ten that attended while I was conducting my research, (most of whom were Senegalese, and many of whom came from a working-class *quartier populaire*,) this explanation for Senegalese absence no longer lined up.

Both Alexandre and Ndeye noted that their Senegalese instructors, N'Diaye and Apollo , allowed them to train for free. So, what really created this divide that led to a pattern of the group having dwindling numbers of locals in years to come?

Thinking along the line of fees reveals a significant set of values reflected in practices of inclusion and exclusion, a system of drawing boundaries of membership that were financially motivated but spoke to a relativity of social dynamics beyond the liquid economic stability of the group. As Gabrielle aptly pointed out, the issue of fees creating a barrier for Senegalese was somewhat "false," because most of the group, even those capable of taking on the costs of training, almost never paid. The issue then became one of the *perception* of who is a fee-payer and who is not. Beyond the costs of training lay another arena of value that was tied to financial gain and yet was somewhat more abstract. This was the idea that certain types of people would attract more new recruits, more funding, and more opportunities for the group. In other words, the types of people representing their membership was a major consideration for the longevity of the association.

Another fault line between Senegalese and migrant practitioners at Afreecapoeira had to do with assessments of who should, or should not, take on the social status of being a capoeira teacher. Making a living entirely from being a capoeira instructor was not impossible in Dakar. Some of the primary characters of Senegalese capoeira history like N'Diaye, Apollo, and Moussa have all done so for various periods of time, if not their entire adult life. Others, like Jean, Pierre, and Prospère, either had other jobs or were students, supplementing their income by teaching regular classes in private schools in Dakar - Thies, and Mbour. Others helped teach temporary workshops for kids on summer

vacation. While the group had a strong desire to invest in more local efforts, the reality of finding enough members to teach *both* in private French schools for decent pay, and in the banlieues for free, to gift capoeira to new generations of Senegalese proved to be a perpetual problem. The number of people willing to invest their time to teach for concrete benefits, as well as ideologically-based pursuits, was few.

Furthermore, internal debates over who was suitable for a life as a capoeira teacher not only revealed some anxieties about class differences, but also about the perceived privilege of mobility. While many used their capoeira skills to make money to varying degrees, and some even aspired to becoming high-status persons in capoeira (like a *mestre*), the idea of choosing the path of a "capoeira teacher," and more broadly deciding to make serious commitments and sacrifices to the advancement of the Afreecapoeira association, brought up concerns around perceptions of that occupation. Becoming a capoeira teacher did not mean the same thing to all in the group. Arguments surrounding who was suitable, appropriate, or even expected to take on the responsibility of developing capoeira in Senegal was inextricably linked to ideas about foreigners and locals. In this case, foreign West Africans were often perceived as cosmopolitan, and therefore mobile, in part because of their seemingly privileged position of studying "abroad" in the first place, and also because of their elusive presence in the group, as they usually contributed for only a few years before moving away. The few Senegalese who flowed in and out of the group were considered as precious assets because of their local positioning, which would allow them to institute capoeira more permanently through instruction in Wolof and access to more "local spaces" like *quartiers populaires*. These "locals," of course, were necessary for the group to persist because of the constant loss of

temporary members. This is why many were so concerned about the failure to better recruit Senegalese young people.

By about 2016, the group was down to one regular teacher, Pierre, who was to move to Germany by the end of the season. Group talk centered around Ousmane's ambivalence to take over as the new head. Ousmane had the next highest belt from Pierre. Yet when I asked him about his hesitation, he replied that he did not get a Master's Degree in Project Management to become just a capoeira teacher. That Ousmane referred to his resume as an indication of his over-qualification for the job of teaching capoeira also draws attention to the pressure placed on him as one of the few and the highest ranked Senegalese in the group. Pierre, who also held degrees in higher education, and worked as a freelance business consultant, did not seem to have the same hesitations. The difference between their positions indicated a larger concern about the perception of being a capoeira teacher in Senegal, and what kind of social status such a position implied. Because of Ousmane's nationality, many in the group expected him to invest in institutionalizing capoeira locally. He also showed clear passion and commitment to the art form. Ousmane dazzled the group with how quickly he excelled in just a few short years, with hours of individual and small group work to supplement his normal trainings. Despite his personal determination, the expectation that he would carry the work of building Afreecapoeira in its next phase was a somewhat insulting assumption for him. Why should he be expected not to move away to pursue other opportunities, like all the Gabonese, Ivorian, Congolese gradés who left before him? It was not for lack of desire to see Afreecapoeira succeed that Ousmane displayed ambivalence. Nor was it because of a fear of not being able to make a living enough to

maintain financial autonomy, although it was a difficult job choice. The main reason for his hesitation lay in how he would be perceived as choosing a career seemingly beneath him. He resisted the expectation that his being Senegalese meant he was therefore responsible for reinforcing the association with a kind of local insurance stability.

An Afropolitan Shelter from Afrophobia

Capoeira creates an environment of home and family seldom found elsewhere. The repetition of gathering, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and sometimes Saturday, and training on the off days at home, creates a rhythm of daily life that shapes not only bodies, but thoughts, energies and environments. In preparation for a show at a local Ethiopian restaurant, Gabrielle choreographed a solo, practicing dropping into the splits as a debut of an update on her signature move every day leading up to the show, either on the terrace in her apartment, or at the Fann practice space. Ousmane advanced to the level of a *gradé* (graduated student) by training a single move at a time 100 times over, until he mastered something new to add to his repertoire. Prospère trained at home too, and sometimes took his berimbau to the beach to work on his technique.

For many of these foreign university students, coming to Senegal was an opportunity to reinvent themselves, and capoeira was one of the main mechanisms of reinvention. Many were driven from their home countries due to lack of opportunity, or out of fear of political violence, that disrupted their sense of national identification. One of the most popular teachers in Afreecapoeira, Clement, came to Senegal after he and his family fled the Congo to settle in Burkina Faso where he went to high school. Senegal was their original destination, but the cost of the residency card was too high, at 500,000 cfa per person (~1000 USD). The ongoing conflict in the Congo soured Clement to the

idea of befriending other Congolese in Dakar, and he was reluctant to identify with the country. When I asked him about his closeness to Pierre, another Congolese expat in his Afreecapoeira cohort, he told me that they were able to build a friendship because they knew each other through capoeira. Jean, another Afreecapoeira member, was from the Central African Republic but preferred not to identify himself by his nationality, ethnicity or race. "Those things cause so much division and violence that distracts us from seeing everyone as human."

For others, capoeira was the reason they remain attached to Senegal despite feeling marginalized there. While it is likely that the market infrastructure would not be able to provide employment to all who came from abroad for their education and training, some were already disinclined to even attempt at a job in Senegal, based on their experience living in Dakar as a student. Malick was a committed member of Afreecapoeira since he moved to Dakar from Burkina Faso. Though his free time was limited by his pursuit of a PhD in Physics at UCAD, he still showed up to practice nearly every session to show his dedication to the group, often in a Dutch wax print, button down shirt and black dress pants, even if he only made the last few minutes of class. Ibrahim shared with me how capoeira shaped his experience being in Dakar:

> "If today I'm still in Dakar, I can say that it is 50% because of capoeira. Because of the capoeira group…At every level, I actually had projects that involved leaving Dakar. But if there is one thing that pushed me to stay here it is capoeira, it is the capoeira group. And I really plan on living capoeira my whole life. I really plan on making my place in the world of capoeira. And I really plan on, I wouldn't say living by capoeira but to have the resources to always come back to capoeira. And I really hope to bring my contribution to this group, to make it grow. I really plan to sacrifice a good amount of my person, of my time in capoeira and in this group."

Not only did he stress the significance of capoeira itself in his life, but he also

demonstrated the particular relationship he had to Afreecapoeira. He sacrificed his time, despite his busy teaching and research schedule, to help the organization with performances and events, and to train on his own, with friends. This was a testament to how important this group had been to him while living in Senegal. His time there was not always easy, because he was called a *ñak* and socially excluded for not speaking Wolof. For these reasons, he felt Senegalese were often not receptive to foreign nationals, and on many occasions he considered leaving for better studying opportunities. In the end, it was the "spirit" and the sense of family in Afreecapoeira that guided his decision to stay as long as he had.

Almost every non-Senegalese university student had a strikingly similar story for how they ended up at Afreecapoeira. They came to Dakar because it houses some of the best universities in Francophone Africa, particularly in the medical field. They all expressed feeling socially isolated for being foreigners, for not speaking Wolof. After eight, ten, and sometimes fifteen years of living and studying in Dakar, many enjoyed their life there, filled with friends from all over the world -except for Senegalese. Gabrielle shared that no Senegalese had invited her to their house in over a decade.

While the primary barriers to social incorporation seem to be issues of language, ideas around belonging in Senegal are often imbued with racialized and national meaning, in which an "outsider" comes to be placed in opposition to a Senegalese on various levels. Once when I invited an Ivoirian woman from the group, Celeste, over to conduct an interview, Sokhna, the housemaid where I was staying, pulled me aside and asked me why I was spending time with such an ugly, dark-skinned girl. Because Sokhna had a slightly darker complexion than Celeste, I knew she was using skin color as a proxy

for Celeste's status as a foreigner.

In speaking about her experience in Dakar as a foreign national, Celeste spoke of what she called an evolution during her time in Senegal. "I had a hard time integrating here. I didn't have a lot of activities, which actually helped me concentrate and advance in my studies." She moved to Senegal a decade earlier at the advice of a family friend who also went for her medical studies. Ferehela was pleased to tell me she loves all the other Africans she has had the pleasure of getting to know. She loves that they learn about each other's cultures, although she has not managed to be close to many Senegalese. When I asked how she'd spent eleven years in Dakar without developing many friendships with Senegalese people, she told me it's not her "personal choice":

> "The Senegalese are nice but I found that they say 'teranga' [Wolof concept of welcoming] but they don't really do 'teranga' like they say. They tell you [they have] 'teranga' when you come here but they don't really want to integrate you. Even for speaking Wolof…this is probably why I don't really have many more intimate Senegalese friends. When we are together in a restaurant or somewhere, if the group is two foreigners and everyone else is Senegalese, you two will be next to each other speaking French and everyone else speaks Wolof. They don't try to teach you, they said 'No, you have to figure out yourself how to speak Wolof. Even if you've only been there two or three weeks. Seriously…that doesn't encourage you to learn Wolof! So maybe it's that that discouraged me from learning Wolof."

Ferehela, admitted to feeling connected to a particular capoeira song because of how it helps her understand her experience as an Ivoirian migrant who has lived as an isolated ex-patriate for 11 years at the time. The song, simple and repetitive, is called **"**Marineiro Sou**"** (I'm a Sailor):

I am not from here	Eu não sou daqui
I'm a sailor	**Marineiro sou**
I don't have love	Eu não tenho amor
I'm a sailor	**Marineiro sou**
I'm from Bahia	Eu sou da Bahia
I'm a sailor	**Marineiro sou**

From São Salvador De São Salvador
I'm a sailor **Marineiro sou**

She first fell in love with the sounds before she understood the Portuguese meanings. The recording was that of Carolina Soares, a Brazilian artist known for popularizing capoeira songs by adding instruments and vocal stylings more characteristic of popular music. The tone of the song itself told her it is sure to have a "very deep meaning." Once she looked up the translation of the lyrics, she told herself, "Wow, this represents me so well. It's a little nostalgic." Celeste was one of many to speak about the years spent in Dakar without being able to crack the Wolof-dominated social scene. Their shared sense of social exclusion was what drew many young West African students to the capoeira school, where they celebrate their diversity through their mutual love of Brazilian culture. In this way, training capoeira, learning Portuguese and building new intimacies in this unconventional social network of martial artists softened the pangs of perpetual exclusion.

Capoeira as Social Structure

For nearly forty years, Senegal has celebrated its National Day of Music on June 21st, and for many years Afreecapoeira has participated with a public *roda*. In 2015, the *roda* took place at former head of state Ousmane Wade's crowned presidential jewel, the Monument de Renaissance. The group gathered at the base of this giant statue of a bare-chested male figure in a Muslim *kufi* cap gripping the waist of his much smaller female counterpart, her arm extended gracefully behind her as she floats behind him, while in his other hand he carried a small boy child who was pointing outward. All three characters looked far off, presumably towards the future. The base of the monument was a place of

gathering. In the daytime, you could find parents letting their children run free on the protected platform, or tourists with professional cameras dangling from their necks. Towards evening, young dancers, rollerbladers, breakdancers, and flirting teenagers filled the space. Afreecapoeira played at events like the *Fête de Musique* year-round, practically marking every popular public site with their *axé*. In 2015, the events of the *roda* were the cause of, or rather the culmination of, an eruption that shook the collaborative spirit of their practice, an eruption that had lasting effects on the structure of their group.

I had just arrived in Dakar for fieldwork a couple weeks after the event. At one of the first training sessions I attended, I heard Gabrielle, Ousmane and Prospère argue about the conflict, although at the time I did not know to what they were referring. Tensions were high as Gabrielle recounted the story to me (paraphrased below):

> *Ousmane and Prospère, two of the more advanced students, were at the instruments, while the two main instructors, Prospère and Clement, were engaged in a game. Abdou—one of N'Diaye's earliest and most central students who was eventually kicked out over relationships gone sour—was on the berimbau and leading the group in song, both indicators that he was leading the event for that moment. Known for his musical talent amongst other skills, Abdou was improvising lyrics in Wolof within the context of a song. His new lyrics featured the names of the two players, and after a while, the Wolofone capoeiristas—Prospère, Ousmane, and eventually Pierre who picked up on some of it—began to notice Abdou was using the song to insult Pierre and Clement. Since none of the students who understood what Abdou was saying came to his defense in the moment, or at the very least made him aware by translating it to him, Clement was outraged and did not return to events or classes at Afreecapoeira since.*

The presence of other Wolofones, however, suggests that he intended for the insults to be understood, at least by some. Abdou may have decided to insult them for reasons unrelated to their status as foreigners; however, the function of language in the incident

speaks to a strategic demonstration of inclusion/exclusion. By insulting the two playing in a language they did not for the most part understand, the audience for his sentiments become the fluent Wolof-speakers of the group, and ultimately those considered Senegalese, since the players themselves could not have known they were being insulted and could not therefore defend themselves. The public nature of Abdou's act was mocking, because it articulated a sentiment that the foreigners did not belong there. This moment was especially jarring within the context of capoeira, which was presumed to be free of exclusions. Eventually Pierre, who had lived in Senegal for many years, caught on, but the injurious reminder of the attitude of some Senegalese towards this foreign majority was solidified.

Before we can understand how this incident came to occur, it is important to contextualize Abdou's aggression towards fellow members, such as Clement and Pierre. Abdou structured his entire life around being a capoeirista. N'Diaye and Abdou were both Senegalese, and they shared the same vision of a Senegal that recognizes and benefits from the human development that occur through the practice of capoeira, as well as a vision that the world would come to know Senegal as a key historical site and symbol of the existence of capoeira today. Over the years, Abdou sharpened his skills quickly, and developed his own ideas about the direction of the group, ideas that were sometimes in opposition to N'Diaye's. The two grew into a tense relationship through disputes over money, ownership and mutual respect. Abdou was eventually voted out of the group by a council of *gradés* (graduated students: those with a blue belt or higher - those who have thus crossed into a new level of responsibility and skill in capoeira). Similar to the events of the 2005 show, in which Senegalese felt N'Diaye privileged

novice, fee-paying foreigners over his talented Senegalese compatriots, Abdou's attitude towards some of those same foreigners, as they progressed and began to run training sessions, also displayed a sense of fraternal betrayal. "At some point," Clement shared with me, "Abdou was sending us hateful messages every single morning. I almost went to the police." The messages often read things like: "You are all sheep following N'Diaye" and "You are foreigners who should go back where you came from."

What is revealing about this incident are the ways in which the capoeira hierarchy comes in to mediate these other extant dynamics of discrimination. Each member's expectations about how to address such an inflammatory incident shows how capoeira hierarchy becomes paramount in the way the moment was understood. Not only were they navigating an incident of discrimination, but they prioritized their values as a capoeira collective in resolving the issue. The rules of the capoeira hierarchy, both in terms of the structure of belt levels and the particular instance of who had power in that specific context (e.g. Abdou holding the berimbau at that moment) weighed in as crucial considerations. Their reactions also spoke to their perception of the degree of damage and social disruption, not just in relation to Afrophobic sentiments, but more importantly to the capoeira community. Gabrielle's assessment of the situation was framed in the language of kinship: "It's like if someone insulted your father in front of you and you don't defend him." In her accusation towards Ousmane and Prospère, the two Senegalese present, she put primacy on their relationship as disciples and "sons" of their capoeira "fathers," a framework in which language and nationality were irrelevant. Ousmane and Prospère were on the defensive, but similarly spoke within the framework of a capoeira family. They argued that it was not their place as students to intervene because they did

not have the authority to disrupt the event. Ousmane specified that perhaps after the *roda* they could have addressed the issue in a more appropriate manner. Preserving the structure of the event, and acting in accordance to their belt levels, turned out, for them, to be the way in which they could most respect what Pierre and Clement taught them as their instructors.

Capoeira is not a particularly exceptional space regarding these broader continental issues regarding an insider/outsider divide on the national level. However, these dynamics played out within the space of capoeira in particular ways, because of the understanding of what capoeira should ideally represent: a space and a practice of community building in the face of repression. The two Senegalese students were outraged by Abdou's attempt to divide the group and assert a Senegalese superiority. Despite their national similarity, they identified more with their capoeira elders than a compatriot authority. The capoeira family was the central identification for these Senegalese practitioners, and despite their hesitation to intervene, their and Gabrielle's loyalty revealed an instance in which their foundation as a small group of capoeiristas overrode the discriminatory actions they confronted. In this instance, Abdou's dedication to the black diaspora liberatory form manifested in a chauvinistic desire to protect that practice for his people. The result of his exclusion, while causing a disruption in the unity of the group, demonstrated the ways in which capoeira still serves, for many, as a transcendent form of community that recognizes no discriminatory division other than the respectful hierarchy of experience. His remarks caused the group to reevaluate the way they protect one another from outside abuses. Thus, Afrophobia in turn begat an Afropolitanism, but one that still in many ways, exercised exclusion towards locals.

Excluded at Home, At Home in Brazil

Ndeye had experiences in Afreecapoeira similar to Alexandre's, although she managed to stick around despite her occasional discomfort. Ndeye was a young Senegalese woman who fell in love with capoeira because it taught her confidence in many forms of self and group creative expression through singing and bodily movement, as well as self-assertion and confidence. It provided her a unique avenue through which to express qualities she already carried in herself. She started out training with *Berimbau Sagrado*, a primarily Senegalese capoeira school which targeted disaffected local youth to give them practical skills of self-confidence and something they might be able to later exploit for market gain. She felt she was encouraged and supported in that group, particularly by the founder, Apollo, who told her to join the group for free, despite not being able to afford training sessions. A few years into their endeavor, the group became relatively inactive when the two leaders were too busy traveling and working to keep up all of their classes, and did not have enough experienced students to take over the project. The remaining students, like Ndeye, were encouraged to train with Afreecapoeira to continue their development. Ndeye found the social landscape there to be starkly different. The group was mostly occupied by West African foreigners who spoke only French and seemed to have enough disposable income to be able to pay the inscription and monthly fees, purchase their capoeira uniforms, and occasionally buy pricey instruments. While Ndeye spoke French, Wolof was her dominant language and she sometimes lacked the confidence to speak up in front of those who grew up with French as their primary language. While many knew her to be somewhat shy, at least in this context, she felt other players did not make any special effort to reach out and include

her. She felt excluded from everything, from executive board meetings to informal hangouts with other members of the group, and attributed this exclusion to what she perceived as the foreign majority's dislike for Senegalese.

One can see the many ways in which Ndeye would feel slighted. While some others also spoke both Wolof and French more fluently, such as Ousmane who was an occasional instructor, there was no formal procedure of translation for those not so strong in French during training. Beyond language, Ndeye felt that no one took time to show her moves more carefully, and that she was rarely invited to the group's social events. There were certain cliques who shared information, supported each other's progress and corrected each other's mistakes. She felt she was left to her own devices, which impeded her improvement. Another member of Afreecapoeira, Zaynab, once told me that Ndeye was not a part of the group and, therefore, had no right to feel left out. Although Ndeye consistently went to practice, and Zaynab herself did not because of health reasons, Zaynab felt that because Ndeye began her capoeira career with *Berimbau Sagrado* many years earlier, this defined her as a non-member, despite her frequent participation.

Ndeye's grievances also became a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which her assumptions about foreign Africans created a barrier to her ability to imagine a friendly connection with others in the group. She expressed a desire to be further integrated, but also contempt for those who failed to integrate themselves into her world. In almost the same breath with which she described her shame for not speaking French well enough, she displayed anger toward the foreigners who made no attempt to speak Wolof. "It's normal if you live or work here, you should learn Wolof! They don't want to learn because they don't like Senegalese, and they don't care to integrate themselves." At

times, she has used the Wolof term "ñak" when referring to others in the group. Ndeye's use of *ñak* designating non-national Africans suggests a belief in their inferiority or lack of civility. Ndeye's experience of being excluded by *ñaks*, who were the majority in the association, set the tone for her general social interactions. In other words, she complained of being marginalized by a group she was also discursively Othering. We could read this as a reaction to feeling excluded in her own country by people she felt didn't belong there in the first place.

The shifting use of the term *ñak* suggests the ways in which racial and nativist thinking operate in the Dakar in the 21st century. Ndeye herself had a somewhat conflicted relationship to blackness. Almost all of her free time was spent in black performance. In addition to capoeira, she trained with several Senegalese dance troupes, and even did an Alvin Ailey workshop in Dakar. Her relationship to Brazil was also one of a deep affinity for Afro-Brazilian expressive cultures. She had drummed with a *batucada* [Brazilian drumming tradition] called Sambaobab for many years, idolized the Candomblé goddess of the sea, Iemanja (which is also her capoeira apellido), and felt a strong connection to the history of slavery and the plight of black people around the world. In a more intimate sphere, Ndeye had many Baay Fall friends all over the city and always seemed to identify herself with marginal characters of overtly black expression that were often frowned upon by a broader Senegalese public. She herself had dreadlocks for many years, and yet she hid them from public view. Though it is conventional throughout the Black Atlantic for Rastafari women to cover their locks, Ndeye expressed fear of judgment by other Senegalese who might have attributed the style to a "wayward" lifestyle. As a result, she wore a large Fula, a headscarf the protruded from her head

reminiscent of Nefertiti's classic profile. While she showed me her dreads, few outside of the privacy of her family home had seen them.

Taking into account her explicit expressions of Atlantic blackness through her associations, her appearance, and her life's work as an artist within a variety of traditionally black forms, Ndeye's sometimes chauvinistic views towards non-Senegalese Africans might seem out of place. This tension, however, is telling of a particular postcolonial moment in which pro-blackness and Afrophobia can exist side-by-side. In other words, an orientation towards "we blacks" operates in the same mental space as "those African foreigners." Ndeye's careful attention to her expressions of blackness, such as donning a *Fula* while hiding dreadlocks, speaks to an environment that is simultaneously black and anti-black in modern day Senegal. Her hesitancy towards socializing with other Africans for fear that they would discriminate against her contributed to the confusion about insiders and outsiders, and what pan-African solidarity looked like in this context. In a sense, it is easier to relate to a transnational expression of blackness through artistic practice than it is to adopt a pan-Africanist perspective that sees race as a unifying force between national neighbors. This illustrates a way in which Afrophobia speaks to a kind of denigrated blackness attributed to Africans that does not apply to a blackness emanating from highly regarded Afro-Brazilian forms. Due to the global reputation of certain forms of black aesthetic and artistic expression that have somehow been racially sanitized so as to be globally marketable (Robitaille 2014) , other forms are still considered publicly unpalatable or shameful (i.e. *Fula* versus dreadlocks). There is thus a danger in essentializing black performance or black politics and assume they operate as universals, *even when they are enacted by black people*.

Masculine Freedom

While language seems like one of the clearest, and most neutral explanations for the lack of Senegalese participation in Afreecapoeira, we must also investigate the role of gender in the school's membership. In recent years, higher numbers of Senegalese women joined the group than men. These women, however, did not tend to remain consistently active. If the main barrier to Senegalese involvement was language, then Senegalese women would have the same issue as men. This suggests that Senegalese men *in particular* have difficulty remaining in the group, and it brings us back to the 2005 moment of exodus in which Alexandre and the others who joined from Alda's group in Parcelles felt uniquely mistreated.

Alexandre described his love for capoeira as being fueled in masculinist terms of aggression and competition. Alda's class was frustrating, in part because of her long absences, and her foreign attitude of mistrust that deemed her un-African in Alexandre's eyes. But it was also dissatisfying because of her restraint on their competitiveness. They were eventually drawn to N'Diaye's Afreecapoeira because "he let us fight and be aggressive between the guys". Alexandre identified the tensions that arose between what he described as the most experienced and acrobatically capable Senegalese guys and the foreign novices, not only in terms of insider and outsider, but as deserving and undeserving of stage time based on skill. His main grievance was that he and his clique had the physical prowess to be featured, even if they lacked the funds for formal membership and performance uniforms. Furthermore, Alexandre explained that the history of capoeira, the meaning of the song lyrics, and its relationship to slavery were not of great significance to the majority of the Parcelles crew. "Perhaps Augustin," he

said. “He loves to study martial arts and their history, that sort of thing.” This was because little was explained to him, he said; but either way, the historical connection to Brazil was not where his interest lay. It was in the embodiment of capoeira itself, the movements and personal expression possible that mattered most. Central in his mind was the physical ability. He felt N’Diaye was dismissing that crucial element in favor of valuing things like the appearance of diversity and perhaps the middle-class respectability of properly uniformed university students.

Africanizing and Nationalizing the Group Image

While the changing demographics of the group speak to the process of how the active members portrayed and marketed their association with the public, their debates over symbolic imagery suggest a semiotic tension about the core values and goals of a Dakar-based Afro-Brazilian martial arts club. Similar themes of strategic (rather than universal) blackness, and wishful but not material relationship to Senegalese nationalism, echoed in the realm of the group’s public image in a way that reflected their internal struggles of membership. I argue that Afreecapoeira’s debates about their place in the urban Dakar sphere as enacted through symbolism and the use of public space demonstrate an ambivalence towards/impossibility of local/national embedded and transnational blackness. By analyzing debates over the school’s logo, name, and practice and performance spaces, Afreecapoeira’s public statements and internal orientation towards capoeira became an important avenue through which to further theorize capoeira as providing a site of contestation. Negotiations over these symbolic elements are a space to “work out” (DeFrantz 2014) shifting social dynamics of migration, nationalism, transnationalism and race in Dakar. At the heart of these tensions is the continued

struggle at the crossroads between transnational blackness read Western/modern and material pan-Africanism.

Afreecapoeira had kept their original logo for many years. A recent shift in the style of the logo, however, sparked debate over the "African" nature of its aesthetic. The logo had been developed by a former Afreecapoeira member named Bamba who had since moved to Ecuador and opened his own branch of the Senegalese school. After the school's ninth successful batizado in 2016, a few of us crowded around Bamba in the Dial Diop elementary school basketball courts. The July heat combined with the dozens of working bodies in the cramped gym space made the ceremonial room unbearably hot, and with the new woven belts distributed, elevating each student to a new status level, some happily made their way to the courts to continue their friendly competitions, only now in basketball. Alongside the growing game, Prospère, Ndeye and I were taking advantage of the opportunity to encounter an "ancien du group" and an experienced capoeirista who trained and taught all over the world. We were regaled with stories about the good old days, and learned tips for dishing out a surprise kick to one's opponent while in the middle of a *macaco*. Like a classic "ancien," he was lamenting the new generation's disregard for the old ways. He boasted about the beauty and careful thought that went into his original design for the group logo. His lament, echoed by Gabrielle and Prospère, was more than just that of an old head resisting change. His concern was noted in the new logo's lack of African/Afrocentric imagery which would have reflected the original ideological goals of the group. The argument in favor of the change was unclear. Those who voted for the switch merely said, they "liked the look of the new format/style, and that they "didn't understand" the old one.

Original Logo

New Logo

"It's so much more roots, it's so much more African." Bamba's description of his logo as more "roots" and "African" in relation to the new design suggested that the new one was an erasure of the elements that he intended to signal by his use of the English word "roots" – a traditionalism and sense of universal blackness. By using "roots" and African" as synonyms, Bamba's description effectively signaled a Jamaican, now transnational genealogy of modern blackness, as in "roots" reggae that comes out of an imagined African traditionalism. In doing so, Bamba's logo seemed to be aimed at portraying a black universalism that upheld an Africa synonymous with black origins, as an intentional reminder to the wider capoeira world that Afreecapoeira's inception on Gorée Island was no coincidental significance. Being one of the first African capoeira schools was central to their raison d'être, and he tried to remind us throughout our discussion that their image should reflect the weight of their activities. Despite Bamba's intentions and his interpretation of N'Diaye's original intent upon founding the group in the late 1990s, new generations of Afreecapoeiristas were skeptical of his symbolism. Prospère interjected with his interpretation of the events of the meeting in which the association's

Executive Board made the decision to modify the original design. One of the concerns that arose, he told us, was with the triangle in the center. People did not know what was meant by it and they believed it to connote some kind of sectarianism they were hesitant to associate with the group's image. It seemed irrelevant to have what might be interpreted as a suspiciously religious symbol by outsiders and members who are unaware of Bamba's intentions of placing what he intended to be a fishing net, to symbolize Senegal's prominent relationship with the sea.

Afrocentric traditionalist symbolism, such as a generic "African mask," did not fit so easily with the new generation. Some in the new generation seem to be resistant to Bamba's more radical anti-colonial politics, perceiving this as part of a bygone era of a particular brand of Afrocentricity. Rather than indulging a romanticization of resistant African traditionalism, the young folks were more concerned with attracting a broader audience more in line with their goals of diversity and inclusion under rubric of "free" "openness." From another angle, they seemed to be shying away from the presumably more divisive brand of black radicalism; hence they removed any elements of the logo that could be perceived by an imagined audience as religiously or racially subversive. There were also anxieties about claims to a Senegalese national proximity, as expressed through proposed uses for the logo. As the annual decision to design t-shirts for the year's events rolled around, Pierre made what proved to be a controversial suggestion. Why not use the model of the Senegalese national soccer team jerseys, but with the Afreecapoeira logo patched on to the left breast instead?

Two Senegalese natives, incidentally both of Luso-African descent, refused the idea on the premise that it was inappropriate and illogical. Perhaps their ambivalent status

as Wolofone and Senegalese by birth, but not by cultural and ethnic background, contributed to their careful treatment around these symbols of Senegalese national identity. In this case, soccer was seen as a "true" activity of the nation, and laminating it onto a symbol representative of Afro-Brazil became an act of diasporic diluting. The hesitancy on the part of some in Afreecapoeira to appropriate iconic objects and symbols of Senegalese nationalism was not a representation of the group's relationship to nationalism. Instead, it was an example of the delicate balance they were trying to strike with democratic consensus to determine their place as a locally-based diasporic association in the arena of Senegalese national and international cultures.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the idea that the coexistence between a regionally-oriented Afrophobia and a diasporic Afropolitanism are connected processes. I explored the individual capoeira group, Afreecapoeira, in order to see how their tensions around membership spoke to larger tensions related to national and non-national, foreign and local. Because foreign West Africans in Senegal felt socially isolated in Dakar, they sought sanctuary in capoeira and subsequently created a somewhat hostile environment for working class Senegalese, who in turn felt justified in their xenophobic beliefs. The coexistence of internal disputes over the cultivation of a diasporic art form rooted in collective black resistance across differences was not without a sense of irony. Yet it demonstrated how capoeira became a site of diasporic contestation that incorporated regional issues and different relationships to blackness that challenged the national and intellectual myth of Senegalese exceptionalism.

CHAPTER 4

The Limits of Reconnection:

Diasporic Chauvinism and Mutually Exclusive Modernities in Capoeira Pilgrimages to 'Africa'

Introduction

The stage was set for a historic moment in the African diasporic imaginary: a Brazilian capoeira *mestre* whose body and spirit were trained in the martial art of black freedom had "returned" to the continent to share his knowledge with his diasporic brothers and sisters. The West African capoeristas, reveling in this rare opportunity to learn from and with a proper Brazilian mestre, welcomed him with open arms. Apollo felt compelled to express his gratitude at this joyous occasion in the most fitting way possible. In true capoeirista fashion, he improvised a song directed at this honored guest, only he chose to do so in his own language, the Wolof language of Senegal. When he first discovered the martial art, he brutalized his body and his voice in pursuit of carving a capoeirsta out of himself as quickly as possible. Today he speaks and sings with a slight but persistent raspiness. His voice has never been the same. He taught himself Brazilian Portuguese to a level of fluency that makes him almost unrecognizable as a non-Brazilian when he speaks. Even his mannerisms, both inside and outside of the *roda*, *feel* Brazilian (Rosa 2015a). Yet he is also fiercely devoted to a political project that elevates African capoeira to the same degree of validity as its Brazilian cousin, because of the importance he places on capoeira's African character and historical origins. So on this occasion, he chose to honor all of these values with a Wolof capoeira song to welcome this Brazilian *mestre*. Before he finished his song, the *mestre* cut him off in anger. He was desecrating the tradition by straying from the standard Brazilian Portuguese in his musical improvisation.

Afro-Brazilian capoeira is "Afro" indeed, and necessarily so through a transnational

Afro-Atlantic dialogue (Matory 1999) that encompasses many West and Central African musical, philosophical and movement traditions (Assunção 2005). However, the "Brazilian" part is often where the buck stops, where the hybridity of black ethnicities, cultural constructions and reconstructed amalgams are consolidated into what ultimately became a national cultural entity, now central to the particularity of Brazilian patrimonial pride. This tension between diaspora and nation on the Brazilian side becomes much more complex as Brazilians transport capoeira to other countries, and infinitely more so when they engage with the recent crop of capoeiristas emerging in West Africa. Capoeira as a national Brazilian cultural tradition, despite the complex process through which it was constructed, becomes even more of a concrete national entity as it migrates out of the country by way of Brazilian migrants who teach abroad as representatives of the Brazilian nation (Griffith 2016; Robitaille 2007, 2014). This, in turn, can make the practice of engaging in diaspora and in fulfilling the aspirational desires of diasporic connections with Africans through capoeira fraught. For instance, Brazilians and other capoeiristas are often enchanted with the idea of returning to the "source" of their Afro-diasporic practice. They often take capoeira-related pilgrimages to Africa. Yet, the interactions with the young West Africans they encounter at times display more of a cultural chauvinism than a spirit of fictive kinship and collaboration.

The chapter will move through two major themes, race and religion, as they pertain to capoeira pilgrimage trips. In order to explore the misrecognitions of racial aspirations, I work through two case studies that give a sense of the range of interactions during these trips. The outcome of both, however, reveals the pervasiveness of a dominant narrative of diaspora that informs the kind of community building in the contemporary period, or, rather, the limitations it produces. The first case study focuses on ethnographic data from an event for a French group with Brazilian instructors and neighboring West African groups hosted by the Capoeira

Association of the Gambia in Banjul to commemorate the International Day of Slavery. The second case study reviews a film by a French attendee of an event held in Benin called *To Blo Dayi*[23] to address the role of the film in attempting to create but ultimately disallowing diasporic community. The second theme of religion is addressed in the latter half of the chapter, as a way of demonstrating a major point of contention and disconnect between African capoeiristas and their foreign counterparts that is overlooked by pilgrims, due to the dynamics described in the first theme. The divided attitudes about the relationship between religion and capoeira not only serve to explain part of the misrecognitions of aspirations and motives, but also speak to the way each of these groups are historically positioned in a fashion that creates mutually exclusive modernities between Africa and its diaspora.

Both race and religion are foundational tenets of these kinds of events, whether explicitly stated or not. These two analytics deployed together reveal a hierarchy of roles in a phenomenon I call *diasporic chauvinism*, that creates subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) divisions within this ostensibly democratic and inclusive artistic community-building project. Diasporic chauvinism is an intentionally paradoxical term. It refers to an attitude of nationalistic ownership over a form of knowledge concerning an inherently transnational, black Atlantic tradition. This assertion of superiority is one over the knowledge inherent in the form itself, as well as over the narrative control over its historical significance. I employ the term "chauvinism" to signal a kind of superiority that is not linked to structural inequality characteristic of White Supremacist racism (Weitzberg 2017). In this respect, it represents one distinct manifestation of Thomas and Campt's (2008) "diasporic hegemonies," in the sense that the diasporic imaginary of "Africa" as a sight of desire can not only serve to obscure the complexity of African contexts, but can also privilege the

[23] The name of the event was described to me by Contra Mestre Fassassi (the founder of the Beninese capoeira school *Ogun Eru*) as "to give something or leave something like a heritage or work" in the Fon language.

diasporic experience in ways that ultimately undermine that of Africans. As chauvinism is also most often synonymous with an extreme nationalism, I employ this term specifically to signal the ways in which the first term, "diasporic", signals an inherent multiplicity of different cultural traditions, that are then consolidated into a national identity by a process represented by the second term, "chauvinism." Diasporic chauvinism thus describes a type of interaction during a moment of diasporic collaboration, historical reckoning or repair, that, in turn, creates a hierarchy of ownership and expertise. In the structure of this narrative, Africans are both historical relics and passive contemporary receptors of this unidirectional assertion from the diaspora to the continent.

What follows is an analysis of capoeira pilgrimages to West Africa from what participants conceptualize as capoeira's geographical, spiritual and cultural origins. Brazilian and European practitioners organize capoeira roots tours in search of understanding the African contexts out of which capoeira's traditions emerged, to perform a symbolic return of bodies to the historical sites of capture that preceded enslavement, and to bolster local African capoeira community projects in a poetic reconciliation of the past through creative collaboration in the present. Like the regional politics in chapter three, these pilgrimage trips reveal the unexpected outcomes of the work many hoped capoeira could do to build transnational community on common ground. The clashing aspirations and agendas of the roots tourism participants signal layers of misrecognition that index the ways the connected processes of racial colonialism and racial slavery are often decoupled in the present, obscuring their historical relationship and, therefore, their postcolonial legacies (Pierre 2012).

The processes by which Brazil was constructed as a 20th century Creole nation that prides itself (at least in national public discourse) on its syncretic traditions and its operational myth of racial democracy does not reflect the postcolonial cultural and political processes of most West

African nation-states. The relationships among religious practice, expressive arts, and racial consciousness in the context of diasporic cultural exchange speaks to the different national (and regional) contexts out of which these capoeiristas from around the world emerge. Therefore, this chapter also brings together religion, modernity and diaspora to demonstrate some of the impossibilities of these categories as each one destabilizes the other. In the end, there are more questions than answers with regards to these interconnected processes as they operate on the ground in West Africa. Like much of the work in the chapters that came before it, this chapter looks at various agents in the landscape of expressive cultural production in its transnationally collaborative moments, only here the transnationality is more clearly instantiated by the nature of the phenomenon of "exchanges" between European, Brazilian, and West African capoeiristas for formal events called *encontros* (Portuguese) or *rencontres* (French). I will argue that while the materiality of diasporic relationships is most concrete in instances of capoeira pilgrimages, the ensuing dynamics create a hierarchy of knowledge and participation that reinscribe the exclusionary nature of the dominant narrative of the African diaspora as it stands today.

Pilgrimage and Race among Capoeiristas

In the long and continuing history of capoeira, we are entering a phase marked by "return." These types of roots tourism trips are framed as pilgrimages, imbuing them with a sacred weight, a journey of personal or collective growth that is primed to inevitably shift something internal within those who embark on it. The pilgrimage, the return, implies a particular significance for those who were forcibly captured and exiled to the Americas by European Imperial expansion, and who are now returning to the site of departure. Every major slave port in West Africa contains an entryway that leads to the open sea from which captives would board the

ships that took them away from their homelands forever. This opening is often called "The Door of No Return" to emphasize the cosmic break the ships that sailed the Middle Passage created between African lifeworlds and what was to come in the colonies.

Pilgrimages are one of the major ways that practitioners pay tribute to the deep historical significance of capoeira. They serve as a reminder that while capoeira has become popular in gyms and dance studios around the world, as an effective fitness exercise, the tradition itself signals a rich and sometimes painfully inextricable tie to the global forces of imperial expansion and enslavement out of which it emerged. The Afro-Brazilians who practice capoeira are thus in a position not only to continue the legacy of the tradition, but also have the potential as racialized subjects to harvest greater significance out of a "return" to the African continent, from which they are descendant (Pierre 2012). Paulla Ebron's work on African American pilgrimages to the continent provides a framework for understanding the complexity of the intentions and realities of heritage tourism in the African diaspora:

> "Heritage tours like the one I describe here merge familiar stories of slave journeys with the contemporary physicality of Africa, thus creating a subjective sense of remembrance. At the same time, the tours provoke varied and complicated responses among participants; the experience can prompt cultural crises and contradictions even as it carries the participants through the rites of passage that allow them to experience Africa as home. In the liminal space created by this particular tour, notions of self and community were called into question and, at least momentarily, sedimented ideas about Africa's meaning. As these emerged, Africa became a site for critical engagement and reassessment of the participants' divergent histories" (Ebron 1999: 912).

Ebron calls for scholars to analyze these kinds of pilgrimage/tourism events in ways that "offer a sense of the simultaneous and contradictory aspects of these projects", that speaks both the specifics of the project itself, as well as the transnational processes of their making (1999:928).

These roots tourism trips in the capoeira world are usually comprised of a dozen students

from capoeira schools in Europe that are either headed by European or Brazilian instructors. They are organized collectively between the visiting group and the host African capoeira school, who also invite practitioners from the surrounding region. The agenda often involves playing capoeira in public spaces, almost always in at least one bustling outdoor marketplace. While the impetus for the trip is framed as a pilgrimage, indicating some kind of return for descendants of slaves, the trips, however, are not limited to Afro-Brazilians. This signals a tension between the framing of the event, and the material reality of it. White foreigners are the majority of those who attend structured, pre-organized trips, which then shifts the meaning of the pilgrimage or "return" to a more universalized definition to the return of capoeira to its origins by all capoeiristas, regardless of their personal background. The Brazilian in attendance is often someone who migrated and set up a capoeira academy in Europe or the United States, who then brings their group of (mostly white) students on a journey to the African continent, which is usually a first for everyone involved. They carry out a series of workshops and artistic collaborations with local African capoeira schools, that almost always culminate in a final showcase for the general public in a French cultural center.

These events have varying degrees of success and significance for the Africans who participate. Most West Africans do not see slavery as integral to the way they define themselves; and most West African governments downplay or ignore that history, relegating it to museums that put them in the past (Pierre 2012). African state discourses also participate in framing Africa as past/symbolic/historical in their ordering of the historical events of the African diaspora. Especially for those countries that were central to the operation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery is often sequestered by state and popular discourse in order to avoid reducing their national history as defined more expansively than the shameful framing of slavery as their starting point (Holsey 2008). The continued economic marginalization of African countries under

global neoliberalism further contributes to the desire of West African governments to downplay the historical precedents of colonization and therefore slavery. West African capoeristas are thus an example of grassroots, rather than state-driven—initiatives of a small portion of the general public that uncommonly aims to define themselves through a *racial* history (Pierre 2012), in part because their involvement in capoeira led to physical and intellectual knowledge about the slave trade as a corrective. Joining a capoeira group, however, is not necessarily the starting point of racialized self-making. Although many come to understand themselves as black through their practice, others are attracted to capoeira because they were looking for avenues with which to engage with the history, practices and relationships that spoke to what they already saw as their black heritage.

Many people who cultivate themselves as capoeiristas in countries around the world not only become invested in the artistic legacies produced in the context of the slave trade, but often become politicized about race issues in their country more generally (Griffith 2016). As Laurence Robitaille demonstrates, the black Brazilian body can become an object of consumption for white Western practitioners who then embody a differently racialized self through the physical movements of capoeira and the racially-marked semantic value that accompanies those movements due to the way they are described and displayed by Brazilian instructors. The fact that the capoeira pilgrimages to West Africa are primarily populated by white, non-Brazilian foreigners demonstrates a step further in this phenomenon. Their eagerness to trace the "return" speaks to a much larger scale investment in inhabiting not only the physicality (Robitaille 2014), but the affective and spiritual positionality of Afro-descendants and African diasporic relationships.

As I noted earlier, capoeira's popularity around the world was propelled by the dual processes of mass migration in the 1980s and the commodification of culture that is often

sanitized as the liberal movement of people and aesthetics through the designation of "globalization" (Appadurai 2006; Robitaille 2014; Sawyer 2006; Thomas and Clarke 2006). Under these political economic circumstances, strategies of liberation, endurance and survival developed by Afro-Americans (in the broadest geographic sense) were now commoditized in such a way that these traditions come up for grabs while Brazilians looking to escape economic precarity in their country leveraged their expressive cultural capital to make a living abroad through the recruitment of foreign clientele.

Lauren Griffith's work on American capoeiristas who travel to Brazil "in search of legitimacy" through intensive training sessions brings to light a phenomenon she calls "apprenticeship pilgrimages" (Griffith 2016). Griffith delves into the parameters of authenticity and legitimacy on all sides of the equation, not only looking at the validation that foreigners (mostly Westerners) seek on pilgrimages, but also at the debates regarding who has the right to represent Brazilian capoeira abroad. Scholars have documented parallel phenomena with Western tourist-pilgrims seeking therapeutic healing and spiritual well-being through yoga or Buddhism in India and elsewhere (Baumann 2001; Hoyez 2007; Maddox 2015). These practitioners often impute specific meaning onto geographic place that require forms of pilgrimage for internal and social transformation (Hoyez 2007). As Griffith remarks about Americans attending capoeira workshops in Salvador, Bahia: "Travel, I had learned, is an important way for *capoeiristas* to augment their cultural capital" (Griffith 2016:50). This same idea, if applied to the French capoeiristas who travel to West Africa ostensibly as capoeira pilgrims, demonstrates the way in which their cultural capital in the capoeira world increases by their participation in these pilgrimages to African countries. Upon setting foot on the continent for the first time, they enter the social landscape as experts from afar. Some of them have already done pilgrimages to Brazil and now on their "return to the source" trip to Africa, they do not arrive simply as knowledge

seeking pilgrims, but rather as already baptized, advanced students. Trips to Africa represent the next stage after pilgrimage, where they engage as "experts", or rather, as diasporic chauvinists, only theirs is an assertion of superior knowledge concerning Brazilian national culture and thus a kind of chaunivism-by-proxy.

Diasporic Chauvinism

Chauvinism might seem out of place alongside an inherently transnational concept such as diaspora, yet it speaks to a kind of hyper-patriotism, a cultural nationalism that borders on notions of supremacy over others. I work with the contradictory nature of this term intentionally to highlight the ways in which the Brazilian nation-state remains central to the cultural world of capoeira, an artistic tradition that is celebrated for its diverse trans-Atlantic beginnings and the reach of its current global purchase. Diasporic chauvinism therefore indexes a kind of gatekeeping attitude toward expressive cultural practices that were built through a transnational cultural dialogue. The singularity of ownership implied by this form of gatekeeping paradoxically erases those dynamic origins for the sake of preserving a sense of national cultural cohesion and purity. The cultural authors coming from a creole nation leverage the transnational (and distinctly "African") origins of their creation. However, they simultaneously protect the delicate rhetoric of their particular racial order and cultural production in the dissemination of the form and in collaborative interactions surrounding it. Afro-Brazilian capoeira, therefore, can be "African" only in the ways that make sense for an Afro-Brazilian context, and not in ways that include contemporary African contributions, despite the fact that some of these traditions embraced in Brazil are from the particular African practices, traditions, and contexts of those Africans excluded by diasporic chauvinism.

Diasporic chauvinism also reflects some of the ways West Africans *perceive* Brazilian attitudes towards contemporary African involvement in the Afro-Brazilian cultural practice. For example, one Gabonese capoeirista, Joseph, was under the impression that Brazilians did not allow non-Brazilians to become capoeira mestres. Even after I expressed to him that there were now mestres of many different nationalities in the countries to which Brazilian capoeira schools have extended, Joseph maintained a healthy skepticism at the idea of their being open to sharing such a high status. Whereas Brazilians may be assumed to be protective over their traditions against the possibility of foreign influence, their control is also sometimes read as directly concerned with keeping Africans, in particular, out.

Diasporic chauvinism is a position those with the privilege to access it take on, and therefore is not bound by the body that is the object of that position. In other words, claiming expertise or authorship over capoeira knowledge, and subsequently the hegemonic narrative construction of "the African diaspora" from a diasporic standpoint, is not only the assertion of Afro-diasporic subjects, but also of non-blacks in former colonies (i.e. white Brazilians) , *and even of white Westerners*. Their fascination with, and dedication to, Afro-derived expressive artistic communities is increasingly well-documented in all corners of the Atlantic, from Swedes flocking to dance workshops in the Gambia to white Americans running hip hop dance studios in the U.S. (DeFrantz 2014, Sawyer 2006). What remains to be more deeply theorized are the ways in which middle class white Westerners' avid participation in these black arts scenes puts them in a position of expertise in relation to Africans themselves, whose access to these cultural traditions is significantly limited due to the lack of economic structure to attract and support institutions like capoeira academies. In this way, economics and expressive culture maintain a tricky relationship under neoliberalism in which cultural traditions are more than ever up for grabs for the most socio-economically well-positioned, which in turn restructures the historical relationships that

made up those traditions in the first place. This in large part explains the seemingly ironic dynamics of diasporic cultural interaction in the 21st century, in which white interest drives much of the industry of pilgrimage trips and cultural "exchange", primarily in the capoeira world, but also for things like African dance class (Sawyer 2006).

Brent Hayes Edwards puts forth the idea of *décalage* to describe the inherently disjointed nature of diasporic relations: "For paradoxically, it is exactly such a haunting gap or discrepancy that allows the African diaspora to 'step' and move' in various articulations. Articulation is always a strange and ambivalent gesture, because finally, in the body it is *only* difference—the separation between bones or members—that allows movement" (Edwards 2003). For Edwards, it is within the inherent nature of diasporic difference, the distinction of histories and the diverse contexts of blackness can diaspora exist. It is in this light that we can better understand how some of the misrecognitions of diasporic interaction come about as a result of efforts to force sameness of experience and of vision. Through the recognition of these gaps and frictions, diaspora can be flexible enough to move and adapt, allowing for multiple articulations of black experiences.

The Gambia Case: Regional Pan-Africanism through the "Failure" of Diaspora

I traveled with several members of Afreecapoeira to a week-long capoeira encontro in Banjul hosted by the Capoeira Association of the Gambia. The event was organized to commemorate the 10th anniversary since their capoeira association began, and the week was to culminate into a performance at the Institut Français for the International Day of Slavery. The history of the group is a unique one. As explained to me by its founder Adama Badji, a black American named Babakwame Ishange from Pennsylvania was teaching him boxing on the beach one day when an Afro-Brazilian capoeirista named Valo spotted them. Valo was on a mission to

"bring capoeira to Africa" and when he saw Adama boxing on the beach, the spirits told him that Adama was the person to give capoeira to. From that day forward, Adama took capoeira on as his only profession and made it his mission to learn as much as he could from his limited time with Valo to be able to spread it across the Gambia. Adama then taught as many children as he could, recruited adults, and developed the association. A couple years prior to my fieldwork, Simon Amaro—a French capoeirista who works for the European Union as some kind of financial development advisor—was stationed in the Gambia with his family, and became a major support for the association by teaching classes, finding a permanent sponsor and organizing major events. The capoeira school Simon comes from, called Geração Capoeira, is based in Grenoble, France and run by a pair of Brazilian brothers (Cebola and Maré) from Minas Gerais, Brazil.

The event was promoted on the association's Facebook page as an international gathering of capoeiristas to participate in a "cultural crossroads" and an "international cultural exchange, " and for the International Day of Slavery. The participants were a group of French capoeiristas from Geração, many of whom had never been to Africa before. Afreecapoeira was also invited, as were a few members of another group, Ginga Nagô, from Guinea-Conakry. The event demonstrated a set of dynamics that speaks to the relationships between various actors in the market of symbolic and material exchange of black cultural expression in urban West Africa. With West African, South American, and European capoeiristas all coming together expressly for a cultural exchange and to memorialize the history of slavery in the Gambia, the expectations were high for making real connections based on the proclaimed intentions for the trip. The results showed several different agendas coming into conflict over the symbolism of geographical Africa.

From start to finish the event was shrouded in inexplicable tension and discomfort. As the event went on, I started to notice divisions that reflected a kind of hierarchy descending from the

honored Brazilian guests and their prized French students, to the Senegalese, and finally to the Gambian capoeiristas who were technically hosting the event. The dinner table reflected this division. The seating arrangements might seem to be the result of people naturally sticking with their group, with those they shared their most comfortable language with. Yet there were other cases that were more difficult to explain. On every bus ride, someone would strike up a pandeiro (a tambourine used in capoeira) and start singing a capoeira song, and the others happily joined in the refrain. But much of the time, when it was the Gambians who started the singing, it was only the Gambians who responded. When the French started, it was only the French who would respond, even if the songs were very common capoeira songs that everyone knew. Our Senegalese group, comprised of West and West Central Africans acted as the buffer, by joining in with all the singing, and sitting between the French and the Gambians. At one dinner, a French man named Medi was being the clown of the group, telling awkward and inappropriate jokes as usual, and generally taking up social space. He decided to take a selfie of the whole table, and then commented loudly that the African side of the table was so dark you couldn't see any of them in the shot. "Hey guy, smile so we can see you on camera!" he shouted jokingly to one of our Central African members at the other end of the table. Not receiving the response he sought, he finally decided to just take the shot of his own group.

One of the Gambian capoeiristas, Amadou, described to me his experience with Simon beyond this particular event:

> He normally shows some racism. I know this is a problem between our own internal association the Gambia, uh capoeira association the Gambia, but actually it's going beyond. I think it's something also, I can talk about. I don't think it's a big deal. So what I mean by showing racism is…the barrier, he tend—he develops strategies that will bring barriers. And like, uh there are specific places where they're French supposed to go, for having lunch. All those things you know. There are places for Gambians, Gambian will be this area. Probably you guys did not experience those things a lot with…him. But for us, we have seen a lot of, stuffs like that. He will, uh, eh…we had last year, uh something like that, a

> program. But actually it was a very bad experience. You know me I am very sensitive about, like, uh…racism stuffs.

This quote clearly demonstrates a pattern of physical segregation, as well as implied barriers displayed by Simon, who is technically an outsider to their group. Since his arrival to the Gambia (and due to his connections and position that brought in resources and sponsorship), however, he has taken over the operations and the vision, and became the face of the association that was originally founded by Gambians. Other Gambians from the group similarly expressed a history of physical segregation and hierarchy of resources, like food and instruments, between Europeans and Africans they felt was indicative of an underlying racist attitude.

Simon's own view of the Gambians he works with was a primarily class-based assessment of their fortitude as practitioners, rather than an expression of racial discrimination. On the last night, Simon caught me walking by after having said next to nothing to me the entire trip. He said, "You're writing a thesis on capoeira in West Africa, no? You should write that Gambians are the poorest capoeiristas in Africa. These guys have nothing. Absolutely nothing. They sleep on the ground. In the village they all call them crazy. Adama lost his wife and kids because of capoeira. But they are so brave, they come and train so hard and they just want to play." Cebola bravely told us stories of race and class discrimination that he experienced in Brazil, and admitted that France is the same, and now he sees the deep class divide here in the Gambia, proving that it's an issue all over the world. "You see this big house we're staying in, and then you see how poor the rest of the people are living in the city," he pointed out openly. While Cebola's thoughts did not appear insincere, I found the gap between his words and his actions towards the Gambians and Gambian history troubling. What is novel here is not finding racism towards Africans by whites and foreigners. Instead, it is the context in which those who have dedicated their lives to a form of cultural expression that valorizes African-rooted traditions

fail to recognize the agency, contribution and partnership of Africans today. There is the symbol of what "Africa" represents for diasporic blacks, and then there is the reality of an uncomfortable, and sometimes ill-fitting, difference in their narrative of diasporic belonging and brotherhood.

The exclusion became even more explicit as the event went on. It often took the form of ignoring, a reluctance to communicate. When the Brazilians taught workshops, they spoke in primarily French or Portuguese, which many of the French folks could understand after years of training and traveling to Brazil. Only a fraction of the time did anyone translate into English, a shared language of our local hosts. The Brazilian brothers rarely interacted with the West African students, despite the fact that the event was supposed to serve as a workshop for the Gambians to learn from more experienced instructors. True, there was the language barrier, neither of the Brazilians spoke English, but there was an abundance of people who would be able to translate for both Portuguese and French. In many instances during the workshops, Cebola and Maré expressed frustration with the Gambians not doing the movements well enough.

Apathy at Historical Slave Sites

As the week-long capoeira *encontro* was centered around the International Day of Slavery, a few activities were planned in light of it. The first day we went to Gambia's historic site where captured Africans were sent to Gorée before they were shipped to the Americas: James Island, renamed Kunta Kinteh Island by President Yaya Jammeh at the request of an American artist. The guide on the canoe gave us his routine speech about how we are to forgive but never forget, and that, although the island is beautiful, we are not supposed to be happy. This is a solemn journey of reflection and remembrance. When we arrived on the island, we were greeted by our guide who was to give us a tour. From the beginning, the two Brazilians seemed

uninterested in following the tour. They had taken off their shirts on the boat to catch the sun rays, and were wearing board shorts and sunglasses. They stood behind the group too far away to hear those who were translating the tour guide's words. When Simon suggested that they come closer, they declined, and wandered around the island themselves observing, and also being playful, while the rest followed the tour. By the end we found them and a few of the French folks taking selfies with big smiles, and flashing the surfer "hang loose" symbol by rattling their thumbs and pinky fingers. The Gambians were silent the entire trip, and some of the Afreecapoeira folks expressed anger amongst themselves at the disrespect and apathy displayed by the Brazilians. On our way back to the canoe, we were late. The tour guide told us to hurry, but the Geração group followed their Brazilian *mestres*, stripped down to their bikini's and swim trunks on this historic landmark, and jumped off the dock one by one, doing flips, dives and cannonballs, laughing and splashing while the irritated canoe driver waited in the boat. None of the Africans went swimming. Geração's trip to the Gambia—and the subsequent disregard for Kunta Kinte island and making real connections (or even speaking to) the African capoeiristas that idealized them so heavily—was proof of the purely symbolic nature of Brazilians and other foreigners' interest in doing capoeira in Africa, rather than in African capoeiristas themselves.

Foreign Showcase of African Authenticity

Instances of French diasporic chauvinism emerged in the collaborations over the final performance for the International Day of Slavery. During show rehearsals, my teacher Pierre brought me in to play *pandeiro* for the portion of the show that was to depict the beginnings of *capoeira angola*. Upon seeing me with the other musicians, Iguana was upset at my assumption that I could be included, and forced me out of the rehearsal. Her reasoning was that they wanted

the depiction to be historically accurate, and there were no women doing *capoeira angola* in the 1940s when it started to develop as a separate genre. Pierre was upset that they kicked me out, and whispered that there were definitely no white people either, signaling to the fact that only one African was cast to play in one of the featured games. The rest were responsible for the orchestra in the background. *Capoeira angola* came out of a racially-motivated movement by its cultural author Mestre Pastinha. He aimed to re-Africanize capoeira, as he felt it had been "whitened" since Mestre Bimba sanitized it for the purposes of national public acceptance and consumption. If the marked bodies of the performers were to be a barrier to an "authentic" representation of the historical bodies they aimed to represent, then somehow gender diversity was categorically inappropriate while colorblind casting went unnoticed.

Our last day in the Gambia, we put on a show for the International Day of Slavery at the Institut Français. The show was directed by Cebola and Maré, and featured primarily the French capoeiristas. The Gambians that they came to the continent to collaborate with, were an afterthought, sprinkled in here and there, but not featured in the major scenes. Afreecapoeira was treated strangely. At first, they were all largely ignored by the French and the Brazilians. They made little effort to include them with the members of the Dakar-based group, so the group kept to themselves. After a couple days, when we had a proper *roda* and they saw that many of the members of Afreecapoeira were advanced in their skill level, they began to socialize with them a bit more and include us in the activities (e.g. using us for teaching demonstrations; giving us parts in the show). I was housed in the women's room with Ndeye. The women spoke to neither of us for days; some would not respond when we greeted them, and Ndeye and I expressed our mutual discomfort to one another. Ndeye left the trip early for a show she had scheduled to perform in with her Brazilian drumming group in Dakar. Later, she explained that the attitude of the French women towards her compelled her to leave earlier than anticipated.

After one of the workshops, Cebola wanted to express himself to the group in Portuguese, and they elected me to translate his speech into English. Up until that point I had stayed pretty quiet, and I think they all mostly thought I spoke French. After they saw me translate his speech, the women suddenly had a million questions for me that night. Who was I, where was I from and what was I doing here? When I told them I was a doctoral student from the US, their whole attitude toward me changed. The women were much friendlier for the remainder of the event. One woman, Iguana, of Arab descent from France, began to show off the capoeira literature she brought on the trip, and expressed her strong feelings that capoeira is about breaking down all barriers of race, language, gender and nationality, and unifying people under the same activity, one with such extraordinary historical depth.

After the formal show, while the audience moved on to a dance party in the courtyard, the French and Brazilian crew quickly snuck back to one of the changing rooms where they hid a tray of pizza designated for all the performers, and a bottle of cachaça, both of which they consumed before any of the African artists had a chance to see them. The Gambians pleaded with the members of Afreecapoeira during preparation for the show not to return to Dakar the next morning, because they felt slighted, and there was never a real opportunity for the African schools to connect and play together. Pierre, the main instructor in Afreecapoeira, countered their pleas, reminding them that we had all played with one another in many *rodas* over the course of the week. Regardless of the factuality of his statement, everyone understood that those *rodas* were mostly dominated by the French players. They never really belonged to the rest of the participants. Once the show was over, Idrissa, an Afreecapoeira member, and I picked up some of the leftover instruments on stage, and began to play softly to pass the time. Amadou, of the Gambian school, approached us and, without a word, he kneeled down in front, proposing a game. Idrissa handed his instrument to another Gambian and joined Amadou in a slow, silent

game. More people joined and tacitly, a pattern was established: those from the Gambian school bought the game with an Afreecapoeira player and vice versa, so that it was as if our schools were two teams that had entered a cooperative game.

A spontaneous *roda* sprang up of all the players from the Gambian and Senegalese schools on the same stage where we just performed. The *roda* had an entirely different feeling to it than any other that week. It was not overly aggressive, competitive, or showy; there was a tone of quiet seriousness. The *roda* became instructive, with Afreecapoeira teaching the Gambian students the proper rules of how to enter the *roda* and buy a game, or how to play the instruments, all with silent motions in place of verbal instructions in order to avoid breaking the rhythm of the event. A couple of the French Geração students discovered the *roda* and joined in to play a few games, but then stood respectfully to the side of the *roda*, as if to honor that it was not for them. Once it was over, Pierre told me we had to arrange for them to come to Dakar soon to do a workshop with us them for free so that they could improve their game, intending to build up the basic skills of West African schools so that foreigners will not be able to mock them for any inadequacies they might attribute to the capoeira in the region.

What made this capoeira *encontro* stand out from the others was the way West African capoeiristas responded to a week-long cultural and historical "exchange" that centered them symbolically, but did not include them structurally. As a result, West Africans recentered their goals on bonding with one another. By routing their aspirations and activities through diasporic narratives and art forms, they wound up building a stronger regional pan-Africanism. It was through the "failure" of equal inclusion in the formal activities that they were able to connect with their national neighbors in a subtle but significant turn of events. This is especially true, considering what is suggested by chapter three that many of the West African youth inclined towards capoeira are looking for international black connections rather than regional African

ones).

The *To Blo Dayi* Case*:* Diasporic Misrecognitions and French Chauvinism

These days, there is video documentation of nearly everything. If not a full-length film, cultural events are heavily documented on all sides through iPhone snapshots or GoPro cameras, not to mention all the candid moments captured and archived on social media. Every capoeira "encounter" I attended ended with a slew of documentation at every level. People took selfies on their own phones, someone had a professional camera, some even a hired media company to create DVDs of the event. The more curated films created by European visitors are often crafted in a celebratory spirit of cross-cultural collaboration. The camera angles are often unconventional to heighten the cool factor of their exotic journey, or the fisheye lens of a GoPro, quickly becoming a standard of popular capoeira videos, making the movements of the game seem more dramatic, almost anti-gravitational. These films do not provide full coverage of everything that occurred during these events. Instead, they are an inherently partial statement on behalf of the filmmaker/practitioner/participant about their take on these events, and how they would like to portray that to the world. In this regard, dissecting these films is useful in that they provide a coherent narrative of the imagined happenings (and often the desires prior to going) of these "cultural exchanges" or "pilgrimages" from the perspective of some of the foreign attendees that helped to realize such a project in the first place.

The intentional nature of creating a documentary style film for outside viewership should not be conflated with the far less simplistic experiences and desires of the filmmakers themselves; however, the construction of the narrative through editing are telling of the decisions of what to show and what not to show. Therefore, they can still speak to an ideological framework from

which we can glean an understanding of what these events were intended to do. Filming however, especially in a documentary style, does not mean that the filmmaker has full control over what occurs in the frame. While the camera might have captured something in the center of the screen, the margins are full of unintentionally captured interactions. Furthermore, the sequencing of interviews may have been ordered to tell a certain kind of narrative, and yet the content can also reveal an entirely alternative one. Here, I want to dissect a particularly revealing film created by José Huerta, a white man from a French capoeira school, about a capoeira pilgrimage his school took with their Afro-Brazilian instructor Mestre Manoel to Benin.

The *To Blo Dayi* trip's premise was two-fold: for foreign capoeiristas to connect with African capoeiristas on the ground, and for Mestre Manoel in particular to "return" to Africa from which his life's practice and his ancestors originated. Based on the spirit of pilgrimage, the event was divided into two differently themed weeks. The first week was a standard capoeira "encounter," in which the invited guest *mestre* and others of expertise would carry out workshops for the entire group, as well as develop some choreographies. That week would culminate in a final performance for the public that would showcase capoeira while telling the story of its development in the broader narrative of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The workshops ending in a final show are standard for these kind of events, not just in Africa but around the world. However, the choreographing of the history of the slave trade is particularly standard in encounters in Africa, because it emphasizes the weight of capoeira's "return."

In Huerta's film, the structure of the interviews was the clearest representation of these French diasporic chauvinisms. Huerta's film featured an omniscient narrator's voice, that of a white Frenchman presumed to be the objective dispenser of guiding information that the viewer would need to have a strong background understanding of what they saw in the film and to grasp the significance of the events that unfolded. For the content itself, there was a clear divide

between what his interviews with Africans contributed to the documentary's narrative and what the Europeans, in addition to one white Brazilian, contributed. Every French person that was interviewed on screen was an expert of capoeira history and knowledge. Interviews with Europeans were the tool for explaining the history of the (African) instruments, the philosophy of the art form, the meaning behind each movement, the goal of the game, the spirit and energy surrounding the practice, and what it feels like to play.

They were also used to explain more than just the technical aspects of the sport. Any information about the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and how that context of imperialism connected Benin to Brazil, connected Beninese/Yoruba voodoo religious traditions to Candomblé and Candomblé to capoeira, came strictly from interviews with Mestre Manoel, the white practitioners, and the faceless objective narrator. Even the current relationships between Brazilians and Africans were only explained through the narration of non-Africans. One scene depicted a French capoeirista explaining the history of capoeira and the slave trade in Brazil to a table of Beninese students, quietly taking notes. Given the context of diasporic chauvinism that cloaked the event, this scene can be read another way, as well as several others in the film, in which there is a silent audience. French and Brazilians displayed instructing silent audiences of Africans about the African diaspora.

Musical Expertise: the Semi-African Berimbau

The Cotonou leg of the journey opens with shots of people nonchalantly lounging on plastic chairs on the side of the road, then shows the entrance of the CCF (French Cultural Center), then cuts to a grassy area inside the CCF where the Togolese capoeiristas from *Nukunu*—known for their acrobatic propensity—were taking turns doing acrobatic sequences

across the grass with the ease of professional gymnasts, and running up the side of a palm tree into a backflip. The next scene cuts to filmmaker José Huerta, who opens his own interview by saying he is going to explain the structure of the music used in *capoeira angola*. He begins with a description of "axé", an energy in capoeira that he defines as a "very deep force" found through music, food and religion that can set someone into a kind of trance. During the whole interview, Huerta is holding the *berimbau* instrument in his hand. He explains that in order to transmit the trance-inducing energy to the capoeiristas playing in the *roda*, you need the *berimbau*. In diasporic chauvinist fashion, Huerta elected himself the documentary's historian of the principle instrument in capoeira, and therefore the cultural authority on the instrument's African antecedents. He explains:

> When it came from Africa, it didn't have the *dobrão*, the little rock to be able to do *dong ding* the two notes. There was just one note *dong dong dong dong*. There was no *caxixi*, which is a typically Brazilian instrument, and there was no calabash. And it was an instrument, "mouth arch" actually, like a *guimbarde* (Jew's harp), and they went "ahh" like that (pretending to strike notes while opening his mouth just over the stick). It was a ritual instrument of the hunters that were then taken to Brazil in captivity. In *capoeira angola*, the master that invented, that sanctified it was Mestre Pastinha. He had a dream, and he dreamed that like in African religion, in the religion of candomblé there are three *atabaques*, he said we will put three *berimbaus*.

The cousin instrument Huerta likely describes is the *mvet*, another bow-like instrument created by the Fang people of Gabon and Cameroon (Alexandre 1974). While the caxixi was not a component of the early version of the *mvet*, it is an instrument commonly used in traditional music throughout West Africa, even for fertility ceremonies among the Kabye in northern Togo. Every iteration of the *mvet* did, in fact, contain a calabash, the 14th century version containing only one at the bottom (which is the style that was preserved in Brazil and remains in that form for capoeira to this day), and the contemporary Gabonese version containing three calabashes. My goal here is not to point out the historical inaccuracy of his claims, which he likely learned

from his Brazilian *mestre*. Rather, I am highlighting the chauvinistic lack of deference inherent in the act of electing himself as the authority on the African-derived instrument, instead of one of his African colleagues who was likely in a better position to confirm or deny the existence of the *mvet's* Brazilian additions. While his interview carried on, it jumped between scenes of a mini-music session with a few of the other event participants, in which Huerta was playing lead berimbau, dancing and animating the session as he initiated the call and response with "Venha ver angola, venha ver angola," or "come see angola, come see angola," The irony of the French invitation to "come see Angola" was masked by the sense of jovial musical collaboration shrouding the scene.

African Capoeiristas as Evidence

What purpose then did interviews with Africans serve in the film? The Africans are generally positioned in a form of becoming, of learning, being initiated into capoeira, while the French are already presumed to be formed, to know what they're doing enough to be able to explain and teach it. In one scene, a French practitioner, David, explains the intellectual significance of *capoeira angola*'s history from a position of expertise to a group of young Beninese men and women taking notes at his informal lecture. Then the scene cuts to a Senegalese capoeirista who is positioned as the "proof" of someone who learned *capoeira regional,* but his experiences and feelings dictate that he is eventually drawn to the spirituality and wisdom of *capoeira angola*, a veritable example of the ostensible African authenticity of Mestre Pastinha's vision.

Apollo, Mohammed, and Fassassi are the three main Africans interviewed for the film, and all three are positioned as objects of capoeira's influence rather than being experts in it.

Whereas the white practitioners are positioned as explainers of the history, Africans serve as the material proof of capoeira's social development, cultural collaboration and individual healing potential. For example, Mohammed Sanou created his own capoeira school in Burkina Faso to signal the positive outcome of the history of enslavement (and reclaim it). Or, take how Apollo described his personal relationship with capoeira:

> I entered into the capoeira world in 2001. And it really touched me. Capoeira really like educated me, it really showed me a lot of things, life values that I had categorically ignored. To tell the truth, I had a childhood that was very very very difficult, very complicated. So at a certain moment it was to the point that I thought that in order to be respected and have importance in life you had to impose violence and have money. That was life for me. And with capoeira I realized that it was diametrically the opposite. And the objective of *Berimbau Sagrado* is to valorize African capoeira, in all its horizons. True, capoeira was born in Brazil. Today in Europe you see tons of capoeira groups that are born, that grow, in the United States, all over the world except in Africa. Yet capoeira has an African part to it.

While the audio runs, the shot cuts to him practicing his interpretive dance solo on stage, shaking his head and hands vigorously while swaying left and right.

The film sets out to treat the events participants as capoeiristas of different backgrounds all on equal footing, while at the same time the African practitioners are inserted as locals newly affected by capoeira's life transforming potential. Meanwhile, the non-Africans are called upon primarily for their expertise. The significance of contemporary African capoeira groups is also somewhat tangential to the narrative of the film. While the chauvinists are emphasizing how African capoeira already is, the African practitioners are calling for space and attention to their new project that is of something not only distinct from Afro-Brazilian capoeira, but an innovation. For example, when Contramestre Fassassi (Mahamadou Fassassi) appears on screen, there is no more of a special introduction than anyone else as was done in the objective narrators framing of Mestre Manoel's personal journey, despite the fact that CM Fassassi was the main

host, organizer, and one of the highest ranking African capoeiristas in Africa. CM Fassassi introduces himself in a similar fashion to other African interviewed: "I am from Agoue, one of the most historic cities in Benin. Morengue is a folkloric dance like capoeira that is practiced in all the Indian ocean, most especially in the Reunion Islands." Again, here you see the African interviewee as a local specialist, bringing authenticity, localism, non-Afro-Brazilian elements into the fold, which actually also works against what a lot of them (Apollo most explicitly) are expressing: that capoeira itself is African and needs to be reclaimed. Even in the way they compare other forms to capoeira, they are folding it within this repertoire of African (and Afro-derived) art forms. But at the same time, capoeira remains the most central practice to their experiences.

French Capoeiristas: Pilgrims, Narrators or Vacationers?

In the context of the capoeira *encontro* in Benin, the French enacted their diasporic chauvinism in two related modalities. One was by acting as *mediator* between Africans and Afro-diasporans; the other was through asserting themselves as *authoritative narrator,* or expert, of diasporic history. The two expressions, mediator and narrator, are inextricably linked, and can therefore be conceived of as two sides of the same chauvinistic coin. However, parsing the two allows for a more nuanced reading of the way their ability to switch back and forth between mediator and narrator serves to try and neutralize any suspicions of whites' place in these matters. David, for instance, is the quintessential French chauvinist, disguised as mediator. He oscillates between elucidating various audiences with his expert knowledge and playing referee for the ensuing dynamics between the two major Afro "sides." The latter is evinced by an early comment he makes in the film. He is explaining the significance of the event to an outsider to these

dynamics:

> There is a very strong African origin in capoeira, but actually there are very few real ties between them, the ties are very mythical between Africa and Brazil. Brazilians know little of Africa and Africans in general know little of Brazil. So going to Benin, one of the countries with the most major slave port, and vodun which is foundational to the powerful Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé, with other capoeiristas including African ones, it is a very unique occasion and an extremely rare event.

His positioning of himself as expert is not limited to the baseline historical facts, such as Benin being the site of historical slave ports and the home of the religious tradition that preceded (and is coterminous with) Candomblé. He also offers up as fact that Brazilians and Africans at present have a weak relationship despite these cultural connections. This statement about historical proximity, but contemporary distance, sets up his final point about the "unique" and "extremely rare" circumstances of their auspicious journey. But what is it that is presumably closing this gap that was centuries in the making? What exactly is returning, and to whom is it returning? The implication is that Mestre Manoel, as an Afro-Brazilian, is the physical embodiment of the thing returned. His black body is triply imbued with historical significance of diasporic return because of his initiation into Candomblé and his life's work as a *mestre* of capoeira. Capoeira itself is thus both an object of this "unique return," as well as the vehicle of return for pilgrims like Mestre Manoel. While this seems like a straightforward description of events—Afro-derived tradition returning to Africa—what remains open to interpretation is who is considered responsible for returning it. Is capoeira, therefore, the vehicle for returning lost kin? Or, is the return capoeira itself being returned by those deemed to possess it? If the latter, it negates the work already accomplished by African capoeristas who began their own capoeira schools and who are already trained and participating in this event. This option also presumes that if capoeira is the object to be returned, then there is a more democratic arena for who can be responsible for returning it,

which then neutralizes anything presumably problematic about white French nationals teaching Africans an Afro-derived art form (that the Africans they're teaching are already trained in).

Questions surrounding authorship, participation, and the object of inquiry or "objective" but influential narrator infect every interaction. This is why each person's presumption of their role in these (yes, historic) gatherings, is important to nuance.

In the second leg of the group's journey, they traveled to the city of Ouidah, known for its connection to the precolonial Dahomean kingdom, its centrality in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and its continued connection to Brazil through formerly enslaved Afro-Brazilians who repatriated there after abolition in 1888. Again, we encounter David imparting knowledge about the event:

> [What] I find to be really powerful about this experience is in fact to really return…or rather go to the source of capoeira that in fact, in the sense of what happened, what had occurred with capoeira in Africa, in any case, according to what we've seen, is a lot of exterior, physical aspects. Capoeira is not acrobatics, the essence of capoeira is a philosophy, it's a spirituality that is then transmitted through movement, through music, through songs.

David's slippage in his first statement is very telling of his position as a diasporic chauvinist. His first instinct to express the "experience" of "return", which he then adjusts to "or rather *go to* the source of capoeira," displaying an ambivalence between speaking from his firsthand experience, but on behalf of a "returnee", or speaking as a "returner" of capoeira. If that's not enough to peg him with the seemingly harsh accusation of a chauvinist, his following lines reiterate his self-proclaimed expertise about contemporary black relations in the capoeira world. It is unclear what he is referring to when he discusses what "occurred with capoeira in Africa…according to what we've seen." He could either be referencing West African cultural practices that fed what ultimately became Brazilian capoeira, or be referring to current existing African capoeira schools,

and therefore, implicitly referring to African capoeiristas like Apollo, CM Fassassi, Koes and Mohammed, with whom he is collaborating under the pretenses of "cultural exchange." His later statement that "capoeira is not acrobatics", seems to refer to the capoeira he saw African practitioners engaged in. His evaluation of "what he saw" describes an activity void of spiritual and philosophical content. In one fell swoop he relegates this African practice to the "physical" side of a Cartesian mind-body dualism he presumes possible in this African context, and then asserts that a deeper level of metaphysical engagement exists in the Brazilian diasporic context. This presumptive comparison orients Brazil as the site of capoeira's "true" origins, the place from which profound meaning was added to the mere physicality inherited from Africa. This is also David's first time on the African continent, therefore his knowledge of contemporary African capoeira is limited to the two-week event (in fact, he had been there roughly one week when the interview took place). Despite being a novice to this cultural landscape, his position as an experienced capoeirista trained under an Afro-Brazilian allows him to position himself as an expert on the difference between African and Afro-Brazilian expressive arts and religious practices.

African Capoeiristas Strike Back

People espousing diasporic chauvinism assert (unearned) authority over other practitioners within a hegemonic framework that structures Afro-diasporic relations. A hierarchy of cultural knowledge emerges that occludes realities on the ground, such as new forms of African expertise, or innovation that might disrupt that common narrative. From the perspective of several West African participants in the event, the French were not humble participants, nor were they passive mediators of this Afro-diasporic cultural and personal exchange. They were

perceived as a dominating force that saw themselves as the center of the event. Ibrahim, a Burkinabé participant and co-founder (with Apollo) of the Senegalese capoeira school *Berimbau Sagrado* (Sacred *Berimbau*), reflected on the events of *To Blo Dayi* with mixed feelings of self-growth and black intimacy undercut by European disruption:

> We felt a little excluded by the French who acted like they came just for vacation and not to connect with us. But Manoel was there to discover Africa, and I exchanged with him a lot. In just a small amount of time I evolved a ton in capoeira, especially in *capoeira angola*. Everyone noticed when I came back. My *mandinga* and my bodily expression. He transmitted me something. The rest were his students and they didn't care at all, they stuck to themselves. There were even clashes. We didn't fight but there were clashes, critiques, we had a meeting about it. We noticed they were keeping to themselves and they didn't want to mix with everyone else. They really came for vacation, not for a cultural exchange. But the event was a cultural exchange. So that means you exchange with people and teach each other. Even in the *roda*, you feel it, that sense of supremacy. They played with the Africans but then they try to dominate them to show that they are better. They do certain things to hurt you. And we could change our game too and try to be violent and hurt them but we didn't.

Ibrahim indicated two strong critiques of French participation. Firstly, they physically segregated themselves from the Africans with whom they came to "culturally exchange," and through that segregation assumed an air of "supremacy" and "domination." Interestingly, his reading of their supremacist (read: chauvinist) attitude comes out of a reading of their physical separation (eating separately for instance, as he later explained), but primarily their behavior inside the capoeira *roda*. At the very site of their shared practice, the reason for their coming together on common ground, arose the place in which their chauvinism—their assertion of their expertise and duty to protect the practice at the expense of African physical interlocutors—took shape. If the body is the primary starting point for the reception and expression of ideology (Merleau-Ponty 1962), then bodily performance and everyday cultural gestures can yield a great deal of information about people's social conditioning and intended statements (Covington-Ward 2016). According to Ibrahim's account, the display of superior diasporic knowledge made by the

French on screen was paralleled by their behavior in the *roda*. The difference between the two contexts, however, is that in the film their displayed expertise compounded their roles as mediators and authoritative narrators bringing the contemporary dynamics of the capoeira world to an unknown audience.

In the *roda*, their interaction was a physical dialogue—a kind of "question and answer" as capoeiristas often describe the game—with African interlocutors, in which they used their expertise (gained through their privileged access to a Brazilian *mestre* in France) in an attempt to subordinate Africans. In doing so, the French physically manifested the hierarchy of diaspora they constructed through the narrative of their interview statements. Brazilians were the experts, the French a close-second (even able to step in for the Brazilian experts), and Africans fell in line as the least relevant contributors to diasporic knowledge about capoeira. Such a hierarchy ultimately serves to privilege the Brazilian context (albeit *Afro*-Brazilian) and relegate present-day Africans to a subjugated role as historical source rather than contemporary innovators. Within this schema there is little room for these positions to shift, instead fixing the separation of Europeans and Africans, and creating space for what Ibrahim perceived as the inappropriate use of aggression in the context of an event premised on cultural exchange.

A second critique can be drawn from Ibrahim's more subtle remark that the French capoeristas did not take seriously the premise of the event as a historic occasion of "exchange" or return. He asserts that they "really came for vacation," rather than the reciprocally pedagogical relationship he imagined would motivate one to participate in this kind of trip. He contrasts this with Mestre Manoel's attitude as outside of the vein of chauvinism, despite Manoel's position as the cultural authority and center of the event. Ibrahim learned valuable diasporic knowledge through Manoel's expertise by way of a reciprocal exchange humbled by sincerity. His language illustrates that Manoel "transmitted [him] something" that resulted in a lasting change in his own

"mandinga and [sic] bodily expression." This exchange sharply contrasts with the white Europeans' engagement with him either through physical distance or aggression. One could also argue that Ibrahim experienced an acutely *racial* sincerity from Mestre Manoel, in which case their connection was founded upon a sense of racial unity as black people (Jackson 2005). Other West African attendees also expressed having learned a great deal of valuable information from the Mestre, and similarly admired his humility and consideration. This possibility must then also be understood within the broader framework of Mestre Manoel's personal "return" as an African descendant and an initiate of Candomblé. Whereas I would argue that Mestre Manoel did not exhibit diasporic chauvinism, his journey of return also served to reinscribe the same framework of diaspora that also worked to occlude African realities on the ground, displayed in the second part of the trip in Cotonou.

Pilgrimage and Religion among Capoeiristas

Earlier in the chapter we saw how an attitude of diasporic chauvinism can signal deeper concerns about the misrecognition of desires of racial unity, or unity over shared history of racial oppression and racialized cultural technologies of overcoming oppressive forces (i.e. capoeira). Through the lens of religious and spiritual practices, new factors come into play that dig even deeper into the thick barrier of misrecognition that causes conflict and disjuncture within expressive cultural communities with the same stated intentions of diasporic exchange, connection and repair. Religion and spirituality introduce new forces to reckon with. They bring to light the limits of racial unity discourse against aspirations of modernity that, more than anything, speak to the connected, but disparate, historical processes that shape the postcolonial West African context and the postcolonial Brazilian context.

For Brazilians (and their Western students) seeking pilgrimage to capoeira's origins, Africa is not only the site of much of the physical movements/movement ideologies and instrumentation. It is also the site of the religious tradition, Candomblé, that developed alongside capoeira in colonial Brazil. While capoeira is not considered a religious practice in and of itself, it developed alongside Candomblé in the same environment of slave markets in colonial Brazil. Historically, capoeristas, if not also initiates of Candomblé themselves, have often supported the religious tradition by drumming for the ritual dances assigned to each divinity (Assunção 2005; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008). Many symbolic elements of Candomblé have made their way into capoeira song lyrics as well, that signal the close relationship between these two Afro-diasporic traditions of cultural hybridity (Lewis 1992). For instance, many songs sing praise to particular *orixás*, such as *Ogum*, the god of iron and war, or *Iemanja*, the goddess of the sea, as they also call for protection over the bodies and soul of the players who are about to enter the *roda*. But they also theorize freedom within the conditions of enslavement out of which traditional capoeira songs still sung today emerged. While the vast majority of Brazilians today are Roman Catholic, many monotheistic Brazilian capoeiristas engage in a kind of secularized adoration for the aspects of Candomblé within capoeira symbolism, as a way of honoring the historical makings of the tradition.

Conversely, those Africans who participated in the pilgrimage events understood capoeira and religion (of any kind) as entirely unrelated. In fact, many West Africans believed that spirituality and other religious practices had no place outside of designated practices that were delineated and predetermined by one's individually claimed faith tradition. While many of the non-African pilgrims self-identified as monotheistic or atheist, the spirituality they believed to be imbedded in the capoeira tradition by way of its proximity to Candomblé was a crucial component of the quest for origins, meaning-making and historical rectification. West African

capoeiristas, on the other hand, entered the realm of capoeira from a different vantage point that called into question the deceptive ease with which Candomblé has remained central while its core spiritual elements were often sequestered within the tradition. The spirituality within capoeira emphasized by pilgrimages for Brazilians and other foreigners was in turn threatening to West African modern sensibilities.

Diasporic Religion: Mutually Exclusive Modernities

Talal Asad challenged Clifford Geertz's seminal essay on religion because of the latter's failure to theorize the power dynamics in the production of religious knowledge (1983). Asad offered instead a genealogy of the historical particularity of the idea of "religion." In doing so, he demonstrated the epistemology of what ultimately was taken up by social scientists as universal categorizations that would then be applied to any ethnographic context without historical analysis of the production of the category of religion itself. Likewise, a historicization of what constitutes religious practice is necessary to understand the misrecognition of capoeira as a spiritual exercise, or as a practice connected to an extant religious tradition. Furthermore, the religious tradition at stake—both the Beninese and Brazilian iterations—also carry with them the burden of racist colonial and anthropological discourses that positioned African spirituality and religious institutions outside of Western modernity (Shaw 1990). These discourses have been countered by subsequent research that has centered Afro-Atlantic dialogues (Matory 1999) within Afro-diasporic religious networks; they argued for analyses of Dahomean *Óyò-Ife*, Brazilian *Candomblé*, Haitian *Vodoun* and Cuban *Santeria* to refute this racist intellectual legacy, demonstrating how they were sophisticated, modern, and transnational forms that also solidified national sensibilities (Apter 2018; Daniel 2011; Matory 2005).

While the work of these pioneers has significantly shifted the analytic possibilities for thinking about the black Atlantic world as a landscape of connectivity and innovation between continental and diasporic Africans throughout history, there is still much to be examined in the way of the role, stigmatization or innovation of black Atlantic religions in the postcolonial present, particularly in the emerging ideologies of cosmopolitan urban African youth (Pierre 2012). Furthermore, the relationship between race and religion *in Africa,* in relation to the contemporary African diaspora, has been undertheorized. This is partly because contemporary studies of religion in people's everyday lives takes for granted the overt categories of distinct religions and religious practices, while avoiding the areas in which religious orientations overlap or contradict. Islamic scholars study Islamic communities, and Christianity scholars study Christian communities, instead of looking at the ways different religious traditions and practices intersect in people's everyday lives and choices. What is left out, then, are the ways in which spiritual affiliations obscured from plain sight may, in fact, signal strategies people employ to work out other aspects of their social lives—such as racial, national or cultural ideologies.

While steadfast monotheistic beliefs and practices weakened some West Africans' predilection for Brazilian capoeira, for others, their Muslim or Christian identities were enriched and nuanced through an engagement with capoeira and the Atlantic animism that accompanied it. The diversity of West Africans' reactions to capoeira's more spiritual elements brings the discussion of transnational black kinship in the 21st century to a new level of complexity. Instead of assuming West Africans would be familiar with the Afro-derived religious aspects of capoeira, these facets of the tradition are more often points of tension, or complete disengagement with, the Afro-Brazilian art form.

The misrecognition of diasporic desires between Africans and Brazilians is most visible around the issue of capoeira's historical relationship with Candomblé, a Yoruban-derived Afro-

Brazilian religious tradition. Conflicting ideas about the centrality of African traditional religion in capoeira practice is a major barrier to many West African's adoption of the martial art wholesale. Many Brazilians treat the historical relationship between Candomblé and capoeira as a necessary component to the tradition of being a capoeirista, despite the fact that the country is 65% Roman Catholic (with a rising number of evangelical converts mirroring a trend across the Americas). Capoeira and Candomblé emerged from the same environment: the Brazilian colonial government permitted the enslaved a day free of the requirements of their labor. Sundays were the day Africans and Afro-Brazilians held "slave markets" where they sold and bought foodstuffs and other necessary items for the week. These markets were also an environment in which the enslaved socialized and gathered for musical, religious and recreational rituals, maintaining traditions they brought from West/Central Africa, while necessarily creating new ones to adapt to the multitudinous context of Portuguese, Tupí, Yoruba, Ewe/Fon/Mina, Angola/Congo and many other cultural, linguistic and religious practices. Throughout the colonial period and beyond, capoeira and Candomblé developed side by side, overlapping through many capoeiristas' decision to become initiates of the religion. It is common for capoeiristas today to assume the role of a drummer in Candomblé *terreiros*, for instance, contributing their musical talents to ritual ceremonies designed to bring out the spirit of an Orixá divinity through music and dance possession of its human conduit (Matory 2005). Furthermore, the valorization of Candomblé and capoeira are part of a larger political project in Brazil to address issues of racial inequality by highlighting Afro-Brazilian cultural practices that were denigrated by social elites for centuries (Hanchard 1999a).

As we return to the *To Blo Dayi* event, then, we can see two major themes pertaining to capoeira's relationship to religion. The first was a traditional capoeira *encontro* involving workshops and a semi-choreographed performance. The second part of the trip was dedicated to

exploring the spiritual roots of capoeira by way of discovering and engaging with Beninese vodun. Both portions of the trip resulted in unexpected reactions by participants that conflicted with the foundational premise of the event. The first part—a cultural exchange between capoeiristas from Africa, Brazil and Europe—was undermined by conflicts between Africans and French in a battle between sincere expectations and chauvinistic attitudes. The second part actually resulted in the loss of participation on the part of several African capoeiristas—a consequence not borne of conflict with white attitudes of superiority, but rather with mutually exclusive aspirations between Africans and Mestre Manoel, the Afro-Brazilian "returnee." The discrepancy between the religious orientation of the monotheistic West Africans and Manoel, an initiate of Candomblé, caused a rupture that revealed the limitations of Afro-diasporic return and African reception. The misrecognition of one another's expectations of reconnecting black Atlantic worlds speaks to the difference in Brazilian and West African processes of racialization, colonialism, and modernity. The aversion of West Africans to traditional West African religious practices that are so foundational to the lives of many Afro-Brazilians who desire to maintain a personal connection with Africa is not without a sense of irony.

For the capoeiristas who traveled to the event from other West African countries, being in Benin was an entirely new cultural environment. One of the starkest differences is Benin's open and strong relationship with vodun, a religion so often socially marginalized in other countries. Several capoeiristas visited from Senegal, a country that has its own indigenous religious practices, but boasts of a population that is 96% Muslim. "Animism" is mostly practiced undercover, away from public view, with less than 1% of the population identifying as animist (CIA 2018). Ibrahim, a Burkinabé capoeirista who settled in Senegal, described Benin in the context of the new spiritual landscape: "You feel that voodoo is strong in Benin, you see the houses where they do sacrifices in order to achieve certain things. It's like a religion over there."

Ibrahim's comment that vodun is "like a religion" speaks to the historical claim leveled against many forms of African "traditional" religion - that they are "cults" or more generally "cultural practices." They do not fall under the category of proper religion in their own right, or are relegated to a pre-monotheistic era from the perspective of Western Enlightenment (Shaw 1990). As a traditional Muslim having lived mostly in urban West African settings, Ibrahim is not likely familiar with the inner workings of such "indigenous" religious practices, particularly those of the Bight of Benin, a region he visited for the first time for the event. However, in the context of Dakar, where traditional religious practices are considered marginal, they play a major public role in the country's two most prized and nationalistic sporting events: traditional wrestling and soccer (as discussed further in Chapter 2).

Ibrahim's first impression of encountering vodun in Benin was that the spiritual practice itself was not only "strong", but visible, permeating society to a degree that extended beyond the sanctification of public sporting events. The fact that such a religion was so openly practiced and embedded in everyday Beninese life was worrisome to him, considering they "do sacrifices in order to achieve certain things." Ibrahim went on to explain his choice to avoid the spiritual activities of the event as much as possible:

> I avoided the religious aspect of the trip because I don't know it. You shouldn't mix yourself up in things that you don't understand because it's a very dense world and the energy is strong. Something can happen to you and because it's energy it's something you can't see. So you have to be careful. They use voodoo to solve certain problems and I am Muslim so that doesn't go with my religion. It's like you have a pact with God so you can't betray that to those polytheistic gods. Today you have to be very careful with mystical things. You can't just involve yourself out of curiosity. You have to see if you have the authority to do it, if you trust the person leading you to it, etc. Africa has a lot of things like that, fetishes, even in Burkina. There are entities, sorcery. After a point you can't sleep anymore, you're too scared from what you've seen. That's why you see crazy people in the street, they tried to do something they didn't understand. It really exists, crazy people aren't crazy, they have seen the invisible world.

He saw voodoo as a problem-solving spiritual technology that was capable of very powerful and even dangerous potentialities. As a monotheistic Muslim who had a "pact with God", he was not permitted to indulge any curiosity of this mystic force. By his logic, the "invisible world" of fetishes was something indigenously "African," and something to be feared, not only for the possibility of belief in it betraying God's omnipotence in Islam, but also for its potential material consequences in the earthly realm. He also spoke of an authorization to participate and an authoritative requirement to conduct certain ritual practices. His unfamiliarity with Beninese voodoo, and his fear of what he could not see (re: invisible), and what he did not know (re: curiosity), became familiar as a common "African" practice when he made the comparison to the existence of fetishism in his home country of Burkina Faso. The familiarity served him in terms of knowing to be cautious of entangling himself in the spirit world through methods unsanctioned by Islam. It, therefore, implied that those who did decide to participate in the initiation or the readings were carelessly risking their sanity, likely for an experience driven by mere curiosity. Positioning himself as a monotheistic African in regard to these affairs, he suggested that he had insider knowledge of the consequences, and therefore remained an outsider in his involvement.

Will, a Togolese capoeirista and the founder of the Lomé-based group *Nukunu*, also felt uncomfortable with the second week's theme of spiritual pilgrimage, and decided to leave the event early in part as a result of the nature of the next segment. He gave a similar explanation in terms of avoiding things you do not understand and cannot see:

> …it is not really the aspect of capoeira I am interested in practicing, the part that is very very very spiritual. I know it's like that in Brazil. You see, for example *maculêlê*, there is the aesthetic side and then there is the real version, and to be able to do this you need the orixas or some kind of spiritual protection, it's with real knives but people don't get cut, so there's a mysterious aspect. I don't want to approach this and the same thing at the festival, it was a week of initiation, it wasn't a "visit." If it was we could understand that, but it was more than that. I wasn't there because I left, but from what I heard there were people who were…well not "initiated" for real but they consulted spiritual guides. So because

> of our religion that we practice, we are not supposed to do that. So that's why we don't want to get so involved in that aspect. But those who had an affinity for this practice, I think they stayed…It's because I'm Christian. And I'm a little scared to discover things I'm probably not supposed to discover.

Will's dichotomous distinction between the "aesthetic side" and the "real version" of *maculêlê* in some ways echoed David's claim mentioned earlier about African capoeira being more "external" and "physical" rather than "spiritual" and "philosophical." However, Will's interpretation of Africans' selective participation with Afro-Brazilian expressive arts traditions was not geared toward demonstrating how Africans were missing the point in some way, or that they lacked the intellectual sophistication to understand a different level of esoteric involvement. Instead, he offered a different explanation of their conscious decision not to participate in the spiritual aspects of capoeira or *maculêlê*, one rooted in their allegiance to Christianity, as well as a cautious attitude towards the religious unknown. Similar to Ibrahim, Will's combination of monotheistic guidelines and common social-based fears of vodun's invisible potentiality prevented him from accepting Afro-Brazilian practices wholesale.

The misrecognition of ideologies about the role of religion in capoeira, and more broadly the merit of African polytheistic religions, signal differences about what constituted religion, what constituted racial healing, and what the relationship was between aspirations concerning the two. Most West African capoeristas not only held the two separately, but as entirely unrelated. They described religion as a fixed part of their identity, not because they understood their own religious practice or faith as static, but because they saw it as a foundational part of who they were, one that could not be destabilized by an activity or association external to it. Often I got a puzzled look when during interviews I asked if their capoeira was in any way connected to their religious orientation: *What do they have to do with each other?* In fact, to mix the two, to even think of them as connected, is an exercise a few undertake only when they discover the spiritual

symbolism within capoeira music that alluded to its historical connection to Candomblé. Upon discovery, they are concerned that they might be involving themselves in sacrilegious practice, and question whether or not capoeira is sanctioned by Islam or Christianity, which I will address below. For the most part, however, West Africans practiced capoeira as a secular exercise. Therefore, ideas around the merits of capoeira in reconnecting the peoples of the black Atlantic often compartmentalized the martial art and the Afro-Atlantic dialogue (Matory 1999) that constituted the umbrella of Óyò-Dahomean religious tradition.

For Afro-Brazilian returnees, like Mestre Manoel, who grew up in a racially-conscious social sphere of Bahian Candomblé, the aspect of spiritual pilgrimage is essential to his experience of return to origins. Many West African capoeristas had an entirely different experience with religion and capoeira ultimately, and treated them as separate realms entirely. Like many of his African capoerista peers in attendance, Contramestre Fassassi, the host of the *To Blo Dayi* event, is a monotheistic Muslim. As a Muslim, he expressed contempt for the spiritual practices of vodun, claiming they were a worse atrocity to humanity than the slave trade itself. He leveled a stereotypical charge against vodun for meddling with the spirit world to carry out acts of vengeance on other human beings, acts including human sacrifice. Contramestre Fassassi is also the founder of Benin's capoeira school *Ogun Eru* named after the Orixá god of iron, which is also the name of the Yoruba state in Nigeria, an ethnic group of Fassassi's family. Despite Fassassi's position as a Beninese national, a Yoruba, and the founder of a capoeira school for which he prides himself on adhering to the standards of Brazilian *capoeira regional* movements, his personal beliefs not only held vodun/candomblé far away from his own practice, but were, in fact, in opposition to them. He suspended these opinions, nonetheless, for the sake of providing a pilgrimage experience that most closely matched the expectations of the Afro-Brazilian returnee and the French origins-seekers, in an effort to build international connections

that would ultimately strengthen the capoeira community for mutual gain. CM Fassassi and others who participated in providing an experience that, on the whole seemed primarily to serve the foreign visitors reflected a common phenomenon of West African accommodations (and suspension of personal beliefs, experiences and desires that may be in opposition) of diasporic tourism (Ebron 1999; Holsey 2008; Pierre 2012; Sawyer 2006). In the end, all participated in reinforcing a narrative of the African diaspora that privileged diasporic desires of return at the expense of marginalized African realities. Meanwhile, the practical interactions that perpetuated that narrative through a continued construction of relationships fell under the same mold.

The presumption that the Africans in attendance would be comfortable with the spiritual portion of the trip did not take into consideration the contemporary landscape of religious practice in urban West Africa. The geographic destination met the needs of those in pilgrimage seeking to find the "source" of capoeira's spiritual aspects due to its relationship with Candomblé that is derived from Beninese vodun. However, the geographic calculation was conflated with the participant calculation. In other words, the two main goals of the French and Brazilian's "return" to Africa—1) to search for the origins of capoeira's cultural knowledge and 2) to engage with African capoeiristas—were, in fact, somewhat incompatible. Africa, the cultural landscape that contributed to what later became Brazilian capoeira, and the West Africans who became capoeiristas in the contemporary moment, could not so easily be subsumed under the same rubric of a pilgrimage journey.

Innovative Diasporic Religiosity

Some West African practitioners grappled with the gap between their devotion to the sport and some of its incongruities with the context of postcolonial modernity, particularly in the

realm of religious faith. Marie, for instance, was to be exorcised from the evil spirits inhabiting her as a result of becoming a capoeirista. An Ivorian woman in her early twenties, Marie started training capoeira with gusto under the loving, but militaristic pedagogy of her Brazilian teacher, Mestra Marcia. She was on her way to becoming one of Marcia's top students—an honor Marcia encourages all her young women to aspire to under her philosophy of capoeira as a tool of social, and particularly women's, empowerment in Africa. After Marie's unplanned pregnancy, however, she stopped training and disappeared from the scene. When she returned to training a few years later, her status as a single mother in Abidjan practicing a foreign martial art was not well received by all. An evangelist pastor friend of hers and his uncle approached her with an urgent request that she allow them to perform deliverance to rid her of the "warrior spirit" that practicing capoeira had instilled in her. According to these advisors, a good Christian woman should keep her household in order and be submissive. They prayed for her, and then asked her what she did to have this warrior spirit emanating from her. When she admitted to having practiced capoeira, they said that the spirit of combat needs to be extirpated from her being, so that she will not end up beating her future husband when she is upset with him, and so that she remains softer and more spiritual. For a while, she told me, it "worked," in that she began to prioritize church and no longer considered returning to capoeira. After some time, she felt depressed and was unable to locate the source of her pain. She approached a man, now her current pastor, who encouraged her to return to the activities that she loves, and she came back to Marcia to whip her back into fighting shape.

But, Marie disagreed with Marcia's urgings to disregard the words of any pastors, and to follow her passion. Marie clearly saw the material and affective benefits of the sport to her life. The capoeira school has since provided her with gainful employment as a children's capoeira teacher. She was getting back in good physical shape after years of neglect, and her position as

one of Marcia's informal assistants gave her a sense of family (she herself was recently orphaned by the loss of her mother). Yet her own thoughts and experiences were not enough to convince her of the spiritual benefits of it, as well as her social obligations as a God-fearing woman. The potential consequences are located in the spirit world.

When they "delivered" her, she conveyed to me, the word "Iemanjá" came out of her mouth. She did not consciously choose to utter the name of the Brazilian Orixá, goddess of the sea. She used passive voice, "it came out" to suggest the word came not of her own volition (which she found particularly telling, because in the Baoulé religious tradition, she comes from a family of water spirits). Naturally, a deliverance would draw Iemanjá out of her, as a water goddess in the Yoruba religious traditions of Benin and Nigeria, but also throughout the Americas. Her use of the Portuguese nomenclature further suggests that "Iemanjá" was a reference to a specifically Brazilian context (Cohen 2009; Matory 2005). While she demonstrated the connection between the Brazilian Candomblé goddess and Baoulé religious cosmologies, she discovered while being exorcised of capoeira's evil, she still saw incongruence between the passion she felt for capoeira and its seemingly immoral nature. This tension does not yet seem fully resolved, as she recounts how the deliverance could not keep her from capoeira entirely, but how it did trigger a period of religious piety.

Not all African capoeiristas fell into the category of monotheists who maintained opposition against the religious/spiritual potentialities of capoeira. Some conceptualized capoeira as a means of religious syncretism, while still identifying as Muslim or Christian. In describing the spiritual reading Mestre Manoel underwent in Cotonou, Apollo explained that "we did Candomblé", and some were even initiated, a rite he said he came very close to undergoing, but decided not to in the end. Similar to Marie, Apollo also used the Brazilian terminology as his reference point for describing the Beninese vodun initiation he nearly received during the second

week of the event. These religious iterations of Yoruban traditions, while coming from a similar root, are not necessarily interchangeable, because of the different geographical contexts from which each developed. Apollo's use of "Candomblé" as the default term, even though he was describing Beninese vodun, indicated his subjectivity as a capoeirista most prominently. His introduction into the world of vodun first came from the context most closely associated with Brazilian capoeira that he likely learned through instructors and books that talked about Candomblé's shared history.

Similar to the framework I elaborated in chapter two, Apollo has "become diasporically African," in the sense that his pursuit of a deeper engagement with an embodied knowledge of his Africanness (most broadly defined because he is a Senegalese Muslim nearly undergoing initiation into a Beninese traditional religious practice) was routed through Brazilian cultural practices. His methods were self-selected and therefore more familiar vehicles through which to expand his definition of himself as an African. Apollo expressed that although he was already both a highly developed capoeirista and a Muslim (which is how he still primarily identifies), it was on the *To Blo Dayi* trip to Benin that he really discovered the religious aspects of capoeira that "very much enriched [him] spiritually." He was not only spiritually enriched by the overtly religious section of the program in which they met with a vodun priest to witness Mestre Manoel's receiving spiritual counsel. Rather, it was after the fact, when he was playing capoeira, that he began to feel a deep internal shift in his person. "I was no longer myself." It was through the embodiment and performative enactment of these experiences and beliefs that his transformation took place.

Apollo's capoeira-driven, diasporically African subjectivity was even further instantiated when he made the comparison of Candomblé with his own cultural context:

> My family here in Senegal also does Candomblé, they call it *ndeup* or *tuur*. We've practiced it for a long time. I had a grandfather [who lived] abroad and when he came back he broke all the things and said they were fetishes and now my family doesn't practice it anymore.

Again, the Brazilian terminology was ground zero and the variation was the Senegalese (i.e. "they call it *ndeup/tuur,*" referring to a Lebou ritual ceremony[24] involving drumming, dancing and sacrifices to appease ancestral spirits in the service of healing a person from spirit possession). He was referring to himself as well, as a Wolof-speaking Senegalese and also as a person having grown up in a household of practitioners of what he essentially conceptualized as the *Senegalese* Candomblé. His family's animism inspired in his grandfather the same anxiety of anti-modernity that African traditional religions (and their diasporic derivations) faced through the history of European imperialism and in the present. Apollo grew up in a Muslim family, but like much of Senegal's Muslim population, "animism" is often at the foundation of their beliefs and practices, the "canvas on which Islam and Christianity are written[25]." His comparison of Candomblé to *ndeup*, however, was not a particularly apparent one to make. While Candomblé is a direct descendant of vodun, due to the fact that practitioners of the latter developed the former while adapting it to a new context, *ndeup* was not a religious tradition shown to have had a strong survival in the Americas, let alone a connection to Brazilian Candomblé in particular. Despite the lack of scholarly research, capoeiristas like Apollo found the comparison salient because of its potential for sincere and material methods of reconnecting lost kin from slavery across the Atlantic divide.

Pauline, a Senegalese capoeirista, also invoked *ndeup* in expressing appreciation for the martial art beyond simply exercise and camaraderie. While she herself was Christian and

[24] The Lebou are an ethnic group considered indigenous to Cape Verde and parts of Senegal.
[25] Personal correspondence with Cheikh Anta Babou.

expressed that she was fearful of the ceremony, she conceptualized *ndeup* as a religious technology capable of returning African captives whose spirits remained in the Americas after they were sent away. Scholarship from early French anthropology to Counseling Psychology has analyzed *ndeup*, primarily describing it as a treatment for mental illness that practitioners understand to manifest in the form of possession (Balandier 1948; Collomb and Ayats 1962; Monteiro and Wall 2011; Sylla and Gueye 2001; Tamba 2016). Traditionally *ndeup* was a practice shrouded in secrecy, as the ceremony is quite powerful. Today, one can find recordings on YouTube, and many religious communities practice it across the African diaspora in various forms.

By highlighting a particular function of the ceremony, she made a rare connection between *ndeup* and Brazilian kin she felt further connected to through her practice of capoeira. Capoeira, for her a secular activity, allowed her to have a deeper connection with those sent across the Atlantic that she sees as lost kin. Pauline's unique ideological contribution is thus not recognizing the parallelism with diasporic communities, but rather the ability of *ndeup* to quite literally return the spirits of those ancestors who died in captivity away from their families in Africa. Furthermore, she saw capoeira in a similar vein, not just a metaphorical way of memorializing the shared painful history, but as a material method of correcting the separation and returning diasporic souls to their rightful "home" on the African continent.

Pauline evoked a religious practice that served to repair the destruction of African sociality and kinship caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Rather than address capoeira and its religious connections directly, Pauline's involvement in capoeira was largely motivated by the fact that it was a concrete physical practice that connected her with the history of slavery, and with her ancestors lost overseas. As a Muslim she was monotheistic and did not participate in traditional religious practices, however, she conceptually weaved together history, religion and art

in a unique fashion that depicted her perspective of the contemporary moment and reflected her innovative black cosmopolitanism. Pauline's perspective, while ostensibly parallel to the assumption behind diasporic spiritual and cultural "returnees" like Mestre Manoel, is one caught between the hegemonic construction of the African diaspora and the realities on the ground of African aspirations to monotheistic modernity.

Conclusion

Before we left to return to Dakar from the "Cultural Crossroads" event in Banjul, a few of the Gambian capoeiristas untied the Brazilian flag colored ribbons used to decorate the performance space, and braided them into bracelets that they distributed only to the members of the African schools. I saw this gesture as an interesting metaphor for the type of pan-African unity in this time and place. The historical connections between Senegal and the Gambia are well known. Prior to the existence of two separate countries, the region of Senegambia was once a single unit under colonial rule between vying British and French forces attempting to collaborate trade centers. The people shared the Wolof language and other cultural traditions that today are falsely divided by former colonial borders. Yet it is significant, and perhaps unlikely, that young people living in this region today find solace and solidarity from exclusion, not just on the basis of their shared colonial and precolonial histories, but in fact *through* the cultural premise of a diasporic expressive art foreign to both. In other words, these West African young people imagine themselves as part of a transnational community as a way of connecting to their next-door neighbors. It is a significant nuancing of the history of pan-African movements that have sought unity with far away black communities. In this case, it was through the failure of that outstretched unity that they came together as West Africans, still with a shared diasporic vision.

Presented with the choice between engaging with African innovation and holding on to what they perceive to be concrete pillars of capoeira practice during these events, Brazilians often choose the latter. This is perhaps unsurprising when read simply as Brazilians working to preserve the core fundamentals of capoeira, such as maintaining Portuguese as the sole acceptable language for music. However, this only seems to take care of the technical aspect of the sport. What of their role as cultural ambassadors to a history whose very survival is a testament to the value of African freedom, humanity and expression, past and present?

West African capoeiristas often have limited access to the economic resources and, therefore, to cultural opportunities that would grant them a) their own pilgrimages to Brazil b) access to Brazilian capoeira training c) access to reconnecting and healing historical trauma in their own right, and not just as hosts catering to the aspirations of diasporic blacks. I have also found that some Europeans, primarily French, act as neocolonial forces that operate as if black cultural traditions also belong to them. They insert themselves as the rightful authors of knowledge production around Afro-Atlantic dialogues, disrupting the few possibilities of real engagement between Africa and diaspora. In so doing, they obscure their own historical relationship with francophone West Africa, and rely primarily on a discourse surrounding the Brazilian pilgrimage experience. In other words, they rarely acknowledge their positionality as the embodiment of a former colonizer, and instead redirect their engagement through the experience of the Brazilian diasporic "pilgrim."

Thus, the Brazilians (of all racial identifications) were caught in this hegemonic, diaspora-centered narrative that catered to their frameworks and aspirations. Often, however, they lorded their cultural superiority (especially those racialized as white) over West African collaborators with the support of their European students. Yet, in order to tease out the nuances of these highly charged pilgrimage events, it is both necessary to establish categories of the different

agents/interest groups involved, and then to pull the lens further back to undo them. While race and nationality determined a pattern of stances and interactions, each of these seemingly cohesive "demographics" (the Brazilian and French diasporic chauvinists and the African modernity monotheists) also had a counterpart. While there were white diasporic chauvinists using their apprenticeship experience to silence the contributions of African capoeiristas, there were also those who were actively working to promote and support the work of local African groups, and even some who return humbly for more personal transformation, for instance.

The focus of these pilgrimage trips on the expectations of the Afro-Brazilians and the white Europeans speaks to the ways the hegemonic narrative of the African diaspora comes primarily out of a diasporic perspective, leaving Africans to occupy a symbolic, historical position and ultimately marginalizing contemporary Africans from their own diaspora.

On the one hand, Africa is often leveraged as a means of politicizing both white and black foreigners who, after their pilgrimages, return to their home contexts with a fortified sense of themselves for two reasons. The first is their bravery for having gone in the first place. The second is more of a self-fulfilling prophecy: a belief that they would be fundamentally changed by their experience there because of their anticipation that Africa would stir something deep in them, whether it be a connection to nature, to vibrancy of life, or to the rude awakening of putting their own privilege into perspective.

On the other hand, African practitioners were left with an unfulfilled aspiration to connect with diasporic kin, further distancing them from recourse to the diaspora for the silence and sequestering of the slave trade in West African political and public discourses. These events are, at times, a lost opportunity for young people on the continent who look to cultural communities like the global capoeira network as a way of exploring these connected histories of

racialization. These outcomes often leave them without recourse to redefining their own racial subjectivities through these embodied forms of historical reclamation and transnational community building.

CONCLUSION

> "The first time the Senegalese came to the Gambia, I was just beginning capoeira. I was not already a singer before capoeira…now that I joined capoeira, it's like anywhere that I am, I'm with music. Some woman asked me the other day "Don't you have a rest? All day you keep on singing?" No, I'm having fun…Capoeira is part of me now. Half of me is capoeira music and the other half is a capoeirista, a *real* capoeirista." (Omar 2016)

Since the mid-1990s, pockets of urban West Africa have seen the emergence of young people looking within and beyond themselves to craft a new way of being. Capoeira is not a leisure activity, but a way of being, doing, interacting, building community, engaging with history, and asserting their humanity. As new recruits become initiated into the porous, albeit contested walls of this shifting network, from their first training session, they become co-authors in the invention of a new tradition that draws on centuries-old global processes to make their own 21st century statement. In a sense, becoming a capoeirista is an increasingly desirable activity in areas like Dakar, Abidjan, Lomé, Cotonou, Accra, Lagos, Banjul, Johannesburg and Maputo, because its history of black liberation carries the possibility for a holistic form of self-defense against material violence, as well as the imagined violence that lingers from the injustices of European imperialism.

As a result, many of these capoeiristas devote their lives to their practice, often in the face of economic precarity, lack of institutional support, time restraints, or social pressures to spend their energy on more "productive" pursuits. Capoeira's uptake in the region has destabilized many categories still troubling analysts of the region (and elsewhere): Africa(n), blackness, tradition, modernity, religion, gender, citizenship, ethnicity, heritage, diaspora, postcolony. With a bold kind of ease, urban young people are crafting their own ideas of themselves, their history, their social worlds and their aspirations of what is considered traditional practice. They do so by mobilizing capoeira as a vehicle with which to transform the most intimate events of their lives.

During my time in the field, two of Afreecapoeira's members, as well as the founder, all lost their mothers. Another member lost her grandmother. In all four of the tragedies, the capoeira community was central to the grieving process. They supported one another, collected money for the mourning member, and held ceremonial *rodas* at training in honor of the deceased. During this same period, a couple who met on the training grounds were married[26], while another member defended her thesis to graduate from medical school. At each of these key life events, fellow capoeiristas were central to the emotional support and symbolic weight of the accomplishment, and playing capoeira together was integral to each ceremony. N'Diaye even played the role of a witness in the wedding on the groom's side. For some of these West African practitioners, being a capoeirista is, in fact, their *primary* identification. They are not doctors or lawyers or newlyweds; they are capoeiristas, who practice medicine or law, capoeiristas getting married. Some even reject their national and ethnic or religious backgrounds, trading these outmoded limitations for a new subjectivity to opt in to a community that recognizes transnational and trans-temporal membership that ties them through legacy and cultural heritage to the early capoeiristas of colonial Brazil. To this end, capoeira often functions as a kind of filter through which one's personal milestones are practiced, as well as a protection from the adversity of everyday life.

N'Diaye lost his mother in 2016. The funeral for N'Diaye mother was a typical Senegalese Muslim occasion, only the men in their best khaftan attended the burial at the cemetery. When he began to walk away from his mother's fresh grave and nearly collapsed in tears, two of his top capoeira students were on either side of him breaking his fall. The memorial service that followed on Gorée Island was overflowing with people in N'Diaye's modest family

[26] Afreecapoeira alone has seen eight married couples who first met at the school. N'Diaye joked in his speech at this particular couple's wedding that Afreecapoeira is a clandestine dating organization. This pattern, however, is common to capoeira schools around the world.

compound. The young, diverse group of martial artists from many West African countries seemed somewhat out of place in the sea of traditionally dressed locals, while most of the capoeira women came dressed in blue jeans and an uncharacteristic makeshift headscarf to show respect for the Muslim proceedings. As N'Diaye's students, they were treated as honored guests. He approached them with a loving smile and told them, "My mother would have loved to see you guys singing and playing capoeira in her honor."

The historical weight of their practice extends beyond their individual lives. It reaches out to speak *back* (Kelley 2012) to the diaspora, calling attention to their ever-present and continued presence in the construction of black Atlantic cultural forms, social collectivities and postcolonial grievances. Nwando Achebe spoke of dance as not simply performance, but as an embodied experience that can serve as recognition, negotiation or even critique of society[27]. Black studies, she argued, is one of the ways of doing that dance of negotiation, recognition and critique. The study of blackness and its various interventions into the study of the modern world is not bound by academic endeavors. I see capoeira as also doing the interrogative dance of global African negotiation. Its West African practitioners engage in the performance of historical and emerging African identities that come into an often playful, sometimes fitful, dialogue of bodies, sounds and ideas within the constructed confines of the *roda,* from which we can learn about the dynamics of the current state of global affairs. Achebe also remarked on the journey itself as the ultimate reward. The negotiations of diasporic blackness and cultural belonging that occur between Ivorians, Gabonese, Senegalese, Gambians, Afro-Brazilians, white Brazilians and even the French in the West African capoeira network is a living archive of the state of postcolonial relationships in this historical moment.

[27] Her formulation came from a featured talk she delivered on the state of Black Studies at Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora in Seville, Spain (November 2017).

In his book, *In Search of Africa*, Manthia Diawara (1998) mines the work of Black American literary giants like Richard Wright and James Baldwin to tease out their conflicted solidarity with Africa. By his account, Africa, for these writers, is a site of racial kinship in shared oppression under colonial rule; but it is also a failed project of modernity, democratization and all the cultural sterilization and secularism assumed necessary to these processes. Diawara contextualizes this conflicted sentiment by highlighting Baldwin's suggestion that the African American feels a sense of contempt for the African from being raised in the West among the trope of the African as Other, a vicious stereotype of savagery in relation to the Protestant Ethic. In other words, the Western imaginary of the African often serves to disrupt even the sincerest attempts of black diasporans to create political and cultural solidarity with the continent. A similar relationship with Western tropes is partly responsible for the disjuncture between Brazilian capoeiristas and West African capoeiristas. However, the way those tropes have been taken up by various black populations in the diaspora sometimes replicate the marginalization of Africans and African contexts in their own pursuits of "modernity", or even in attempts to resist Western hegemony (Pierre 2004; Thomas and Campt 2008).

This dissertation has mined the moments of friction, conflict and misrecognition of diasporic projects and interactions. There are also many instances of sincere and mutual exchange between black capoeiristas from the diaspora who come to build mutually beneficial relationships with African capoeristas. Focusing on these moments of rupture in a pan-African dream, however, particularly the disruption of African desires for mutual recognition by diasporans, is productive in understanding the postcolonial outcomes that shape these black Atlantic reparative aspirations. These "circuit breakers" (Rommen 2013) are indicative of hegemonies within the Global South that are often glossed over for fear of crushing the already delicate dreams of Afro-unity. By grappling with the realities of these diasporic disjunctures, and accepting "failures"

where they occur, we will then be able to recognize other kinds collectives forming, new ways of dealing with these old problems.

Furthermore, the 21st century context in which capoeira is rapidly popularizing in this francophone world is shaped by global trends of instability that increase the need for innovative self and group identification. Contemporary political and economic conditions challenge young people to seek out forms of self-defense and mental fortitude to protect themselves and their communities from amorphous threats to their well-being. In the colonial moment, violence against Africans and Afro-descendants in pursuit of capital was arguably systematic and relatively predictable. In the postcolonial moment, and more specifically post-1990 as Arjun Appadurai (2006) argues, this landscape of highly globalized late stage capitalism has inaugurated new kinds of threats in communities around the world, and violence that is seemingly source-less, amorphous and randomized. As neoliberal industries crisscross over political territories, so do stateless networks of terror. In the last two years alone, fundamentalist groups have attacked urban centers in the West Africa that have large Muslim populations and a cosmopolitan dynamism read as "Western".

What is the relevance of metaphors and symbolism of slavery to the current context of political violence in West Africa, such as the Ivoirian Civil war, or the attacks on the "Haram" cosmopolitanism of urban Muslim centers like Grand-Bassam, Bamako and Ouagadougou, with Dakar fearing to be the next target? I argue that as the nature of violence around the world transform, so do forms of protection and positive community building to maintain personal well-being and social stability. For some communities of young West Africans, capoeira is a form of self-defense that surpasses its common recreational function. They are drawn to the ambiguous nature of capoeira, in part as a tool of self-preservation that parallels the ambiguous nature of the threats they face in the postcolonial era. The invisibility of these threats gives them an

ambiguous, surprising and nameless quality, making them difficult to pinpoint, which is why the versatility of capoeira allows them to fight on multiple fronts. They respond to this context of instability in the era of globalization with another product of globalization to draw on metaphors of colonial-era techniques of liberation and healing.

In urban West Africa, nationals and non-nationals alike are using capoeira to redefine citizenship, spirituality and cultural heritage. They do so in response to cultural influences that seem too foreign or irrelevant, yet that swept in with the winds of globalization. Yet they also use capoeira as a way of expanding the hegemonic national discourse that values ethnic homogeneity to be more inclusive of immigrants, diasporic ancestors and the history of colonialism and slavery upon which the nation-state rests. Capoeira provides a means of reimagining one's social world in urban West Africa to a more inclusive reality. It also shapes the way people feel about their ability to protect themselves from symbolic, spiritual and physical harm. Capoeira is, in a sense, a holistic means of self-defense, a form of combat against postcolonial evils predicated on a heroic history of resistance to slavery that resonates throughout the pan-African community that carries on its legacy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexandre, Pierre. 1974. "Introduction to a Fang Oral Art Genre: Gabon and Cameroon mvet." Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 37(1): 1-7.

Alleyne, Osei. 2017. "Dancehall Diaspora: Roots, Routes and Reggae Music in Ghana." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Almeida, Bira. 1981. *Capoeira: A Brazilian Art Form*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

Alves, Jaime Amparo; and Vargas, João Costa. 2014. "On deaf ears: anti-black police terror, multiracial protest and white loyalty to the state." Identities 24(3):254-274.

Appadurai, Arjun. 2006. *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Apter, Andrew. 2018. *Oduduwa's Chain: Locations of Culture in the Yoruba-Atlantic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Asad, Talal. 1983. "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections of Geertz." Man 18(2): 237-259.

Asante, Godfried; Sekimoto, Sachi; and Brown, Christopher. 2016. "Becoming 'Black': Exploring the Racialized Experiences of African Immigrants in the United States." Howard Journal of Communications 27(4): 367-384.

Assunção, Matthias Röhrig. 2005. *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*. New York: Routledge.

Babou, Cheikh Anta. 2008. "Migration and Cultural Change: Money, 'Caste,' Gender, and Social Status Among Senegalese Female Hair Braiders in the United States." Africa Today 55(2): 3-22.

Babou, Cheikh Anta. 2011. "A West African Sufi Master on the Global Stage: Cheikh Abdoulaye Dièye and the Khidmatul Khadim International Sufi School in France and the United States." African Diaspora 4(1): 27-49.

Babou, Cheikh Anta. 2013. "The Senegalese 'Social Contract' Revisited: the Muridiyya Muslim Order and State Politics." *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal (Religion, Culture, and Public Life)*. Ed. Mamadou Diouf. New York: Columbia University Press.

Babou, Cheikh Anta. 2016. "Negotiating the Boundaries of Power: Ousmane Wade, the Muridiyya, and State Politics in Senegal, 2000-2012." Journal of West African History 2(1): 165-188.

Balandier, Georges. 1948. "Femmes 'Possédées' et Leurs Chants." Présence Africaine 5: 749-754.

Baller, Susann. 2007. "Transforming urban landscapes: soccer fields as site of urban sociability in the agglomeration of Dakar." African Identities 5(2): 217-230.

Barnes, Sandra T. 1989. *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Basch, Linda; Glick Schiller, Nina; and Blanc, Cristina Szanton. 1994. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. New York: Routledge.

Baumann, Martin. 2001. "Global Buddhism: Developmental Periods, Regional Histories, and a New Analytical Perspective." Journal of Global Buddhism 2: 1-43.

Benton, Adia. 2016. "Risky Business: Race, Nonequivalence and the Humanitarian Politics of Life." Visual Anthropology 29(2): 187-203.

Bhabha, Homi (Ed). 1990. *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Blacking, John. 1973. *How Musical Is Man?* Seattle: Washington University Press.

Brown, Jacqueline Nassy. 2005. *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Brubaker, Roger. 2005. "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora." Ethnic and Racial Studies 28(1): 1-19.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Campt, Tina. 2002. "The Crowded Space of Diaspora: Intercultural Address and the Tensions of Diasporic Relation." Radical History Review 83(1): 94-113.

Campt, Tina. 2005. *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Capoeira, Nestor. 1995. *The Little Capoeira Book*. Berkeley: Blue Snake Books.

Castillo, Lisa Earl. 2016. "Mapping the nineteenth-century Brazilian returnee movement: Demographics, life stories and the question of slavery." Atlantic Studies 13(1): 25-52.

Central Intelligence Agency. Factbook: Senegal. Accessed April 2018: http://www.ciaworldfactbook.us/node/257.html.

Cesarino, Letícia. 2017. "Anthropology and the South-South Encounter: On 'Culture' in Brazil-Africa Relations." American Anthropologist 119(2): 333-341.

Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections of Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Clarke, Kamari Maxine. 2009. *Fictions of Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Challenges of Legal Pluralism in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Clifford, James; and Marcus, George E. (Eds). 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clifford, James. 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cohen, Peter. 2009. "The Orixa Atlantic: Historicizing the Roots of a Global Religion" in *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*. Ed. Thomas Csordas, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Collomb, Henri and Ayats, Henri. 1962. "Les migrations au Sénégal: étude psychopathologique." Cahiers d'Études Africaines 2(8): 570-597.

Comaroff, Jean, and Comaroff, John L. 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conklin, Alice. 1997. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Conquergood, Dwight. 2002. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." The Drama Review 46(2): 145-156.

Covington-Ward, Yolanda. 2016. *Gesture and Power: Religion, Nationalism, and Everyday Performance in Congo*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Cox, Aimee. 2009. "Thugs, Black Divas, and Gendered Aspirations." Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society 11(2): 113-141.

Crook, Larry N. 1993. "Black Consciousness, Samba Reggae, and the Re-Africanization of Bahian Carnival Music in Brazil." The World of Music 35(2): 90-108.

D'Amico-Samuels, Deborah. 2010. "Undoing Fieldwork: Personal, Political, Theoretical and Methodological Implications." In *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Ed. Faye Harrison. Arlington: American Anthropological Association.

Daniel, Yvonne. 2005. *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomble*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Daniel, Yvonne. 2011. *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance: Igniting Citizenship*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

DeFrantz, Thomas. 2014. "Introduction" in *Black Performance Theory*. Eds. Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez. Durham: Duke University Press.

Desch-Obi, T.J. 2008. *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Art Traditions in the Atlantic World*. Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press.

Diouf, Mamadou. 2001. *Histoire du Sénégal: Le modèle islamo-wolof et ses périphéries*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.

Diouf, Mamadou. 2013. "Introduction: The Public Role of the "Good Islam": Sufi Islam and the Administration of Pluralism. A Senegalese Story." *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal (Religion, Culture, and Public Life)*. Ed. Mamadou Diouf. New York: Columbia University Press.

Downey, Greg. 2005. *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Drake, St. Clair. 1987. *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology Vol. 2*. Diasporic Africa Press.

Ebron, Paulla. 1999. "Tourists as Pilgrims: Commercial Fashioning of Transatlantic Politics." American Ethnologist 26(4): 910-932.

Ebron, Paulla. 2002. *Performing Africa*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2003. *The Practice of Diaspora: literature, translation, and the rise of Black internationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

El Hamel, Chouki. 2012. *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ferguson, James. 2006. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Fields, Karen E. and Fields, Barbara. 2012. *Racecraft: the Soul of Inequality in American Life*. London: Verso.

Forde, Daryll and Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1950. *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. London: Routledge.

Gable, Eric. 2006. "The Funeral and Modernity in Manjaco." Cultural Anthropology 21(3): 385-415.

Gates, Henry Louis. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gellar, Sheldon. 2005. *Democracy in Senegal: Tocquevillian Analytics in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Geschiere, Peter, and Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2000. "Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging."

Geschiere, Peter; and Ceuppens, Bambi. 2005. "Autochthony: Local or Global? New Modes in the Struggle over Citizenship and Belonging in Africa and Europe." Annual Review of Anthropology 34: 385-407.

Geschiere, Peter. 2009. *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Gikandi, Simon. 2001. “Foreword” in *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*. Eds. Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makokha. Editions Rodopi.

Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Glassman, Jonathan. 2011. *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Gordon, Edmund T. 2010. “Anthropology and Liberation.” In *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Ed. Faye Harrison. Arlington: American Anthropological Association.

Greene, Sandra. 2002. *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Griffith, Lauren. 2016. *In Search of Legitimacy: How Outsiders Become Part of an Afro-Brazilian Tradition*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Gueye, Marame. 2013. “Urban Guerrilla Poetry: The Movement *Y’en a Marre* and the Socio-Political Influences of Hip Hop in Senegal. The Journal of Pan African Studies 6(3): 22-42.

Haigh, Louise and Solomon, Hussein. 2013. “Xenophobia in South Africa: Origins, Trajectory and Recommendations.” Africa Review 1(2): 111-131.

Hall, Bruce S. 2001. *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1990. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart 222-237.

Hanchard, Michael (Ed). 1999a. *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hanchard, Michael. 1999b. “Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora.” Public Culture 11(1): 245-268.

Harney, Elizabeth. 2004. *In Senghor’s Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Harrison, Faye V (Ed). 2010[1991]. *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Arlington: American Anthropological Association.

Hartman, Saidiya V. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hartman, Saidiya. 2006. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

Herskovits, Melville J. 1930. *The Anthropometry of the American Negro*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Herskovits, Melville. 1941. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press Books.

Heywood, Linda M.; and Thornton, John K. 2007. *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Ranger, Terence. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holsey, Bayo. 2008. *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

HoSang, Daniel Martinez; and LaBennett, Oneka; Pulido, Laura. 2012. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hoyez, Anne-Cécile. 2007. "The 'world of yoga'" The production and reproduction of therapeutic landscapes." Social Science and Medicine 65: 112-124.

Jackson, John L. 2005. *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Jaji, Tsitsi. 2014. *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jones, Hilary. 2013. *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kringelbach, Hélène Neveu. 2013. *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal*. New York: Berghahan Books.

Leichtman, Mara A. 2013. "From the Cross (and Crescent) to the Cedar and Back Again: Transnational Religion and Politics Among Lebanese Christians in Senegal." Anthropological Quarterly 86(1): 35-75).

Lewis, J. Lowell. 1992. *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

L'Organisation internationale pour les Migrations. 2009. "Migration au Sénégal: Profil National 2009."

Lowe, Lisa. 2015. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Maddox, Callie Batts. 2015. "Studying at the source: Ashtanga yoga tourism and the search for authenticity in Mysore, India." Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change 13(4): 330-343.

Madison, Soyini. 2005. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Majumdar, Boria. 2002. "Kolkata Colonized: Soccer in a Subcontinental 'Brazilian Colony'." Soccer and Society 3(2): 70-86.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1944. *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2012. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marcus, George. 1995. "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." Annual Review of Anthropology 24(1): 95-117.

Matory, J. Lorand. 1999. "The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Roots of the Yoruba Nation." Comparative Studies in Society and History 41(1):72-103.

Matory, J. Lorand. 2005. *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.

Mbembe, Achille. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mbembe, Achille. 2007. "Afropolitanism," in Simon Njami and Lucy Durán (eds.), *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media): 26-30.

Mbembe, Achille. 2015. "Achille Mbembe writes about Xenophobic South." Africa is a Country, April 16, 2015.

Mintz, Sydney Wilfred and Price, Richard. 1972. *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. Boston: Beacon Press Books.

Monteiro, Nicole M. and Wall, Diana J. 2011. "African Dance as Healing Modality Throughout the Diaspora: The Use of Ritual and Movement to Work Through Trauma." The Journal of Pan African Studies 4(6): 234-252.

Moten, Fred. 2003. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Mudimbe, V. Y. 1988. *The invention of Africa: gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2005. *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*. London: Zed Books.

Omi, Michael; and Winant, Howard. 2014[1986]. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Third Edition. New York: Routledge.

Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Osemeka, Irene. 2014. "The Management of Religious Diversity in West Africa: The Exceptionalism of the Wolof and Yoruba in the Post-Independence Period." Historia Actual Online 33: 61-75.

Osumare, Halifu. 2012. *The Hiplife in Ghana: West African Indigenization of Hip-Hop*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Peano, Irene. 2007/2008. "Wrestling Masculinities: Metaphors of Purity and Metonymical Bodies in Senegalese Arenas." The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology 27(2): 36-56.

Pierre, Jemima. 2004. "Black Immigrants in the United States and the 'Cultural Narratives' of Ethnicity." Identities 11(2): 141-170.

Pierre, Jemima. 2012. *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pierre, Jemima. 2013. "Race in Africa Today: A Commentary." Cultural Anthropology 28(3): 547-551.

Ralph, Michael. 2015. *Forensics of Capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ramos-Zayas, Ana Y. 2012. *Street Therapists: Race, Affect, and Neoliberal Personhood in Latino Newark*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Riles, Annelise. 2000. *The Network Inside Out*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

Robitaille, Laurence. 2007. "Les Jeux de la Capoeira avec L'Identité Brésilienne." Revue canadienne des etudes latino-américaines et caraïbes 32(63):213-235.

Robitaille, Laurence. 2014. "Promoting Capoeira, Branding Brazil: A Focus on the Semantic Body." Black Music Research Journal 34(2): 229-254.

Rommen, Timothy. 2013. "Some Cold Facts about Circuits and Circuit Breakers." Safundi 14(4): 471-475.

Rosa, Cristina. 2015a. *Brazilian Bodies and their Choreographies of Identification: Swing Nation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rosa, Cristina. 2015b. "Playing, Fighting, and Dancing: Unpacking the Significance of Ginga within the Practice of Capoeira Angola." The Drama Review 56(3): 141-166.

Rosenthal, Joshua M. 2009. "Capoeira and Globalization". *In* Imagining Globalization: Language, Identities, and Boundaries. Ho Hon Leung, Matthew Hendley, Robert W. Compton, and Brian D. Haley, eds. Pp. 145-163. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Samson, Fabienne. 2016. "L'implantation de l'Église Universelle de Royaume de Dieu au Sénégal." In *Néo-pentecôtismes* Eds. Ruiz, Jesús García; and Michel, Patrick. Tepsis.

Savinskinsky, Neil J. 1994. "Rastafari in the Promised Land: The Spread of Jamaican Socioreligious Movement among the Youth of West Africa." African Studies Review 37(3): 19-50.

Sawyer, Lena. 2006 "Racialization, Gender, and the Negotiation of Power in Stockholm's African Dance Courses" *in Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*. Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, eds. Pp. 316-334. Durham: Duke University Press.

Scott, David. 1991. "That Event, This Memory: Notes on the Anthropology of African Diasporas in the New World." Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies 1(3): 261-284.

Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Shain, Richard M. 2009. "The Re(Public) of Salsa: Afro-Cuban Music in *Fin-de-Siècle* Dakar." The Journal of the International African Institute 79(2): 186-206.

Shaw, Rosalind. 1990. "The invention of 'African Traditional Religion'." Religion 20: 339-353.

Shipley, Jesse Weaver. 2013. *Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Skidmore, Thomas E. 2010. *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith, Christen. 2016. *Afro Paradise: Blackness, Violence, and Performance in Brazil*. Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

Stanford Alumni Magazine. 2017. "The Elevator Pitch: Inside the Business School's ambitious venture to lift people out of poverty." Accessed January 2017: https://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article/?article_id=90711.

Stoller, Paul. 2002. *Money has no smell: the Africanization of New York City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sylla, A. 1974. "La réforme sportive a touché les Navétanes," Le Soleil, 10/11 August. Thip, Djibril (ASC Nietti Mbaar). 2001. Interview in Thiaroye Djidda Kao (Pikine), 8 March.

Talmon-Chvaicer, Maya. 2008. *The Hidden History of Capoeira: A Collision of Cultures in the Brazilian Battle Dance*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Tamba, Moustapha. 2016. *Histoire et sociologie des religions au Sénégal*. Paris : L'Harmattan.

Taylor, Diana. 2007. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Taylor, Gerard. 2005. *Capoeira: The Jogo de Angola from Luanda to Cyberspace*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

Thomas, Deborah. 2002. "Democratizing Dance: Institutional Transformation and Hegemonic Re-Ordering in Postcolonial Jamaica." Cultural Anthropology 17(1): 512-550.

Thomas, Deborah. 2004. *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Thomas, Deborah. 2006 "Modern Blackness: Progress, 'America,' and the Politics of Popular Culture in Jamaica" *in Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*. Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, eds. Pp. 316-334. Durham: Duke University Press.

Thomas, Deborah and Clarke, Kamari. 2006. *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Thomas, Deborah; and Campt, Tina. 2008. Gendering Diaspora: Transnational Feminism, Diaspora and its Hegemonies. *Feminist Review*, Special Review 90: 1-8.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2003. *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tsing, Anna. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

van Reekum, Rogier; and Schinkel, Willem. 2017. "Drawing Lines, Enacting Migration: Visual Prostheses of Bordering Empire." Public Culture 29(1): 27-51.

Varela, Sergio González. 2017. *Power in Practice: The Pragmatic Anthropology of Afro-Brazilian Capoeira*. New York: Berghahan Books.

Vieira, Luiz Renato. 1995. *O Jogo da Capoeira: Corpo e Cultura Popular no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Sprint.

Villalon, Leonardo A. 1995. *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Viotti de Costa, E. 1985. *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*. Chicago: University of

Chicago Press.

Weitzberg, Keren. 2017. *We Do Not Have Borders: Greater Somalia and the Predicaments of Belonging in Kenya*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Werner, Jean-François. 2006. "How Women Are Using Television to Domesticate Globalization: A Case Study of the Reception and Consumption of *Telenovelas* in Senegal." Visual Anthropology 19: 443-472.

Werbner, Richard. 2002. *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*. Zed Books.

Wesolowski, Katya. 2007. "Hard Play: Capoeira and the Politics of Inequality in Rio de Janeiro." Dissertation for Columbia University.

Winant, Howard. 1999. "Racial Democracy and Racial Identity: Comparing the United States and Brazil," In *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil*. Ed. Michael Hanchard. Durham: Duke University Press.

Wright, Handel Kashope. 2016. “Stuart Hall’s relevance for the study of African blackness.” International Journal of Cultural Studies 19(1): 85-99.

Wyllie, R.W. 1977. “Ignorance and Etiological Anarchy.” Anthropos 72(1/2): 119-128.

Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument*. The New Centennial Review 3(3): 257-337.

Yayoh, Wilson. 2002. “Krepi States in the 18th and 19th Centuries.” Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana 6: 67-81.

Yelvington, Kevin (Ed). 2006. *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Zeleza, Paul Tiyambe. 2005. “Rethinking the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic.” African Affairs 104(414): 35-68.