



Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas
Instituto de Filosofia, Artes e Cultura
Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto
ISSN: 2596-0229

O QUE PODE UM CORPO DISSIDENTE NA CAPOEIRA?

WHAT CAN A DISSIDENT BODY DO IN CAPOEIRA?

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 doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v9i18.8533

What can a dissident body do in *capoeira*?

Abstract: This article investigates how LGBTQIA+ *capoeira* practitioners experience gender and sexual performativity, analyzing the intersections of sexuality, race, class, and precarity. In its third stage, the research employed structured interviews with four LGBTQIA+ *capoeiristas* who teach in their groups, located in different Brazilian states. Analysis of the accounts shows that these bodies experience specific forms of exclusion and silencing, being pressured to conceal their identities as a survival strategy. Moreover, even though rooted in an ancestral matrix of resistance, *capoeira* reproduces hegemonic norms that hinder the recognition and advancement of dissident individuals. In conclusion, strengthening dissident performativity in *capoeira* depends on creating more plural spaces and confronting the symbolic and material hierarchies that sustain historical exclusions. By engaging with present urgencies, *capoeira* practice may reaffirm its libertarian potential, provided it opens space for the diversity of bodies and knowledges.

Keywords: *capoeira*; performativity; dissident bodies; precarity; LGBTQIA+.

O que pode um corpo dissidente na *capoeira*?

Resumo: Este artigo investiga como a performatividade de gênero e sexualidade é vivida por pessoas LGBTQIA+ na prática da *capoeira*, analisando os atravessamentos entre sexualidade, raça, classe e precariedade. A pesquisa, em sua terceira etapa, utilizou entrevistas estruturadas com quatro *capoeiristas* LGBTQIA+ que exercem docência em seus grupos, situados em diferentes estados brasileiros. A análise dos relatos evidencia que esses corpos experienciam formas específicas de exclusão e silenciamento, sendo pressionados a ocultar suas identidades como estratégia de sobrevivência. Revela-se, ainda, que a *capoeira*, mesmo ancorada em uma matriz ancestral de resistência, reproduz normas hegemônicas que dificultam o reconhecimento e a ascensão de pessoas dissidentes. Conclui-se que o fortalecimento da performatividade dissidente na *capoeira* depende da criação de espaços mais plurais e do enfrentamento das hierarquias simbólicas e materiais que sustentam exclusões históricas. A prática da *capoeira*, ao dialogar com as urgências do presente, pode reafirmar seu potencial libertário, desde que abra espaço para a diversidade de corpos e saberes.

Palavras-chave: *capoeira*; performatividade; corpos dissidentes; precariedade; LGBTQIA+.



1 Introduction

I began this research from a personal motivation: I have been a *capoeira* practitioner for over 20 years, and my involvement in said practice coincided with the process of recognizing my sexuality. Over the years, I noticed the absence of openly LGBTQIA+¹ people—especially men—in the *capoeira* circles I frequented. This estrangement became a research question: Why do I not see openly LGBTQIA+ people practicing *capoeira*, or feeling comfortable expressing gender and sexual identities within it?

From this perceived absence, it became necessary to seek other accounts that could help me understand the factors producing this sense of nonexistent LGBTQIA+ bodies in *capoeira*. I therefore formulated two preliminary hypotheses: (1) LGBTQIA+ people might feel compelled to silence their sexual orientations as a survival strategy within *capoeira*; (2) LGBTQIA+ people might refrain from entering *capoeira* because they perceive their bodies as inadequate to the bodily and hierarchical standards governing its graduation system.

Recognizing the gender tensions within *capoeira* practice—shaped by hierarchizing processes that privilege² white, cisgender³ heterosexual men—guides this research. It examines how the performativity of LGBTQIA+ bodies is experienced in this context and how their recognition may contribute to transforming the cultural paradigms that structure the practice.

In developing the concept of performativity, Butler (2018) proposed that gender identity does not preexist the subject but is constituted over time by repetition of socially regulated acts. From this perspective, the construction of gender and sexuality does not stem from a prior essence but from the reiteration of practices that, precisely through repetition, remain open to displacement and transformation. In this sense, as interpreted by Bauman, Butler “[...] argues that gender is performative; i.e., it is not an essential or inherent quality of a person but is effected through discursive acts constitutive of gender identities” (Bauman, 2008, p. 4). Performativity, therefore,

1 The acronym LGBTQIA+ continues to expand. It designates diverse gender identities and sexual orientations: L (lesbian), G (gay), B (bisexual), T (transgender), Q (queer or questioning), I (intersex), A (asexual), and the symbol +, indicating additional identities beyond the acronym. More recently, P (pansexual) and N (nonbinary) have also been incorporated, further reflecting identities that challenge normative gender and sexuality frameworks (Simões; Facchini, 2009; Santos, 2017).

2 I use the term “privilege” following McIntosh (1988), who defines it as a system of unearned advantages or benefits enjoyed by individuals or groups, often at others’ expense. Privilege operates across social, economic, racial, and gender spheres and contributes to uphold structural inequality. Bento (2002) further links privilege to racial discrimination, noting that even in poverty white people retain the symbolic privilege of whiteness, which is far from insignificant. Attempts to reduce debates about race into class analysis function as a recurrent “escape route,” despite consistent evidence that among the poor and exploited in Brazil, Black populations face significantly greater deficits in health, education, and work. As the author concludes, poverty in Brazil has a color and any minimally informed Brazilian acknowledge it, “but it is inconvenient to acknowledge it” (Bento, 2002, p. 30).

3 I use the term “cis” to refer to individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth (Rodrigues, 2016). The concept contrasts with the experiences of trans people, whose gender identity does not correspond to their assigned sex. The term was introduced to denaturalize restrictive and discriminatory gender norms and support more plural understandings of gender.



should not be understood as the voluntary enactment of a “gender role,” but as a reiterative process grounded in norms that precede the subject and are historically and socially regulated. Through their continual reiteration, such norms produce materialization effects, making what they name—in this case, gender—appear natural and stable.

This article presents the results of the third stage of my research⁴, conducted in 2025 through analysis of interviews with four *capoeira* practitioners who already teach within their groups, located in different Brazilian states and identified as LGBTQIA+. The previously structured interviews addressed the ways *capoeira* practice both constructs and is co-constructed by these individuals’ gender and sexual identities⁵.

The first participant is a *capoeira* teacher working in the city of Salvador, Bahia, who self-identifies as a Black cisgender bisexual man. The second participant is a *treinela* from a *capoeira* group in the city of Maringá, Paraná, and identifies as a Black cisgender lesbian woman. The third participant is a *capoeira* mestra in the city of Joinville, Santa Catarina, identifying as a Black cisgender lesbian woman. The fourth participant is also a *capoeira* mestra in Salvador, Bahia, likewise identifying as a Black cisgender lesbian woman. Interviewee selection was limited to individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ and who occupy high-ranking positions in *capoeira*, given the relevance of their trajectories and enunciative positions within the field under investigation. Anonymity was adopted to preserve their identities given the sensitive nature of the accounts shared.

Throughout the interviews, it became evident that beyond the initial hypotheses, gender and sexuality are articulated with markers of racialization and social vulnerability that intersect in producing the marginalization of these bodies in *capoeira* and in society.

Precarity is the rubric that brings together women, queer people, transgender people, the poor, those with disabilities, the stateless, but also racial and religious minorities. It is a social and economic condition, not an identity (indeed, it cuts across these categories and produces potential alliances among those who do not recognize that they belong to one another) (Butler, 2018, p. 65).

Precarity allows us to continue denouncing processes of oppression in which certain lives—by virtue of their singularities, claiming their right to exist in difference—are left to chance and placed at the margins. Lives deemed unimportant and thus exposed to victimization due to the absence of policies capable of creating conditions for them to expand and flourish. Precarity is also

⁴ A preliminary version of this text appeared in “Pobreza, performance, educação” (Icle; Santos, 2025). This article expands and reworks that material, developed during a postdoctoral fellowship at the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), with an enlarged theoretical and analytical framework.

⁵ According to Brah, “personal identities are always articulated with collective experience, yet individual life trajectories, shaped through everyday social relations do not simply mirror group experience. Likewise, collective identities cannot be reduced to the sum of individual ones; rather, they are processes of signification through which shared experiences along axes such as class, caste, or religion acquire particular meanings. Collective identity is the process of signification through which shared experiences around specific axes of differentiation – such as class, caste, or religion – are invested with particular meanings. Thus, expanded awareness of identity construction often entails a partial suppression of a group’s internal heterogeneity, though the power relations embedded in that heterogeneity do not disappear” (Brah, 2006, p. 371).



the condition in which certain groups are placed, enabling—through the production of shared knowledges—the imagining and practice of alliance politics. Precarity allows us to understand systems of oppression and the value a life may occupy within them. Vulnerability, however, belongs to the order of life itself. Living is dangerous. We are all vulnerable; yet we are not all equally positioned before vulnerability. Vulnerability equalizes us as life but does not differentiate us within systems of hierarchization. Although in this article we seek to approximate precarity and poverty (and we can), we maintain the perspective that poverty is the historical result of economic forces acting upon groups, populations, and peoples, from which class inequalities derive. Precarity, unlike poverty, operates differently across groups, populations, and peoples. In the face of poverty affecting lives considered important, policies are created.

A contradiction thus emerges: although *capoeira* constituted itself as a libertarian struggle⁶, recent decades have witnessed the reproduction of mechanisms that marginalize dissident bodies. In this regard, according to Martielo (2022), only by recognizing sexuality, gender, race, and class within *capoeira* through a counter-hegemonic perspective can we rethink it as a “libertarian direct action for the resignification of subjectivities, cultural resistance, ethics, and aesthetics” (Martielo, 2022, p. 11), reconnecting it with its ancestral matrix.

Hence, at this stage I recognize the transversality of the notion of poverty/vulnerability in the experiences of *capoeiristas*. This notion, which can be understood multidimensionally, intertwines with ideas of social exclusion and deprivation of rights (Spicker, 2007). From this premise, I argue that *capoeira* practice, across much of its groupings, is already permeated by a conception of precarity and that, when analyzing *capoeiristas*' experiences through the lenses of sexuality, gender, race, and class, an intersectional intensification of this precarity becomes evident. In this sense, according to Butler (2015, p. 42-43),

[...] precarity must be understood not merely as an aspect of this or that life but as a generalized condition whose universality can be denied only by denying precarity itself. [...] Moreover, the very idea of precarity implies dependence on social networks and conditions, suggesting that the issue at stake is not life as such but always and only the conditions of life—life as something that requires certain conditions in order to become livable and, above all, to become grievable. [...] Where a life has no chance to flourish is precisely where we must strive to improve the conditions of life. [...] Our obligations are precisely to the conditions that make life possible, not to life itself—or rather, our obligations arise from the recognition that no life can be sustained without these sustaining conditions, which constitute both our political responsibility and the substance of our most difficult decisions (Butler, 2015, p. 42-43).

6 For Édison Carneiro (1975), *capoeira* originated as an African practice adapted to struggles for freedom under slavery in Brazil. Initially a form of combat used to defend the de facto or legal freedom of the Black population, police repression and shifting social conditions gradually transformed it into a game or playful practice among friends (Carneiro, 1975, p. 3).



2 Dissident bodies in *capoeira*

Capoeira is a Brazilian cultural manifestation regarded as one of its national identity symbols⁷, rooted in the traditions and ancestries of Black and Indigenous peoples who struggled for self-determination in the country. The assemblage of movements, songs, instruments, and spatial occupation emerges from Black and Indigenous performances and corporealities developed and passed on over centuries, almost exclusively through orality and the embodied performativity of their masters of knowledge.

According to Martins (2021), performativity in *capoeira* is sustained through the bodily actions of its practitioners, since “[...] in predominantly oral and gestural cultures, such as African and Indigenous ones, the body is, par excellence, the locus and environment of memory” (Martins, 2021, p. 60). Martins (2021) understands performativity in *capoeira* as the result of the repetition of gestures and movements that produce corporeality as something individually, sexually, ethnically, and culturally marked. As such, the *capoeira* player absorbs in their movements the performativity of their ancestors in practice, while also inscribing their own corporeality in it, grounded in identity.

It is worth recalling that the notion of gender identity is not static, polarized, differentiated, and intractable (Butler, 2003, p. 78), as it is socially imposed. Drawing on reflections inspired by Foucault (1982), Butler (2009) adds that gender identity is compulsory, although some people reject this compulsion. Foucault (1982) argues that we need not define ourselves in the world or in relation to others through a search for identity, as if it were the imposition of a law, principle, or code. Rather, we can define ourselves more flexibly, allowing that, prior to any interest or demand, we may live and coexist with our differences.

If we must position ourselves in relation to the issue of identity, we must start from the fact that we are unique beings. However, the relations we should establish with ourselves are not relations of identity; they should instead be relations of differentiation, creation, and innovation. It is very boring always being the same. We should not exclude identity if it is through identity that people find their pleasure, but neither should we regard such identity as a universal ethical rule (Foucault, 1982, p. 5).

On the other hand, Ciampa (1984) warns that, despite the tacit understanding of identity as metamorphosis, the study of identity cannot be dissociated of both the individual and society, since the historical and social context determines possibilities and impossibilities in modes and alternatives of identity. In this sense, the author further argues (Ciampa, 1984, p. 72) that capitalism and the growing complexities of society prevent us from living our “true” identities.

⁷ Stuart Hall (2006) argues that national identity should not be understood as a fixed or homogeneous essence uniting all subjects of a nation. Rather, it is a discursive construction representing internal diversity as if it were unity. Although national cultures are crossed by divisions of class, gender, race, and others, they are symbolically “unified” through cultural power, functioning as identity fantasies that conceal internal contradictions and differences. They are traversed by deep internal divisions and differences, ‘unified’ only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power. Nevertheless, as the fantasies of the whole self described in Lacanian psychoanalysis, national identities continue to be represented as unified (Hall, 2006, p. 62).



If this is true, it means there are many—and therefore complex and sometimes even paradoxical identities.

Once regarded as a symbol of national identity, *capoeira* endured centuries of repression. Since it emerged as a practice of resistance and struggle for self-determination among Black and Indigenous peoples subjected to enslavement, *capoeira* was openly combated by the state even after the abolition of slavery. Its groupings, known as *maltsas*, were targets of persecution (Soares, 1994). Repression intensified with the criminalization of *capoeira* under the Republican Penal Code on October 11, 1890, which nearly led to its disappearance in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Soares, 1994).

Capoeira survived centuries of repression because its techniques were passed on almost exclusively through the orality and corporeality of its masters of knowledge. According to Palhares (2019), the *capoeira* practiced between the 1850s and the 1930s constituted a form of knowledge production grounded in a collective, ethical, and resistant process based on ancestral African-derived principles. According to Abib and Cordeiro (2018, p. 234), “[...] this ‘African pedagogy’ of *capoeira* is based on highly distinctive traits rooted in ancestry, rituality, a sense of belonging to a community, playfulness, and an entire universe of knowledge expressed in the moment of the game, in the *capoeira roda* (circle for *capoeira* practice).”

In this context, it is important to recall that even after the abolition of slavery, no social reparation policies were implemented for the peoples who had been kidnapped and enslaved, which contributed to the persistence of precarious living conditions for many of them in Brazil (Palhares, 1999). Inserted in this reality of poverty were also *capoeira* practitioners and their groupings. Although professionalization initiatives have existed since the 1930s, the practice remains predominantly marked by the presence of marginalized bodies, whose practitioners find few opportunities for financial advancement through *capoeira*. In this sense, poverty, as one of the structural markers of the system of oppression, remains a frequent reality in *capoeira* spaces and in the development of their educational methodologies.

Even under precarious conditions—but with large doses of creativity—these “professionals” use this cultural game to survive and seek the most unusual possibilities to escape the fate of those who, regarded by many as the great masters of *capoeira*, died in absolute poverty. *Mestres* such as Pastinha, Bimba, Valdemar da Liberdade, and others “experienced the crossroads of hunger and fame” (Areu, 2003, p. 14). Nonetheless, they became the great references of *capoeiragem* in the 20th century and are, for new generations of *capoeiristas*, products of a condition of exploitation from which they seek to escape (Falcão, 2006, p. 64).

Thus, even with the institutional progress achieved through recognition of the *capoeira roda* as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity⁸ by UNESCO, the goals proposed by the

8 In 2014, UNESCO recognized the *capoeira roda* as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, emphasizing the need to safeguard this practice and ensure its transmission to future generations through the knowledge of *mestres* and *mestras*.



Brazilian government to safeguard masters of popular knowledge still lack public actions capable of transforming the reality of those who sustain this culture.

Aligned with the path of professionalization, most *capoeira* groups have adopted, since the 1930s—though especially from the 1970s onward—a graduation system that begins with the *batizado* (usually after the first year of training) and culminates in the conferral of the title of *mestre* or *mestra* (Araujo, 2010). This graduation process is subjective: teachers, *mestres* or *mestras* in each group evaluate the progression of each stage of the *capoeiristas'* formation, which may last over 30 years. This systematization was initially created as a centralized structure in which the *mestre* or *mestra* holds the authority to train their students.

Notably, this pedagogical formation process varies across groups and among the modalities of *Capoeira Regional*, *Capoeira Angola*, and contemporary variations of these practices. In *Capoeira Angola*, unlike the other modalities, there is no division of graduations through cords, for instance. This hierarchical process—although it may also take decades—usually distinguishes only among students, *contramestres* (training masters), and *mestres*.

This system, subjectively evaluated in the graduation process and centered on the decision-making power of a *mestre* or *mestra*, hinders understanding how some people are favored by the evaluations of those higher in the hierarchy, to the detriment of others who receive different forms of treatment during their training process. Although not always possible to know precisely which factors lead to the privileging of certain groups of people over others in different *capoeira* groups, simply observing the large number of cisgender heterosexual male masters in comparison with other segments is enough to perceive a process of privilege maintenance that often goes unquestioned.

The perception that difficulties accumulate as gender, race, sexual orientation, and economic situation is evident in the discourses of the interviewees. In addition to confronting discriminatory environments both outside and within the practice, the interviewees report difficulties to obtain recognition and valuing of their knowledge. One interviewee reported an expectation of a given bodily aesthetic standard when identifying herself as a *capoeira* teacher.

[...] I started training and really identified with people in the group; others thought I was kind of “too forward,” you know, with the movements and stuff, I was very active. I picked things up really fast. Then he said, “Look, you already have a nickname, let’s baptize you.” “I already have one, Manga.” As the master knew my parents, well... he started with that story, “Oh, that manga is going to do this or that,” so it brought a little bit [of discrimination]... I also started to have a kind of... awareness of this prejudice on our sexual identity. I was already very focused on that because I used to go around social movements at the time, I’d pass by places, hear some things, pick up pamphlets about Black identity. So I started to gain some awareness of the situations people go through. It can be racial prejudice, gender prejudice, sexual identity too, so I started noticing these things. Anyway, I joined the group and I’m still in it today (*Capoeira* teacher, March 2, 2023, in-person interview).

[...] I noticed that from the moment I came out as a lesbian woman, the number of people looking for me decreased. For example, the likes [on social media] from people – former students who used to follow my work – stopped. There’s also



the issue of women within *capoeira*. Society's aesthetic standards are very unfair to people who fall outside them. I see that for women this is very complicated, because you find *mestres* outside that aesthetic standard doing great even without being a good teacher. But in a *mestra's* class, or with a good female *capoeira* teacher, if you find a class with a very attentive teacher, people may criticize if she's outside that aesthetic standard (*Capoeira mestra*, March 3, 2023, online interview).

In other words, these accounts indicate that hegemonic masculine and heteronormative thinking in *capoeira* limits work opportunities for other bodies, allowing financial advancement in the practice to only a restricted group of people. *Capoeira* has resisted across centuries by absorbing cultural elements and behaviors from the time and space in which it was situated. Thus it is unsurprising that the practice, embedded in a patriarchal⁹ context still prevalent in the country and associated with hierarchical dynamics, carries a tacit understanding of the image of the “virile man” as the reference for corporeality in *capoeira* (Oliveira, 2023).

In light of this, while the culture resisted attempts at extermination, the presence of women and LGBTQIA+ people was silenced and erased from its history (Oliveira, 2023), mirroring the state mechanisms. According to Abreu (2023), we may speak of a “state LGBTQIphobia,” insofar as there exists a systematic action that produces invisibility, erasure, social unprotection, and violence to maintain hierarchies of gender, race, and sexuality.

The state's policy of extermination of socially marginalized groups operates through sophisticated mechanisms, ranging from the erasures and historical gaps already mentioned to the absence of public policies committed to mitigating the social and economic inequalities produced by racism, sexism, ableism, and LGBTQIphobia. The non-recognition of citizenship, the impossibility of participating in political life under equal conditions, and the absence of principles of socioeconomic redistribution hinders governmental policies that restrict democratic freedoms and deepen social hierarchies. This terrain fosters the reproduction of gender binarism, intensifies the sexual and racial division of labor, and strengthens heteronormativity (Irineu, 2023, p. 110)

Importantly, although women's presence in *capoeira* has become a recurring theme in contemporary debates, the masculine and heterosexual reference remains dominant and imposed in *capoeira* practices (Muricy, 2016). This becomes even more evident by observing that, beyond declared sexual orientation, LGBTQIA+ women with masculinizing markers tend to enjoy greater “passing”¹⁰ in *capoeira rodas* than LGBTQIA+ men with feminizing markers. This fact reveals that gender is directly tied to sexuality. According to Balieiro and Risk (2014, p. 171), “sexuality and

9 I use the term “patriarchy” to refer to an institutionalized social, political, and economic system in which men hold power and authority over women and other genders positioned as subordinate (Hartmann, 1976). This deeply rooted structure sustains gender inequality and shapes social, economic, and cultural relations.

10 Rodrigues (2023) defines passing as the social perception of a subject, particularly trans people, regarding the extent to which a transgender person (including transsexuals and *travestis*) is read as cisgender. Although sometimes perceived as desirable, passing can operate as a trap: it reinforces cisnormative standards and delegitimizes those who do not meet them. It may also translate into the denial of rights, including the right to life. While the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution (Art. 5) guarantees equality before the law and the inviolability of life, trans people who do not “pass” often face reduced social interaction and increased exposure to violence (Rodrigues, 2023, p. 28).



gender intersect when considering that the social construction of masculinity is based on the denial of the feminine, including the symbolic domination of women and homophobia.”

This perception of gender and sexuality in *capoeira*, though still little studied and difficult to grasp, becomes visible by observing the numerous men who identify as heterosexual and benefit from privileges that enable them to become *-mestres* in their groups, compared with the obstacles faced by women and LGBTQIA+ people in reaching the same hierarchical positions.

Moreover, self-declaration regarding sexuality is difficult, revealing multiple subjectivities around these marginalized themes. Data from the National Health Survey conducted by IBGE in 2019 indicate that only 2% of the population identifies as LGBTQIA+, which suggests a clear pattern of underreporting. Analysts from the institute attribute this to prejudice and fear of violence as the main factors behind such underreporting.

This underreporting scenario demonstrates how a policy of silencing marginal bodies—in which individuals struggle to recognize their own reality or feel constrained not to acknowledge it—becomes an effective extermination tool. If there are no people claiming certain spaces, there appears to be no need to conceive public policies that ensure their survival and well-being.

In the interviewees’ accounts, we can observe different barriers surrounding the process of coming out in the context of *capoeira* practice. Beyond the family and religious spheres, they report having to confront sexist and homophobic discourses, as well as fearing the loss of space within their groups, especially before their *capoeira* teachers, should they assume their sexuality.

[...] just the other day I went to teach at an event in Rio de Janeiro. During the event, a *mestre* said something like: “ah, people like you [lesbian], I know you all distrust men. If men were better, you wouldn’t need to be with women,” for example. You hear things like that all the time. And this came from a *-mestre*, an older person, the whole situation, I was there as an invited *contramestra*, so it was absolutely embarrassing, right? Then you still have to explain to the person that there are things we don’t choose. That’s not how things work (*Capoeira mestra treinela*, March 9, 2023, online interview).

[...] it came from a very old and respected *mestre*, and when he said it I tried to explain politely, but everyone said, “Oh, so now you want to change the *-mestre’s* mind?” I don’t want to change anyone’s mind, I just want respect. He doesn’t need to talk about me. It’d be better if he just pretended I didn’t exist. But if he talks about me, I have to talk about myself too. So, these things happen and you end up being cautious. After going through this many times, nowadays I don’t go just anywhere (*Capoeira mestra treinela*, March 9, 2023, online interview).

[...] my *mestre* doesn’t understand that a Black gay man has opinions. Just like a Black lesbian woman has opinions. But those opinions aren’t respected. We understand and respect the hierarchy, but sometimes someone younger can give you a push forward with much more energy than someone who’s been in *capoeira* much longer than you, you know? It’s because of this lack of understanding, and because the younger person might actually know a lot (*Capoeira teacher*, March 2, 2023, in-person interview).



From these excerpts we can see how the hierarchy established in *capoeira* groups becomes a barrier to dialogue. It inhibits the questioning of discriminatory positions taken by *mestres* toward their students.

Among the interviewees there was difficulty in self-declaring as living in poverty. Even while recognizing that their *capoeira* groups operate in precarious environments—with inadequate spaces for activities, lack of equipment, and in many cases no remuneration for teachers—the interviewees understand themselves as living in conditions of precarity but do not identify themselves as poor, as they believe there are people in greater need (especially those experiencing hunger). When asked whether he belonged to the spectrum of poverty, one interviewee responded:

[...] of course not, because I live in a neighborhood – actually a group of neighborhoods – where there are poor people and extremely poor people. The poor one is me: I work, I have my income, I rent a place, sometimes share it with someone else, but we don't go hungry. When we want to go to the movies, we go; to the mall, we go; we buy something we want – we're poor. But the extremely poor are the ones you say: "this family needs a food basket, let's organize a *capoeira roda*, because this family needs the support that will come out of it." Because one by one the poor help the extremely poor. So that's the distinction I make between being poor and being extremely poor. It exists. There are extremely poor people in this neighborhood. And we try, in every way we can, to help (*Capoeira* teacher, March 2, 2023, in-person interview).

Economic conditions affect both the practice of *capoeira* and the inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ people interviewed. They emphasize that the lack of financial resources limits the expansion of *capoeira* and including different bodies within groups, especially the most marginalized.

[...] speaking from my reality, I fought so hard to earn a rank, but until recently, just a few days ago, I was working as a construction helper. When things get tight, you do whatever you can. There's no such thing as being ranked or not. Not here. A lot of people out there graduated and are unemployed. So having a degree just gives you the right to stand in line, maybe you'll get something, right? So these are the things we notice: the difficulty of entering the labor market, this struggle. And at the same time the responsibility of sustaining cultural creation, how do you divide that? Because there's rent, I have rent to pay, I have my house, my partner here. There are essential things that can't be missing, otherwise we'll have nowhere to land. I think that's the struggle, that's the pending issue. Everything is always very risky. So there's a huge responsibility – I'm a very new *contramestra*. It's been only a year since I was recognized as *contramestra*, and the responsibility grows even more. Something I hadn't even thought about, didn't want it that way. We know we'll get there one day, but we think it will take longer. Then suddenly they demand a huge responsibility from you to sustain it. But you also have to sustain your home, *capoeira*, a job... it's an investment that doesn't really have a place, because you don't actually have the means. I believe there's a very thin line between falling into poverty and not, you know? And it's like that all the time (*Capoeira mestra treinela*, March 9, 2023, online interview).

[...] with more financial support, I wouldn't have to work eight hours and then still go teach *capoeira*. I can dedicate myself. Go to one neighborhood, then another, to schools, daycare centers, the periphery, social projects, NGOs. Spread the teachers and *mestres* from the group, and we can really take *capoeira* as an emancipatory instrument. Really taking popular culture as a tool that restores Black, peripheral identity and brings pride in being Black and peripheral, you know (*Capoeira mestra treinela*, March 9, 2023, online interview).



Lack of adequate funding not only limits the practice of *capoeira* in general but also creates barriers to including marginalized groups. Thus it perpetuates social exclusion and invisibility within *capoeira*.

Puma Camillê (2023) can be presented as an important contemporary figure who foregrounds the performativity of bodies that dissent from a cisgender heterosexual norm within *capoeira*. Revisiting her trajectory, she self-identifies as a “*travesti* body, Black, dark-skinned, that takes *capoeira* as a subversive technological instrument” (Camillê, 2023). The artist develops research and artistic practice at the crossroads of *capoeira*, Blackness, and transversality.

Each step this body has taken is a first step, the first time in history that *capoeira*, in this body, has reached these spaces. So I realized they are historical steps. And even more so because this body speaks of *capoeira* not from that hegemonic, catechized, whitened, patriarchal place. By bringing *capoeira*, I am reminding people that it does not need to manifest through bodily masculinity. It can bring other elements of power, communities, and people who were not there before, but who are bodies authorized to manifest it in the diaspora (Camillê, 2023).

Puma thus understood that she could create a welcoming environment for different people within *capoeira* practice, unlike what she herself experienced in her training process. She therefore created *Capoeira para todes*, a collective of LGBTQIA+ people interested in practicing *capoeira*. This initiative encouraged people from her community to enter *capoeira* and, through the diffusion of this work, encouraged other practitioners willing to open such welcoming spaces to a diversity of bodies. According to Puma (2023), the challenge of the collective is to enable the reconstruction of new images of the LGBTQIA+ body beyond those systematically pre-established (often associated with prostitution, suffering, and death) that stigmatize these individuals. This occurs by foregrounding the performance of dissident bodies in *capoeira*, especially transgender people.

Indeed, the interviewees frequently expressed a desire for environments that enable the participation of all people. However, such initiatives still encounter resistance, as moments when the traditions of *capoeira* groups and their masters allow this openness remain rare. When they do occur, they typically take the form of independent groups that lack institutional support for their continuity.

I would really, really, really love that. When I was first recognized as a teacher I even told my master: “I’m going to create my own team of trans men and women.” That was my first idea. But here that possibility became so scarce, and I had no support. You know when you want to do something and you can’t find support anywhere? Sometimes, when you look for support, you get more help from people outside than from those inside your own house. That weakened me. But from now on I’m open any time there’s good support and a good team of trans men and women, my goodness (*Capoeira* teacher, March 2, 2023, in-person interview).

One interviewee reported that Puma’s initiative inspired others. When she publicized the opening of a *capoeira para todes* she encountered resistance from LGBTQIA+ people who had not yet come out, since joining such spaces might lead others to read them as LGBTQIA+.



I once started promoting my work as “*Capoeira para todes*.” Someone told me they wouldn’t come because they weren’t fully out yet and, if they were there, people would know it. So they said *Capoeira para todes* was positive, but also negative, because people like them wouldn’t go since others would see them as... I think that was a downside. I even stopped promoting it that way. I don’t want access limited like that either. I want everyone there, not just a specific group. So I changed it and no longer advertise it as “*Capoeira para todes*” (*Capoeira mestra*, March 3, 2023, online interview).

This account shows that simply offering space for people—often made vulnerable by multiple forms of violence—to practice capoeira is not enough. Such initiatives do not necessarily guarantee the safety needed for them to perform their identities and play with them.

The collective *Capoeira para todes* proposes a renewal of traditional capoeira spaces. While valuing ancestral knowledge transmitted by mestres and mestras, the group invites them to participate in shared experiences, fostering a horizontal exchange in which traditional knowledge can dialogue with contemporary, more plural and inclusive realities.

Recognizing dissident bodies in capoeira is therefore urgent. It helps us understand how this ancestral practice may refine our corporealities in relation to identity while also showing that different bodies can perform capoeira. Doing so requires questioning the hegemonic bodily standard, reinforced by hierarchical structures, as the sole reference for the practice.

Continuous reflection on capoeira practice and ritual, attuned to the issues of our time, enables its development within its cultural matrix while maintaining ties to ancestry. Culture—and tradition itself—is inevitably transformed by the time and place in which it exists. Practitioners must therefore adopt strategies that allow difference to be welcomed within the practice.

These dynamics show that capoeira’s performativity can remain rooted in its cultural matrices while hybridizing key contemporary concerns, such as respect for sexual and gender diversity. In doing so, it resignifies a national identity closer to lived reality. A reality emerging from the political, social, and cultural plurality of capoeira practitioners in Brazil and beyond. Effective actions are needed to ensure these transformations challenge hegemonic patterns and reconnect with the libertarian thought of capoeira’s ancestors.

Understanding conditions of precarity and poverty in capoeira reveals the persistence of the marginalization of historically excluded bodies. This libertarian struggle—born as resistance to oppression—remains marked by structural inequality, reflecting both the social vulnerability of practitioners and intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, and sexuality within the practice. The absence of safeguarding public policies further perpetuates the exclusion of capoeira mestres and mestras and their groups. Although capoeira remains a symbol of Brazilian cultural identity, the precarization of its practitioners shows that the struggle for freedom continues.

When performativity is brought to the crossroads between dissident bodies and capoeira bodies—both marked by gender, sexuality, raciality, and precarity—these intersections generate



a sense of urgency. This urgency exceeds the existential, becoming political and aesthetic as it mobilizes new ways of acting, resisting, and resignifying the body itself.

Thi Gresa (2020, p. 40), reflecting on dissident performances in contemporary politics, states that “[...] our transvestigender and dissident/dissonant bodies exist in constant tension, enabling not only other narratives but other ways of thinking the body in tension—the body-as-tension.” When such bodies inhabit the universe of capoeira, the intersections of gender, sexuality, raciality, and class emerge as borderline zones of risk.

Resuming the idea of dissonance and noise, we reach these border possibilities, existences that, through performance – transform their bodies into political presences and activate their performative practices – testing the limits of what forms of existence are possible (Thi Gresa, 2020, p. 40).

Thus the performativity of these bodies—whose very existence is already political—displaces meaning by breaking the systematic silences imposed upon them. Their voices and corporealities emerge in the spaces where they manage to assert themselves.

3 Final considerations

The third stage of this research shows that although *capoeira* is grounded in traditions of resistance among oppressed peoples and their ancestralities, its contemporary practice is marked by contradictions that reproduce the very hierarchies and exclusions it historically resisted. The accounts of LGBTQIA+ *capoeira* teachers reveal that power structures sustained by gender, sexuality, and racial norms still operate strongly within groups, directly shaping trajectories of training and belonging.

The performativity of dissident bodies in *capoeira* not only exposes the material and symbolic obstacles these individuals face but also demonstrates their capacity to subvert norms, open fissures, and produce new meanings for the practice itself. The sense of urgency traversing these bodies is both aesthetic and political, emerging in tension with traditional and hegemonically legitimized ways of being a *capoeirista*.

Reflecting on the precarity that marks these bodies also reveals the intersectional barriers—both within and beyond *capoeira*—that shape the (in)ability to survive through the practice. These barriers appear in the absence of safeguarding public policies, the silencing of dissident bodies and voices, and the scarcity of public funding. Examining the performativity of dissident bodies in *capoeira* therefore invites efforts to strengthen its emancipatory potential within the territories of resistance and expression from which the practice emerged. Through ongoing dialogue with political and cultural perspectives, *capoeira* may affirm itself as a plural space for building more inclusive collectives open to difference.



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Funding

Not applicable

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable

Competing interests

No declared conflict of interest

Research Context

No declared research context

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Copyright of the translation

Celso Rimoli and Carolina Vanso

Contribution of authorship (CRediT)

Mateus Schimith: conceptualization, analysis and writing.

Alexsandro Rodrigues: writing and supervision.

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Evaluation Method

Double-Blind Peer Review

Editors

Altemar Di Monteiro

Anderson Feliciano

Soraya Martins

Peer Review History

Submission date: 15 July 2025

Approval date: 05 February 2026