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Between Borders and Crossroads: Performances of Orality in Different Brazilian Bodies and Contexts

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Taking our own research and life trajectories as point of departure, what we propose here is an interplay of ethnographic data obtained working with two groups of storytellers: one, inhabitants of the Brazil/Argentina/Uruguay border country, and others whom we encountered within the context of Capoeira Angola of Bahian tradition (Salvador, Bahia). While borders may be seen as establishing boundaries, and crossroads as announcing encounters, we may be able to think about these two conceptual markers, coming from each context, as territories (physical and/or symbolic) from which different performances of orality emerge. Attentive to issues of gender and race/ethnicity, and to the conflicts, tensions and creations that constitute them, we propose a discussion of the meanings that emerge from narratives produced by subjects who are situated within these “borders and crossroads”.

Keywords: Brazilian popular traditions, Capoeira, traditional storytellers, gauchos, intersectionality.

To Begin With

Instigated by the marks imprinted on our research by different territorialities and corporealities, we decided to propose in this article a reflective exercise based on two Brazilian popular traditions: Capoeira Angola from Bahia, Northeast region of Brazil, and the stories told by inhabitants of the border between Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, in far southern Brazil.

These territories and the performances emerging from them were not a random choice; on the contrary, they are linked to the very crossroads at which we authors find ourselves. Neither in the South nor in the Northeast, but in the Brazilian Center-West, where the institutions we are affiliated to are situated and where our common interest in Brazilian traditional performances is understood. If crossroads herald meetings, boundaries

may mark differences: on the one hand, a Rio Grande do Sul anthropologist of German descent¹, a researcher of the oral narratives told in the border region between Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, and, on the other, a black Capoeira practitioner descended from Africans who worked as slaves on the coffee farms of the Paraíba River Valley in São Paulo, a researcher of black performances.

Therefore, we view borders and crossroads as powerful conceptual operators, sensitive geographical and symbolic territories from where different performances of orality stem. Our reflections in this article are inspired by the work developed by the Brazilian researcher and playwright Leda Maria Martins, for whom traditional black performances are acts that bodily inscribe, in time and space, an ancestral memory, an episteme, in a process she calls “Afrographics of memory” (Martins 1997). On the other hand, we also draw on the concept of performance developed by Deborah Kapchan, in dialogue with Richard Bauman:

Performances are aesthetic practices – patterns of behavior, ways of speaking, manners of bodily comportment – whose repetitions situate actors in time and space, structuring individual and group identities. Insofar as performances are based upon repetitions, whether lines learned, gestures imitated, or discourses reiterated, they are generic means of tradition making. Indeed, performance genres play an essential (and often essentializing) role in the mediation and creation of social communities, whether organized around bonds of nationalism, ethnicity, class status, or gender (Kapchan 1995: 479).

Both Capoeira and the *gauchos*’ narratives, therefore, will be addressed here as traditions of “performance.” These highly distinct traditions are part of the huge Brazilian cultural mosaic. Brazil is home to many Brazils, in the words of the anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro (1922–1997). In his book *The Brazilian People*, written over 30 years ago, Ribeiro investigates the cultural matrices and mechanisms of the cultural formation of the Brazilian people, highlighting a few Brazils, namely: Backlands Brazil, Peasant Brazil, Creole Brazil, Southern Brazil. In this text we approach our borders and crossroads from the viewpoint of Creole Brazil and Southern Brazil, aware that there are certainly many other Brazils outside the categories listed by the author.

¹ The South Region of Brazil, which incorporates the state of Rio Grande do Sul, has experienced a massive migration process of Germans and Italians during the 19th century, which conferred a “whiteness” that is evoked in some Brazilian popular traditions, as we will argue in the text.

At the Crossroads of Afro-Brazil

Darcy Ribeiro defined “Creole Brazil” as “(...) a Black cultural area related to the historical-cultural configuration stemming from the introduction of the sugar economy and its complements and annexes in the coastal strip of the Northeast of Brazil, which runs from Rio Grande do Norte to Bahia” (Ribeiro 1995: 275). Although we agree with the author’s definition, we propose to rename this Brazil as “Afro-Brazil”, not to defend the Africa that was diluted in Brazil, but the Africa that constituted the country, besides resisting and reinventing itself within it, especially considering that, for over three centuries, Portuguese and Brazilian vessels shipped enslaved men and women from almost 90 African ports, making 9,200 crossings that transported about 4.9 million people to Brazil.² We therefore understand that the African contribution to the cultural, historical and economic formation of Brazil should be recognized in the very process of designing and designating the categories of analysis. And it is in this effort to appreciate Brazilian Africanisms that the concept of crossroads has emerged from religions of African origin to inform the reflection on traditional performances.

As a geographical site, a crossroads consists of the intersection of two streets, roads or trails. A person at a crossroads enjoys a few possibilities of movement, of options of direction. On the other hand, a crossroads is also a place of encounter, that is, not only a point of departure, but also of arrival. Streets, roads and trails meet at crossroads and people travelling on them have the chance to meet there, even if they later decide to set off in different directions. Thus, symbolically, a crossroads is a metaphor for movement, decision and also encounter.

It is also at crossroads that followers of religions of African origin in Brazil make offerings to an entity called Exu (Eshu, Èṣù) and to the “people of the street.” By religions of African origin we understand a number of spiritualist practices that, despite having been created and consolidated in Brazil, cultivate elements or cosmo-perceptions deriving from African peoples, such as: the cult of ancestors; the mediumistic trance; the practice of prayer through singing, dancing and percussive music; the notion of gratifying and thanking sacred entities through offerings; a family-based framework, where the priest is the father, the priestess is the mother and the other followers are their offspring; and concern with nurturing the vital life force through a series of specific rites of each religious practice, such the herbal bath.

The best-known religions of African origin in Brazil are Candomblé, Umbanda, Quimbanda, Batuque, Macumba, Jaré and Tambor de Mina, each of

² Data from The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, an international effort to catalog data on the slave trade – which includes, among others, Harvard University: <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

which has its specificities, depending on the region where they are practiced and local traditions. All of them, to a greater or lesser degree, in dialogue with Christianity and/or indigenous, aboriginal traditions, some of which have become almost imperceptible, as is the case with some Candomblé traditions that have endeavored to re-Africanize themselves, especially from the 1970s, based on the notion that it was no longer necessary to conceal the deities, forbidden during the slavery period, behind Catholic saints.

Candomblé, in particular, preserves strong elements of African traditions, such as language, eating habits and the cult of African deities called Orishas (Ketu Candomblé), Nkise (Congo-Angola Candomblé) or Voduns (Jeje Candomblé), patron gods and goddesses of elements of nature or human actions. Orishas are worshiped in Ketu Candomblé, which is of Yoruba origin, in Congo-Angola Candomblé, of Bantu origin, especially from the region called Congo-Angola, and also Jeje Candomblé, whose origins lie in the ancient Kingdom of Dahomey.

All candomblé variants worship a deity that is considered the messenger in charge of communication between humans and gods and goddesses. In Keto Candomblé it is Exu Orisha, also called lord of the paths. In Congo-Angola Candomblé it is Nkise Njila or Mavile, and in Jeje Candomblé it is Vodum Legba, also called Elegbara.

Exu, Elegbara e Legba são, entre os povos iorubas e fon-ewe situados na África Ocidental, divindades mensageiras, dinâmicas, temidas e respeitadas, que devem ser saudadas em primeiro lugar para não atrair confusão ou vingança. São deuses tricksters que questionam, invertem ou quebram regras e comportamentos. São associados aos processos de fertilidade e, sob a forma de um falo ereto, cultuados em altares públicos localizados na frente das casas, nos mercados e nas encruzilhadas. Quando seu culto foi “descoberto” pelos europeus iniciou-se um processo no qual essas divindades foram associadas ao imaginário do mal, da desordem e da repressão sexual (ao demônio cristão e muçulmano) e, posteriormente ao mundo pré-moderno (primitivo), ao imaginário das forças antagônicas da modernidade, entre as quais estava, sobretudo, o pensamento mágico presente nas religiões que não passaram pelo processo da secularização ou burocratização (Silva 2019: 453).

[Exu, Elegbara and Legba are, among the Yoruba and Fon-Ewe peoples of West Africa, messenger divinities, dynamic, feared and respected, which must be initially hailed so as not to attract confusion or revenge. They are trickster gods that chal-

lenge, invert or break rules and behaviors. They are associated with fertility processes and, in the shape of an erect phallus, worshiped on public altars situated outside houses, in markets and at crossroads. The “discovery” of their cult by Europeans triggered a process in which these deities were associated with the imaginary of evil, disorder and sexual repression (with the Christian and Muslim devil) and, after the pre-modern (primitive) world, with the imaginary of the antagonistic forces of modernity, among which was, above all, the magical thinking of religions that did not undergo processes of secularization or bureaucratization (Silva 2019: 453).]³

Understanding the importance of Exu, Njila and Legba for Candomblé in Brazil, as well as the misguided way in which these deities have been associated with the Christian devil, provides important clues to understanding the crossroads on at least three levels: 1) symbolically, as the abode of this deity; 2) geographically, as the public space (street) occupied by followers of Candomblé and also of other religions of African origin in Brazil to worship these gods with offerings. It is worth noting that Candomblé was historically persecuted and condemned by Christian morality, which still promotes religious intolerance even though the Brazilian constitution guarantees freedom of worship;⁴ and 3) as a conceptual operator that advocates an Afro-epistemology, as pointed out by Leda Maria Martins (1997).

A encruzilhada, locus tangencial, é aqui assinalada como instância simbólica e metonímica, da qual se processam via diversas de elaborações discursivas, motivadas pelos próprios discursos que a coabitam. Da esfera do rito e, portanto, da performance, é o lugar radial de centramento e descentramento, interseções, influências e divergências, fusões e rupturas, multiplicidade e convergências, unidade e pluralidade, origem e disseminação. Operadora de linguagens e de discursos, a encruzilhada, como um lugar terceiro, é geratriz de produção, as noções de sujeito híbrido, mestiço e liminar, articulado pela crítica pós-colonial, podem ser pensadas como indicativas de efeitos de processos e cruzamentos discursivos diversos, intertextuais e interculturais (Martins 1997: 28).

[The crossroads, tangential locus, is herein considered a symbolic and metonymic territory from which are processed

³ This and all other translations of works in Portuguese are from our own authorship.

⁴ After the election of the current Brazilian president, attacks on Candomblé yards have increased. See: <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/01/21/denuncias-de-intolerancia-religiosa-aumentaram-56-no-brasil->

different means of discursive elaboration driven by the very discourses that jointly inhabit it. In the sphere of rite and, therefore, of performance, it is the radial site of centering and decentering, intersections, influences and divergences, mergers and ruptures, multiplicity and convergences, unity and plurality, origin and dissemination. Operator of languages and discourses, the crossroads, as a third place, generates production, the notions of hybrid, mixed-race and preliminary subject, articulated by post-colonial criticism, can be viewed as indicative of the effects of different discursive processes and crossings, intertextual and intercultural (Martins 1997: 28).]

The crossroads is also the place of the “people of the street” who, in hybrid religions that rely heavily on Christianity and spiritualism (such as Umbanda), relate to the so-called *Pombagiras*, *Exus* and *Malandros*. These were human beings generally living in conditions of social risk, earning a living from the streets, prostitution and illegal activities, and who, after their demise, were charged with the mission of working through mediums (people who embody these spirits when in a trance so they may dedicate themselves to caring for humans and thus evolve in their spiritual processes). Due to Christian influence, some religious practices that worship *Exus* and *Pombagiras* assign these entities to a negative pole, called left. Afro-Brazilian religions, however, understand that energy and spiritual balance is only possible if there is worship to the right and to the left, to the people of the street and to the “line of souls,” which includes the spirits of old people, children and descendants of indigenous people called *Caboclos* (Brown 1994; Ortiz 1999).

A passerby who walks incautiously on Brazilian thoroughfares and encounters an *ebó*⁵ at a crossroads may experience a feeling of strangeness or even aversion, depending on their relationship with and knowledge of such a practice. These offerings (*ebós*) may consist of food, coins, shells, sacred seeds, candles and votive offerings. Like crossroads, Capoeira also holds surprises. In this Brazilian practice created by enslaved Africans, a danced fight takes place in the center of a circle constituted by people who sing and play instruments. Besides the attack and defense moves, the game’s highlight is in the players’ ability to trick each other, showing superiority in what is called *malandragem* (trickery), *malícia* or *mandinga*.

At crossroads there is a flow of entrances and exits which is also suggested by the Capoeira swaying movement of entering (attack) and exiting (defense) the circle. In the 19th and early 20th century Capoeira established

⁵ *Ebó* is the name given in Candomblé to offerings made to deities to obtain help, care or protection.

itself as a street game, played either by day by urban slaves⁶ or dock workers between jobs, or at night by bohemians, samba musicians and idlers,⁷ as were called those who rejected a life dedicated exclusively to work.

The street is precisely the wandering ground of Exu, the lord of the ways, worshipped in Candomblé, and other related entities revered in Umbanda, Catimbó and similar religious practices. According to the sociologist Reginaldo Prandi (2005), Exu is both messenger and transgressor, since, among other traits, he holds the power to break with tradition, challenge rules, subvert norms and promote change. As an Orisha he is feared and considered dangerous for being the “very principle of movement, which transforms everything, which respects no limits” (Prandi 2005: 50), and perhaps for this reason is mistakenly viewed by Christian religions as the devil himself.

According to Candomblé belief, each person belongs to an Orisha (fully confirmed through an initiation process), who is the master or mistress of their head, of whom they are offspring and from whom they inherit physical and/or personality traits, which can also be understood as the divine manifestation intrinsic to each being.

Exu, the guardian of crossroads and front doors, besides being a messenger, is also the patron of copulation, being thus ascribed the quality of sensuality. Therefore, it is said that, among other characteristics, the sons and daughters of Exu are intelligent, seductive, agile and lovers of partying and drinking, and consequently viewed with certain distrust (Prandi 2005). Observing the traits of the Lord of Crossroads, we can relate him to Capoeira, which is likewise seductive, agile and tricky.

According to the anthropologist Roberto Da Matta (1985), a *malandro* (trickster) is a highly individualized person who lives outside the formal framework of social rules. Eternalized in samba lyrics, the *malandro* is viewed in Brazil as paradigmatic type, a hero. In an urban and adverse social context, especially for black and poor people, he became a synonym for cleverness, vivacity, cunning, associated at the same time with captivating quick-wittedness and a certain “charm.” All of these characteristics are materialized in the Capoeira, where one is always ready to attack and defend, with lightness and elegance.

A *malandro*, therefore, does not make a deliberate show of force, but rather finds an elegant and friendly way to “pull a fast one on others” or “trip them up,”⁸ using smooth talking and seduction. Beyond the swaggering at-

⁶ Slaves working in retail.

⁷ The term *vadio* (idler) later undergoes change in Afro-Brazilian cultural practices and starts to denote not only “non-work,” but also play-based and recreational activities, such as the Capoeira that occupied the streets in the late 19th century, disturbing the elites.

⁸ *Rasteira* in Portuguese, a Capoeira move to knock down one’s opponent.

titude typical of the practice of Capoeira, the figure of the *malandro* is a historical and cultural construction of an archetype that plays out the reality of Brazilian social drama from the late 19th century, an age marked by the abolition of slavery, which was decreed without a project to insert the black population in society. It was on the fringes and outskirts of large cities that this population found its own means of survival, not only in terms of minimum subsistence conditions but also of ways to rise above the harsh reality of daily life, marked by scarce resources, difficult access to basic rights and high vulnerability to violence. In this context emerges Capoeira, which should also be understood as strategy of resistance.

A significant part of the information circulating today about Capoeira comes from testimonies by masters of that tradition, recorded in audio and video by practitioners and researchers, especially in the second half of the 20th century. In that period Capoeira underwent major change, gaining recognition as a national art or sport and spreading widely from the state of Bahia to other Brazil regions and also abroad. According to Pires, during this process the practice branched out into two strands, Capoeira Angola and Regional Capoeira, in a process of cultural invention triggered in the first decades of the 20th century. According to him, “These styles are specific forms of Capoeira developed in the city of Salvador, where sporting criteria did not destroy the playful side of the practice” (Pires 2001: 239).

Despite being contemporary with Regional Capoeira, Capoeira Angola is considered a more traditional style that preserves the memory of the old masters and nurtures their African ancestry, unlike Regional Capoeira, which was created by Mestre Bimba with more evident martial and sporting goals compared to the ritualistic traits that Capoeira Angola sought to emphasize.

One of the major Capoeira Angola masters was Vicente Ferreira Pastinha, born in the city of Salvador, Bahia, in 1889, one year after the abolition of slavery, and deceased in 1981. Below is an account of Pastinha’s apprenticeship transcribed from a testimony given by the master in the 1988 video documentary *Pastinha! Uma Vida Pela Capoeira* [*Pastinha! A Life for Capoeira*], directed by Antônio Carlos Muricy.⁹

A capoeira é mandinga, é manha, é malícia, é tudo o que a boca come. (...) A minha vida de criança foi um pouquinho amarga, encontrei um rival, um menino que era rival meu. Então nós entrávamos em luta, travava as lutas e eu apanhava, levava a pior. E na janela duma casa tinha um africano apreciando a minha luta com esse menino, então quando eu acabava de bri-

⁹ The documentary is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-unP_tdBiKI (17.04.2020).

gar, eu passava e o velho me chamava: “Meu filho, vem cá!” Eu cheguei na janela e ele então me disse:

“Você não pode brigar com aquele menino. Aquele menino é mais ativo que você. Aquele menino é malandro e você não pode brigar com ele. Você quer brigar com o menino na raça, mas não pode. O tempo que você vai pra casa empinar raia [pipa], você vem aqui pro meu casuá [casa].”

Então aceitei o convite do velho e pegava na capoeira. E ginga pra aqui e ginga pra lá, ginga pra aqui, ginga pra lá. E cai e levanta. Quando ele viu que eu já tava em condições de responder o menino ele disse: “Você já pode brigar com o menino, então sai.” Quando eu vinha a mãe dele via que eu ia passar, gritava: “Honorato, aí vem seu camarada.” E o menino puc, de dentro de casa o menino pulava na rua como um satanás. E aí ele me pegou e eu insisti. E na hora que ele insistiu e passou a mão, eu saí por baixo. Ele tornou a passar a mão em mim e eu tornei a sair debaixo. “Você tá vivo hein?” Aí insistiu a terceira vez e eu rebati a mão dele e sentei os pés nele [chutou]. Ele recebeu, caiu, tornei a sentar o pé nele, ele tornou cair. (...) E depois fui aprender a arte marítima, aprendi a música, esgrima, de espadas, florete, carabina, fui músico. Em 1910 dei baixa já saí de lá como professor de capoeira. (...) A capoeira tem negativa, a capoeira nega, a capoeira é positiva, tem verdade. Negativa é fazer que vai e não vai e na hora que nêgo mal espera o capoeirista vai e entra e ganha.

[Capoeira is witchcraft, it's slyness, it's trickery, it's everything that nurtures the body. (...) My life as a kid was rather tough, I had a rival, a boy who was a rival of mine. So, we'd fight, and I'd get beaten, come off worse. And at the window of a house there was an African observing my fights with this boy, so when I'd finish fighting, I'd pass by and the old man would call me: “Come here, son!” I went up to the window and he said: “You can't fight that boy. That boy is more active than you. That boy is sly and you can't fight him. You want to fight him the hard way, but you can't. Whenever you go out to fly kites, come here to my house.”

So, I accepted the old man's invitation and practiced Capoeira. Moving this way, moving that way, a leg here, a leg there. And falling and getting up. When he saw that I was good enough to take on the boy, he said: “You can already fight the boy, so get out.” When I passed by, his mother would see me and shout: “Honorato, here comes your pal.” And the kid would jump out of the house into the street like a devil. And then he caught me and I

dodged. And when he urged and tried to hold me, I slipped out from under him. He tried to hold me again, and again I slipped out. "You're quite lively, huh?" Then he pressed the third time and I deflected his hand and kicked him hard. He fell back, I kicked him again, he fell again. (...) And then I went on to learn the art of navigation, I learned music, fencing, with epee, foil, rifle, I was a musician. In 1910 I was discharged and left as a Capoeira instructor. (...) Capoeira has negation, Capoeira denies, Capoeira is positive, it has truth. Negation is to feign the attack and pull back, and when the opponent is off guard, to close in to win.]

In telling his story, Mestre Pastinha not only shares memories and information about his life but, above all, contributes to the construction of collective knowledge through his personal experience. The act of telling stories to transmit basic principles, celebrate life and encounters and mark identities is intensely present in the formative process of Capoeira, which comprises not only physical exercise, but also, to a great extent, stories shared by masters and teachers.

Mestre Pastinha's narrative shows us how the boy Vicente was introduced to Capoeira. It is that old man of African origin who, seeing him at a disadvantage and, perhaps, unfairly treated, prepares the boy to fight and also for life, teaching him the slyness, trickery and resistance of Capoeira.

The figure of the old man, Seu Benedito, is also the genuine representation of the importance of the male or female master in the context of Capoeira Angola, and also of African ancestry, which Pastinha emphasizes so much in his statement. It is worth mentioning that in addition to being a Capoeira instructor, Mestre Pastinha was also considered a Capoeira philosopher, and some of his sayings became famous and are transmitted orally even today in Capoeira circles:

Angola, capoeira mãe. Mandinga de escravo em ânsia de liberdade, seu princípio não tem método e seu fim é inconcebível ao mais sábio capoeirista (Mestre Pastinha – tradição oral apud Magalhães Filho 2019: 18).

[Angola, mother Capoeira. Witchcraft of slaves yearning for freedom, its beginning has no method and its end is inconceivable to the wisest of Capoeira fighters (Mestre Pastinha – oral tradition, in Magalhães Filho 2019: 18).]

The black man from Angola also symbolizes the importance of Bantu Africa, which immersed itself deeply in Brazilian history and daily life through the Congo-Angola component. Another element that we can highlight in Mestre Pastinha's biographical narrative is the fact that Vicente's

site of learning was Seu Benedito's own house, perhaps at the bottom of his backyard, which relates to the specificity of sociability in black and Brazilian cultures and the importance of the community in Afrocentric educational methods.

Mestre Pastinha's narrative reveals not only his initiation in the practice of Capoeira, but also the importance of courage, observation, listening and waiting for the right time. Pastinha listened to Seu Benedito, answered his call to Capoeira Angola, trained, waited for the elder's word, and observed and feinted before attacking.

What relationship might there be between this crossroads and the border? And, more specifically, what borders are we talking about? Certainly not just the geopolitical borders separating Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, but also the borders between the subjects of anthropology, performance studies and dance; the narrative borders between traditional narratives and life stories; the borders of the imaginary; bodily borders, which define dexterity, strength, scars; age-related borders: children, elders... all understood here as storytellers. Border, therefore, due to its semantic wealth, is, along with crossroads, one of the key concepts adopted in this article.

On the Borders of a Southern Brazil

More than 3,500 km from the site of Mestre Pastinha's story in Bahia there is another fragment that makes up the mosaic of Brazilian identities, that which Darcy Ribeiro (1995) called Southern Brazil, characterized by its great cultural heterogeneity and composed, according to him, of three components:

Such are the rustic peasants of mainly Azorean origin who occupy the coastal strip from Paraná to the south; the current representatives of the former gauchos of the open fields of the River Plate border and the pastoral pockets of Santa Catarina and Paraná, and, finally, the foreign-driven Brazilian formation of the descendants of European immigrants (...) (Ribeiro 1995: 408).

[Tais são os lavradores matutos de origem principalmente açoriana, que ocupam a faixa litorânea do Paraná para o sul; os representantes atuais dos antigos gaúchos da zona de campos da fronteira rio-platense e dos bolsões pastoris de Santa Catarina e do Paraná, e, finalmente, a formação gringo-brasileira dos descendentes de imigrantes europeus (...) (Ribeiro 1995: 408).]

The differences between Afro-Brazil, or Creole Brazil, and Southern Brazil are many. Although the population of black men and women in the Northeast region greatly outnumbers that of the rest of the country, the presence of the black population in Rio Grande do Sul cannot be denied. Nevertheless, this state located in the far south of Brazil is better known for the cultural traditions brought by European immigrants, especially from Germany and Italy, whose arrival in the region dates from the 19th century.¹⁰ It is worth noting that Darcy Ribeiro himself does not include in this identity formation, at least not explicitly, the presence of enslaved blacks (they are supposedly included, along with the indigenous population, in what the author calls “former gauchos”), and it is precisely that presence that we want to emphasize here, through the narratives told by local residents of the border between Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

Historically, the geographical position of Rio Grande do Sul placed this state in a very specific situation in relation to the rest of Brazil, as not only was the number of slaves on farms in the River Plate region substantially lower, but also Argentina and Uruguay officially abolished slavery much earlier than Brazil (1815 and 1842, respectively). Consequently, those countries were often the destination of runaway Brazilians slaves (Petiz 2006; Targa 1991), just as, inversely, many blacks who lived in Uruguay were kidnapped to be sold as slaves in Brazil. Mário Pires, a journalist in Rivera, Uruguay, comments on the presence of slaves in the Uruguayan border region:

Entonces... en esa zona, que era territorio muy habitado por extranjeros, por terratenientes brasileños, ellos trajeran esclavos a trabajar acá. Y los trajeran como empleados, porque acá entraban como empleados, entonces había siempre el problema porque... estaba hecha la trampa. Y inventaban historias, inventaban ciertas cosas para camuflar que no eran esclavos, para justificar que no eran esclavos, pero eran esclavos. Y había comercio de esclavos. Y ahí cerca de Vichadero, cuando tu vas por allá, hay un lugar que se llama Tambores. Ahí hay una localidad, un paraje que se llama Tambores. En ese lugar se le llama Tambores porque los negros, los fines de semana, se reunían en una roda, a tocar sus ritos. (Mário Pires, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Rivera/UY, 16.06.2001).

[So... our territory was inhabited by many foreigners, by Brazilian landowners, who brought slaves to work here. And

¹⁰ The settling of Europeans in Brazil was firstly driven by a colonization process and later linked to a national eugenics project to improve the “race” through progressive whitening of the population.

they brought them as employees, so there was always the problem because... it caused great confusion! They invented stories, invented certain things to camouflage their slavery, to justify that they were not slaves, although they were. And there was a slave trade. And there close to Vichadero [a Uruguayan village on the border with Brazil], if you go there, there is a place called Tambores [Drums]. It has that name because the black people would gather in a circle on weekends to perform their rituals. (Mário Pires, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Rivera/UY, 16.06.2001).¹¹

The historian Moacyr Flores (1997) observes that even the revolutionaries of the Farrapos uprising did not free the slaves during the years of the Rio Grande do Sul Republic (1835–1845, the decade in which the province of Rio Grande do Sul was a country independent from Brazil). Targa, drawing on data from 1874, points out that despite being unevenly distributed across the region, the percentage of enslaved population in Rio Grande do Sul was one of the highest in Brazil, 21.3% against 15.9% in Minas Gerais, 20.4% in São Paulo and 39.7% in Rio de Janeiro” (Targa 1991: 446).

Due to the prohibition of the slave trade in 1850, the fierce abolitionist campaigns and the arrival of German and Italian immigrants in the state,¹² keeping slaves gradually became uneconomical, and they were eventually freed in 1888 without any kind of compensation or institutional support.

Several peculiarities, therefore, emerge from/in the cultural practices of the inhabitants of this border region. Their customs, their manner of speaking, the movement between “the other side” and this side, the architecture, daily life, relationships, occupations, leisure, trade, everything seems to be permeated by a “border way of being” that goes beyond divisions on maps and theoretical formulations.

¹¹ All tapes and transcripts about the *gauchos* storytellers are part of the Luciana Hartmann’s personal collection.

¹² The first immigrants to arrive in Rio Grande do Sul were the Azoreans, in 1752, settling in and around the capital city, Porto Alegre. The first German settlers arrived in the early 19th century, later followed by the Italians, Poles, etc., who were taken to the Sinos River valley and the highlands region. This immigration was less pronounced in the border area, where no villages were founded by the settlers, but even so cultural differences were/are perceived by the population and expressed in some narratives: “Mas o General Bordini era gringo (designação local para italiano), então nós chegemo lá, pensa que ele olhava prá uma vaca? Ficava lá na... ele tinha uns viveiros de cebolinha, a senhora pensava que era um poteiro de pastagem, (porque) era muito. E batata inglesa ele plantava um absurdo (...)” [“But General Bordini was a gringo (local name for Italian person), so we get there, do you think got his hands dirty? He stayed at the... he had a chives garden, you’d think it was a pasture, (because) it was huge. And he planted an absurd number of potatoes (...)”] (Valter A. Prata, 68 years, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Alegrete/BR, 07.08.1998).

In this tri-border region, territories, societies and identities transcend their respective nation-states, and the micro-region in focus, located “between” these states, shares a border culture. Laballe (1996: 17) also draws attention to this characteristic of the local inhabitants: “They are ‘in-between,’ in ‘no man’s land.’” References to the border as a “no man’s land” are found in narratives that mention, for example, murders committed in the region, with bodies abandoned on the border line, as this would be “ownerless land” where the states exercise no power.

The notion of border pervading our analysis is, therefore, related to the idea of front line, a place of conflicts and tensions and, consequently, a fertile field of contacts and negotiations to try to appease them (Leenhardt 2002).

The image of the region described by Bastide also contributes to reinforce this “warrior ethos” of the border inhabitants, developed alongside the integration relationships between the “sides”:

Fronteira é local de luta, mas é também local de interpenetração, de trocas de civilizações, principalmente quando é móvel. A que separa as possessões espanholas das possessões portuguesas, deslocava-se ao sabor dos golpes de surpresa e das batalhas; era fronteira feita de corpos humanos e não de montanhas ou de rios. Descendentes de velhas famílias portuguesas são encontrados no Uruguai, descendentes de velhas famílias espanholas são encontrados no Rio Grande do Sul. Os indivíduos misturaram-se numa área movediça que não era possessão de nenhuma coroa, e sim o domínio de rebanhos e de capinzais (Bastide 1980: 178).

[The border is a place of struggle, but it is also a place of interpenetration, of exchanges between civilizations, especially when it is mobile. The border separating Spanish and Portuguese possessions would move according to surprise attacks and battles; it was a border made of human bodies rather than mountains or rivers. Descendants of old Portuguese families are found in Uruguay; descendants of old Spanish families are found in Rio Grande do Sul. Individuals mingled on an unstable ground that was not owned by either crown, but dominated by herds and grassland (Bastide 1980: 178).]

In this border “country” coexist subjects, traditions, customs, economies, languages and, above all, narratives.¹³

¹³ We are inspired once again by Jacques Leenhardt, who argues that “the border is not so much a line as a space” (2001: 19), since its correlated notion, limit, comes from the Latin word *limes*, meaning interval, margin, border without appropriation.

As we have seen in our ethnographic research, the population of this border region belongs to the same narrative community. This is evident in the words of Barreto, a storyteller from the Brazilian town of Santana de Livramento, which borders Rivera on the Uruguayan side: "Here on this border, wherever you see a dividing line you will hear a tale..."¹⁴

United, on the one hand, by the geographic characteristics of the region – the pampas¹⁵ – and a similar historical background and social organization, on the other hand, the regions' inhabitants often found themselves fighting on opposite sides in conflicts that led to the establishment of political boundaries between the three countries.

The border problem, not least for the intense history of contact in this region, is accompanied by a paradoxical discourse that tends alternately to affirm differences – when tensions escalate and conflicts are inevitable – and to celebrate similarities – when integration becomes a reality. The border is therefore the space where the paradox between being equal or being "another" is most clearly defined. This ambiguous relationship of conflict and integration, present from the very foundation of the border's culture, is, therefore, a main approach to reflect on the subject. As noted by Grimson (2000: 23), the study of the border itself defies any static, uniform and non-relational notion of culture and identity, as it should consider in its analytical outlook not only the "cultural blend" but also the alliance and the social and political conflicts inherent in the condition of living on the border.

The notion of conflict used in this work accords with that of Briggs (1996: 13), for whom conflict does not merely relate to divergence in normal social processes, but, on the contrary, involves complex forms that are part of the very constitution of social life. On a broader scale, one may view the former armed conflicts of these borders, which involved dramatic events, as having been replaced by economic conflicts. But in a more local perspective the conflicts take on a different dimension and may possibly have greater significance in the social life of the region, ceasing to oppose countries and their economies to oppose employers and employees, urban and rural workers, youngsters and elders, men and women, tradition and modernity, humans and animals, nature and the supernatural. . . In other words, among the small, "intra-border" social groups, identity is also and mainly found in the very in-

¹⁴ Original in Portuguese: "Aqui nessa fronteira onde tu vê beira de linha tu vai ver cuento", Antônio Carlos Barreto, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Santana do Livramento/BR, 22.11.2001.

¹⁵ Pampas is the name given to the vast plains of Rio Grande do Sul and the countries of the River Plate basin, covered with natural pastures used for cattle raising (Nunes & Nunes 2000).

teraction, manipulation, interpretation and, in some cases, “fictionalization”¹⁶ of their experiences of conflict.

As Pedro Riera, 50, from Rivera, Uruguay, explains, combining Portuguese and Spanish in his performance:

Yo tengo bien claro el concepto de soberanía, derechos humanos. Pero explicar a un hombre que vive en una frontera que ciertas cosas no pueden ser (ri), más allá de una calle... No! No te entienden. No siguen ni a líderes, ni a caudillos ni a nadie! Eran como los gauchos nuestros, que cuanto más gaucho más orejano, no? Él no se ata a leyes. (...) E quem explica prá eles donde começa e dónde termina? Não tem. Eles vão prá um lado, vão pro-outro e não tem problema (Pedro Riera, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Rivera/UY, 20.06.2001).

[I’m very clear about the concept of sovereignty, human rights. But try to explain to a man who lives on the border that certain things cannot be done beyond a street... [laughs] No! They don’t understand! They don’t follow leaders, or *caudillos*, or anyone! They are like our gauchos – the more gaucho, the more *orejano* [an animal with no branding, that is, that has no owner]. They are not bound by the laws (...). And who can explain to them where it starts and where it ends? No... They go here, go there and that’s it (Pedro Riera, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Rivera/UY, 20.06.2001).]

The issue of policies to control the distribution of human and non-human populations on the planet, strongly experienced in border regions, is addressed by the philosopher Achille Mbembe. These policies, according to him, occur “Not only through the control of bodies but the control of movement itself and its corollary, speed, which is indeed what migration control

¹⁶ According to Palleiro, one of its distinctive features is the recreation, through rhetorical techniques and strategies of referential construction, of the constitutive elements of the group’s cultural identity. This construction includes “tanto la experiencia histórica como el patrimonio simbólico de las ideas y creencias de dicho grupo, reelaborados en un mundo posible, mediante procedimientos de textualización ficcional. Este mundo posible es presentado ante el receptor, por medio de recursos argumentativos dirigidos a producir un efecto de realidad, como un universo verosímil” [“both the historical experience and the symbolic heritage of the ideas and beliefs of group, reworked in a possible world, through fictional textualization procedures. This possible world is presented to the receiver, through argumentative resources aimed at producing an effect of reality, as a plausible universe”] (Palleiro 1992: 17–18). This process of fictionalization, however, would be only one aspect shaping cultural identity in narratives, which does not mean that all references to identity in the narratives are fictional.

policies are all about: controlling bodies, but also movement” (2018). Pedro Riera’s words, however, show that borderland inhabitants find ways to resist such policies, one of which, we argue here, is through oral narratives, which cross borders with no passports.

If borders are significant sites of differences, how are these differences, these conflicts, specifically in terms of ethnic-racial configurations, expressed in the region?

Let’s see what the narrators say. Tomazito Berruti, 80 years old, from Cerro Pelado, Uruguay, relates:

Mi gran escuela, mi primera, pero al mismo tiempo gran escuela, fue una cocina de estancia llena de humo, con unos banquitos bajos, con una media luna de paisanos de todas las edades, negros, blancos, viejos, gurices – porque en las estancias hay de todo, y con mucho olor a carne asada, porque siempre el desayuno era un asado, y a yerba, porque allí estaba la yerbera. Además, lo que yo aprendí allí. Nos madrugábamos, nos levantábamos y nos íbamos, y entonces uno oía los cuentos de los personajes y la vida impresionante. Los viejitos que no se jubilaban en aquel tiempo, y nosotros los queríamos y éramos compañeros de ellos. Tomadores... gauchos que admirábamos (Tomazito Berruti, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Cerro Pelado/UY, 03.07.2001).

[My main school, my first and at the same time main school, was the ranch’s kitchen, filled with smoke, with low stools and a half circle formed by farm hands of all ages, black, white, elders, kids – because the ranches have all kinds of people – and a strong smell of roast meat, because breakfast was always a barbecue, and maté tea [*chimarrão*], because that was where the maté leaves were kept. In addition, everything that I learned there... We’d wake up at the crack of dawn and go there, and then we’d listen to the stories of those characters and their impressive lives. The elders who never retired in those times, and we loved them and were their companions. Gauchos we admired (Tomazito Berruti, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Cerro Pelado/UY, 03.07.01).]

For Tomazito, the son of Italian immigrant farmers, learning took place in a context of ethnic, age and class diversity, through orality, the stories that were shared among different subjects. It is important to note that in his memories the narrator reproduces to some extent the figure of the gauchos and the democratic spirit of ranch life immortalized in the literature of the River Plate region (Nichols 1942).

In turn, Dom Martimiano Silva Rodrigues, a black man of the same age and living in the same region as Tomazito, evokes a distinct memory:

Sim, sim, nas minhas época havia o racismo. O que era negro era à parte nesses tempo. Branco também. O negro não entrava em baile de branco e o branco não deixavam eles entrar. Se olhava, olhava da porta e o negro também. E ainda hay muita gente ainda aqui... Agora a recém que tão meio começando. Ah, não, havia uma festa aí, negro à parte (Martimiano Silva Rodrigues, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Cerro Pelado/UY, 02.07.2001).

[Yes, yes, in my days there was racism. What was black was separate in those days. White too. Blacks did not attend the dances of white folk and whites didn't let them in. If they observed, it was from the door. And there are still a lot of people here... Now the new one that is just beginning. Ah, if there was a party there, blacks celebrated apart" (Martimiano Silva Rodrigues, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Cerro Pelado/UY, 02.07.2001).]

The question that remains from this account is: why people who interacted in the same workplace (in this case, the ranch) were not allowed to share the same leisure space (the dance)? In some border towns still survive the so-called *Centro de Tradições Gaúchas* (CGT – Centers of Gaucho Traditions), frequented exclusively by blacks. The actual names of the centers hint at this condition: Princess Isabel (daughter of Dom Pedro II, who signed the law abolishing slavery in Brazil in 1888), *Negrinho do Pastoreio* (a local legend of slave boy who dies from harsh punishment by his master and becomes a kind of popular saint), etc.

This form of segregation is perhaps only the most evident sign of the deep ties between the exploitation of black labor and slavery, which survive in Brazil to this day. For Dalla Vecchia (1997: 102), research involving reports by descendants of enslaved people and observation of remnants of slave quarters, whipping posts and iron shackles make it possible to conclude that "The myth of benign slavery in cattle ranching or farming in Rio Grande do Sul is an ideological farce". Dona Eládia dos Santos, 52, a black woman who works as a cook at a ranch in Quaraí, a Brazilian town bordering Artigas in Uruguay, gives us an example of these exploitative relationships:

Os patrões eram horríveis antigamente. Tu vê, esse homem véio aí (refere-se a Seu Rosa, homem negro que vivia na estância) também foi criado assim. Ele já foi criado sem juventude. Ele não teve infância esse véio. Ele veio prá cá muito gurizinho e naquele tempo não deixavam sair. Então é isso, ele ficou, não casou, não teve filho... Naquele tempo tu não saía, os patrões não deixavam tu sair. Que côsa horrível, que tempo bem difícil! E os patrões te davam pau! (Eládia dos Santos, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Santana do Livramento/BR, 16.09.1998).

[The ranch owners were horrible in the past. You see, that old man there (refers to Seu Rosa, a black man who lived on the ranch) was also raised like that. He had no youth. He had no childhood, that old man. He came here as a kid and at that time they wouldn't let you out. So that's it, he stayed on, he never got married, never had children... In those days you couldn't leave the ranch, the owners wouldn't let you. What a horrible thing, what difficult times! And the owners would beat you! (Eládia dos Santos, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Santana do Livramento/BR, 16.09.1998).]

Seu Rosa, 84 years old, mentioned by Dona Eládia, was already retired at the time of our research, but continued living on the ranch and doing odd jobs such as chopping meat, sweeping the yard, keeping the shed fire burning and the water always heated for the maté tea. For Piccin (2012), this “unmarried condition,” combined with the geographic isolation of the black workforce, is essential to understand the domination system in the region.¹⁷ As a consequence of this practice, former employees who never started a family ended up, like Seu Rosa, remaining on the ranches and were considered part of the estate when it was sold or inherited: “Um dos estancieiros entrevistados declarou que ele ainda tinha em sua estância alguns “velhos” peões que tinha “herdado” de seu pai junto com a propriedade e que ‘nunca saíam da estância’” [“One of the ranch owners interviewed stated that he still had on his ranch a few ‘old’ workers he had ‘inherited’ from his father along with the property and who ‘had never left the ranch’”] (Piccin 2012: 247).

The presence of blacks in the narratives is also commonly associated with tales about treasures buried in old ranches, often alongside accounts of dreams indicating where the money is and curses on those who find the gold and don't follow the instructions.¹⁸ Many of these narratives tell that the ranch owners would make slaves dig the hole to bury the money in and then, to prevent them stealing it or revealing the location, would kill and bury them also.¹⁹ These places are haunted and the treasure can only be removed when it is received in a dream by an heir or someone who deserves it.

¹⁷ According to Piccin (2012: 261): “Certamente, essa configuração devia ser a mais econômica também para o patrão, com menor dispêndio monetário, uma vez que o peão solteiro então morava e se alimentava no galpão, cujo nível de remuneração passava a ser o mínimo para a reprodução da força de trabalho não de sua família, mas apenas de sua própria pessoa” [“This must certainly have been the most economical arrangement for the ranch owner, involving lower costs, since the unmarried worker lived and ate in the shed and was remunerated with the minimum required for the reproductive labor not of his family, but only of himself.”]

¹⁸ These tales of buried money bear a relation to the Mexican “treasure tales” studied by Briggs (1985).

¹⁹ The historian Raul Pont (1986: 104) gives the complete account of this “operation that took on macabre proportions.”

There is still much to be told about the history of slavery in Brazil and Dona Eládia's narrative helps us to learn more about this reality:

Uma tia minha, a tia Juliana, morreu com 105. A tia Juliana foi escrava. Ela era do Rio de Janeiro, depois ela foi morrer aqui (na fronteira). Descobriram... papai sempre me dizia: "Eu tenho uma irmã. Se chama Juliana." (...) E depois descobriram ela. Foram achar ela num morro, morava no morro, morava no morro. Trouxeram ela prá Livramento. Ainda durou uns dez anos aqui em Livramento. Depois morreu. Sem doença nenhuma, apagou... a véinha. Aí a tia Juliana (quando era jovem) andava de namoro com um homem, e sabe o que é que as patroas fizeram? Queimaram a... (aponta para a região genital). Ela nunca mais quis homem na vida, nunca, nunca... Atiraram doce quente... mandaram ela baixar as calças e atiraram doce quente nela, prá ela não namorar. Foi. Ela tinha tudo queimado. Ela era uma moça solteirona, porque as mulheres atiraram doce quente nela. E ela tinha um braço também queimado. Que elas (as escravas) mexiam doce e tinham que cantar (ela cantarola). Se tu parasse de cantar achavam que tu tava roubando doce. E a tia Juliana parou de cantar e a mulher veio de lá, diz que ela tava provando doce aí agarrou uma pás (colher de pau) e atirou o doce na tia Juliana. Não pegou no rosto mas pegou no braço. Ela foi muito judiada! Tu vê, ela ainda pegou o tempo das escrava, dessa gente ruim! Tu vê, eu tenho a... tenho o quadro da Princesa Anastácia aí no meu quarto. A Princesa Anastácia foi uma negra escrava (Eládia dos Santos, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Santana do Livramento/BR, 16.09.1998).

[An aunt of mine, Aunt Juliana, died at the age of 105. Aunt Juliana was a slave. She was from Rio de Janeiro, and ended up dying here (at the border). They found her... My father always told me: "I have a sister. She's called Juliana." (...) And then they found her. They found her on a hillside slum, she was living there. They brought her to Livramento. She survived another ten years here in Livramento. Then she died. She wasn't ill, she just faded away... the old woman. So, Aunt Juliana (when she was young) was dating a man, and do you know what her mistresses did? They burned the... (points to the genital region). She never again desired a man in her life, never, never... They threw hot caramel... they told her to lower her pants and threw hot caramel on her, so she wouldn't date. They did it. It was all burned. She was a single girl because the women threw hot caramel on her. And she had a burnt arm too. They (the slaves) stirred the caramel and had to sing (she hums). If you

stopped singing, they thought you were stealing caramel. And Aunt Juliana stopped singing and the woman came up and said she was tasting the caramel, then she grabbed a blade (wooden spoon) and threw the caramel on Aunt Juliana. She missed her face but hit her arm. She really suffered a lot. You see, she lived in the time of slaves, of those bad people! You see, I have... I have a picture of Princess Anastácia there in my room. Princess Anastácia was a black slave (Eládia dos Santos, interviewed by Luciana Hartmann – Santana do Livramento/BR, 16.09.1998).]

In Dona Eládia's narrative, the facts recalled about Aunt Juliana are followed by the story of Princess Anastácia, which she tells in detail after mentioning the image hanging on her bedroom wall.²⁰ Bodies, narratives, images of black women come together to preserve an ancestral memory. A memory that survives as it circulates, as it moves between storytellers and listeners, between borders and crossroads, as we will see below.

Between Borders and Crossroads: Interplay Between Stories and Brazils

It is important to attend once again to what is obviously a utopian intent, the question of a borderless world. From its inception, "movement" or more precisely "borderlessness" has been central to various utopian traditions. The very concept of utopia, refers to that which has no borders, beginning with the imagination itself. The power of utopianism lies in its ability to instantiate the tension between borderlessness, movement and place, a tension – if we look carefully – that has marked social transformations in the modern era.

Achille Mbembe (2018)

As we have seen, the narratives of Mestre Pastinha and Dona Eládia are complex and therefore offer several possibilities for analysis. We chose here to address them from the perspective of "narrative events" – the discursive situation of their narration – and "narrated events" – the words and actions they report, based on Jakobson (1990). This formal manipulation of the relationship between narrated events and narrative events provides, according to Bauman (1986), an important foundation for the realization of social commentary through the narrative form.

Thus, while the events narrated by Dona Eládia and Mestre Pastinha directly or indirectly evoke issues related to the African diaspora in Brazil,

²⁰ We did not insert Dona Eládia's narrative about Princess Anastácia due to lack of space.

marked by slavery, in their respective narrative events both make common use of several aesthetic and performance devices.

Dona Eládia keeps an image of the enslaved Anastácia in her room, remembered in Brazilian oral tradition as a princess with miraculous healing powers. Mestre Pastinha's story also bears marks of slavery, since his Capoeira master, Tio Benedito, was a former black slave from Angola who is evoked in his narrative also as a protector.

In the narratives of Mestre Pastinha and Dona Eládia, memory is triggered as a connection with ancestry. Black bodies and voices tell stories in an "Afrography of memory" (Martins 1997), gradually configured through specific stylistic resources. Dona Eládia, for example, uses reported speech, i.e., the representation of the characters' words in the first person. According to Bauman and Briggs (1990), this is one of the main devices used by storytellers to connect narrated events to narrative events. The storyteller also seeks interaction with the audience through the use of questions such as "You know (...)?" Gesturing a lot throughout the narration, she gives special emphasis to demonstrating the punishment applied to Aunt Juliana, which adds great drama to the story being narrated. Mestre Pastinha, in turn, in telling his story of initiation into Capoeira, also uses the same device (reported speech), using Seu Benedito's words as a link with Capoeira from the past and with Africa, since he was an enthusiastic defender of the African legacy of Capoeira as opposed to Capoeira regional. In this narrative, Mestre Pastinha answers one of the main questions of the tradition-based context of Capoeira Angola: "Boy, who was your master?", stressing the importance of the master-disciple relationship.

At the border narrated by Dom Martimiano and Dona Eládia, the memory and history of slavery times actualize in "Southern Brazil" the black bodies of the past and the present, which to this day suffer from extreme subordination, violence and discrimination.

At the crossroads narrated by Mestre Pastinha, the son of a Spanish peddler and a black woman from Bahia, the adversity of the street is the stage of learning and strategies of sociability of the black population, as well as of resistance and assertion of black cultures, especially the importance of the master and of African ancestry.

Darcy Ribeiro, in the work referred to herein, developed his arguments about the construction of the identity of the Brazilian people, emphasizing the notion of miscegenation. That thesis is severely criticized for, to a certain extent, centering the narratives on the voices of the colonizers. In line with such criticism, we address the potential of the narratives not only with regards to representation, but above all to the construction of imaginaries and, based on their ethnic and gender specificities, stress the importance of listening to the different voices.

There is an African proverb that claims that “Until the lions tell the story, the hunters will always be the heroes.” Considering the dynamics of the traditions and resorting to Exu’s sagacity, we could add a new perspective to the proverb which also considers the stories of female hunters and lionesses... With that in mind, we would like to conclude by introducing another element into our reflections on performances of orality in different Brazils: the intersectional gaze/listening.

In the last decades, the issue of intersectionality between gender and race has gained prominence in Brazil, led mainly by black intellectuals such as the anthropologist Lélia Gonzalez, who stresses the need for black women to be protagonists and narrators of their life stories. We therefore draw on intersectionality as an analytical category that makes it possible to instrumentalize anti-racist and feminist movements and other initiatives of human rights protection to deal with agendas such as those of black women (Akotirene 2019).

At the current crossroads of Capoeira Angola, the issue of women’s historical invisibility has found an important forum for discussion. How to build an Afrography of women’s memory if their stories are not told? After all, were there no women in Capoeira or were their stories forgotten/erased? This effort to look at and narrate the past, which we join, currently reinforces a movement of empowerment of female leaders, above all by the realization that, despite the large number of women participating in this popular tradition, the number of female Capoeira masters still it is relatively insignificant.

Dona Eládia’s narrative borders, in turn, make it possible to glimpse an enlightening picture of the situation of black women in Brazil, of the control of their bodies and sexuality and of their vulnerability in the face of patriarchal violence. In her performance, Dona Eládia projects herself and the group, raising questions that cannot be detached from their markers of ethnicity-race, gender and, we might add, class. With her black body of woman and cook, her grandiose gestures brandishing knives or wooden spoons, her poetic narrative full of pauses, repetitions, reported speech, Dona Eládia, being an excellent performer, plays a powerful role in evoking an ancestral memory and demonstrating the current reality. As stressed by Kapchan, quoted at the beginning of this article, “To perform is to carry something into effect – whether it be a story, an identity, an artistic artifact, a historical memory, or an ethnography” (1995: 479).

Although the issue of gender was not essential to the discussion developed in this article, our intent in highlighting Dona Eládia’s narrative is to propose an exercise in appreciating, in studies on popular traditions, intersectional issues and the respective conflicts, tensions and creations running through them. We view these analytical traversals proposed in an intersec-

tional approach as a possibility of, who knows, in crossing some of established borders of knowledge, having fruitful encounters at the crossroads.

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Entre fronteiras e encruzilhadas: performances da oralidade em diferentes corpos e contextos brasileiros

Luciana Hartmann and Renata de Lima Silva

Resumo

Partindo das trajetórias de pesquisa e de vida das autoras, propomos neste artigo um jogo entre dados etnográficos obtidos na investigação com contadores de causos da fronteira entre Brasil, Argentina e Uruguai e aqueles oriundos de vivências no contexto da capoeira angola de tradição baiana (Salvador, Bahia). Se as fronteiras demarcam limites e as encruzilhadas anunciam encontros, é possível pensar esses dois operadores conceituais, característicos de cada contexto, como territórios (físicos e/ou simbólicos) de onde emergem distintas performances da oralidade. Atentas às questões de gênero e étnico-raciais, e aos conflitos, tensões e criações que as constituem, propomos discutir os sentidos que emergem de narrativas produzidas por sujeitos situados nessas fronteiras e encruzilhadas.

Palavras-chave: tradições populares brasileiras; capoeira; contadores de histórias; gaúchos; interseccionalidade.

Између граница и раскршћа:
Перформанси усмености у различитим
бразилским телима и контекстима

Лусиана Артман и Рената де Лима Силва

Резиме

Полазећи од властитих истраживања и животних путева, овде ћемо се бавити узајамним дејством етнографских података који су добијени радом с две групе приповедача: једну чине становници пограничног подручја између Бразила, Аргентине и Уругваја, а другу они које смо срели у контексту истраживања плеса „капуера Ангола“ традиције Баије (државе на североистоку Бразила, главни град Салвадор). Мада се границе могу схватити као успостављање ограничења, а раскршћа као најавна сусрета, о ове две појмовне ознаке, полазећи од сваког контекста понаособ, може се размишљати као о територијама (физичким и/или симболичким) из којих проистичу различити перформанси усмености. Имајући слуша за питања рода и расе/етничитета, и за сукобе, тензије и стваралаштво који чине њихов саставни део, предлажемо расправу о значењима која искрсавају из приповедања субјеката ситуираних у оквиру тих „граница и раскршћа“.

Кључне речи: бразилске народне традиције, капуера, традиционални приповедачи, гаучоси, тачке пресека.

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