'If I climb a wall of ten meters': capoeira, parkour and the politics of public space among (post)migrant youth in Turin, Italy

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ABSTRACT Rather than being seen as citizens, the children of immigrants are portrayed as a population to be controlled and contained across Europe. In Italy today, debates about cultural authenticity and renewed nationalism accompany waves of moral panic that depict a country under siege by illegal and unwanted immigrants. Specifically in cities, immigrants and their children are imagined and portrayed as alien and out of place. Drawing on fourteen months of ethnographic research in Turin, Italy, with children of immigrants aged between 16 and 21, Ugolotti and Moyer illustrate how these youth make use of their bodies through capoeira and parkour practices to contest and reappropriate public spaces, thereby challenging dominant visions about what constitutes the public, how it should be used and by whom. They analyse the 'body in place' to understand how the children of immigrants navigate unequal spatial relations and challenge dominant regimes of representation, while also attempting to improve their life conditions and reach their personal goals.

KEYWORDS capoeira, immigration, parkour, public space, social navigation, Turin, youth

> *We are young, we are foreigners, we are always around, we are exactly who they [police] look for first . . .* (Bogdan, 16 years old)

Despite being the newest citizens in many European countries, children of immigrants are hardly portrayed as such in public discourses. Public imaginaries of these youths as a threat to a modern and ordered society are perpetuated through the skewed attention they receive in the media and from politicians. Debates about cultural authenticity, renewed nationalism and waves of moral panic, which depict 'Fortress Europe' as 'under siege' by illegal and unwanted immigrants, increasingly contribute to the defining of immigrants and their children as alien bodies who are 'out of place' in Europe. As Abdelmalek Sayad has argued, in Europe, the 'children of migration' represent the 'inopportune posterity' of migration, a concrete manifestation of the impossibility of two 'illusions': the illusion of

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sanitized, regulated and temporary immigration for host societies, and the illusion of return for immigrants.[1]

This case study explores the embodied and spatial negotiations of groups of young men, mostly of immigrant origin, who practise capoeira and parkour in Turin's public spaces. Our perspective focuses on what is at stake in the everyday practices of (post)migrant youth as they tactically navigate urban spaces made treacherous by Turin's contemporary politics. Inspired by Michael Silk and David Andrews's call for a 'physical cultural studies approach' that 'identifies the body—and even more specifically the active body—as the central focus of its intellectual labour', we examine the 'body in place',[2] in relation to public discourses that portray migrant youth as being inherently 'out of place' in the city. By examining and explicating what is at stake as marginalized young men engage with social spaces in Turin, we aim to contribute to debates on practice theory as it intersects with theories about agency and social change.[3] Our conceptual and methodological approach also aims to challenge the pathologized portrayals of (post)migrant youth that have come to dominate public discourses across Europe.

This study examines the ways that capoeira and parkour practices, when enacted in urban public spaces, can represent attempts by groups of disenfranchised youth to negotiate their own formula of citizenship and inclusion. Furthermore, it will analyse these practices as a means of countering the social exclusion produced by Italy's contemporary anti-immigration sentiments and the 'anxious politics' resulting from enhanced surveillance regimes,[4] and restrictive laws/policies that target minority populations.[5] Capoeira and parkour practices can thus serve as meaningful spatial-temporal events through which we observe marginalized youth as they negotiate, challenge and/or reproduce the hierarchies of belonging that shape both their daily lives and future horizons.[6]

Methodology

1 Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, trans. from the French by David Macey (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press 2004); Abdelmalek Sayad, *L'immigrazione, o i paradossi dell'alterità: l'illusione del provvisorio*, trans. from the French (Verona: Ombre Corte 2008); Abdelmalek Sayad, 'La vita dell'immigrato', *Aut Aut*, no. 341, January–March 2009.

2 David L. Andrews and Michael L. Silk, 'Toward a physical cultural studies', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2011, 4–35 (7).

3 Henrik Vigh, 'Motion squared: a second look on the concept of social navigation', *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2009, 419–38.

4 Andrew Manley and Michael Silk, 'Liquid London: sporting spectacle, Britishness and ban-optic surveillance', *Surveillance and Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2014, 360–76.

5 Didier Bigo, 'Globalized (in)security: the field and the ban-opticon', in Didier Bigo and Anastassia Tsoukala (eds), *Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes: The (In)Security Games* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2006), 5–49.

6 Les Back, Shamser Sinha and with Charlynne Bryan, 'New hierarchies of belonging', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2012, 139–54.

Data for this study are derived from fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Turin, between May and November 2011 and in 2013–14. The lead author engaged in informal interviews and took part in daily capoeira and parkour practice with the research participants. Additionally, we conducted nine in-depth interviews with *capoeiristas* and *traceurs*,[7] and with eight street educators working with migrant youth in Turin. Names of interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy. We engaged with young men with different geographic origins because we observed that an approach that restricted participant selection based on geographic origins or ethnicity would have limited insights about our interlocutors' enacted negotiations of space.[8]

We argue that, when conducting research on the experiences and practices of young people, it is important to develop an approach that encourages the voices and perspectives of youth to emerge. Our approach, which is similar to that used by Moyer in her research with young men living and working in the streets of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania,[9] entailed regular and extensive 'deep hanging out' with the research participants in their cultural milieu, including long hours in Turin's public spaces. This allowed us to gain valuable insight into young people's practices, daily navigation of public spaces and the power relations affecting their lives. The lead author's practice of capoeira and parkour with participants proved enormously helpful in gaining access to the fieldwork environment. This ethnographic approach enabled his co-presence with interviewees in the field as a 'passionate participant',[10] and facilitated a theoretically driven, 'visceral' analysis of the observed practices in the context of research by including the researcher's 'sensations, moods, and physical state of being' during capoeira and parkour practice.[11] The embodied involvement in participants' practices required a self-reflexive analysis of the researcher's political, gendered, racialized bodily presence in the field; as an educated, ethnic Italian male, it is certain that he unwittingly influenced talk, attitudes and gestures among interlocutors.[12] A self-reflexive, ongoing, critical awareness of the researcher's presence and

7 Capoeira and parkour practitioners.

8 Participants hailed from Romania, Brazil, Morocco, Senegal, Nigeria, Ukraine, Moldova, Albania, Peru and the Dominican Republic.

9 Eileen Moyer, 'Street corner justice in the name of Jah: imperatives for peace among Dar es Salaam street youth', *Africa Today*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2005, 31–58.

10 Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousands Oak, CA and London: Sage 1994), 105–17 (114).

11 Elizabeth Sweet and Sara Ortiz Escalante, 'Bringing bodies into planning: visceral methods, fear and gender violence', *Urban Studies*, vol. 52, no. 10, 2015, 1826–45 (1827).

12 Ben Carrington, '"What's the footballer doing here?": racialized performativity, reflexivity, and identity', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2008, 423–52; Michael D. Giardina and Joshua I. Newman, 'Physical cultural studies and embodied research acts', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 11, no. 6, 2011, 523–34; Jessica Francombe-Webb, Emma Rich and Laura De Pian, '"I move like you . . . but different": biopolitics and embodied methodologies', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2014, 471–82.

engagement with participants enabled an interrogation of how his situated body impacted the research practice and context, and how his physicality became part of the meaning-making process.[13]

Paradoxes and consequences of Turin's urban regeneration

> *Millions of visitors will be able to seize the opportunity to visit Torino and to explore a city that is often not recognized by the new image that the city has taken on in recent years. Turin has been greatly transformed, it has became more beautiful, much more open [to diversity], much more welcoming, much more accommodating, a great city of arts and culture . . .* (Piero Fassino, Mayor of Turin)[14]

Turin, a city located in the industrial northwest of Italy, is often referred to as the 'Italian Detroit', both because of its reliance on the auto industry and the eventual collapse of that economic sector. Turin is Italy's fourth largest city and the third largest economic centre; it is also known as the most indebted city in Italy and the poorest city in the industrial North.[15] During the 1950s, job opportunities in the industrial sector attracted many internal migrants from southern Italy, who were replaced by labourers from North and West Africa, South America and Eastern Europe in the 1980s. Although Turin had long been considered among the most progressive and tolerant cities in northern Italy,[16] the sharp economic downturn that accompanied the economic crisis in the early 2000s brought an effective collapse of heavy industry, as well as a significant change to Turin's social inclusivity. The fragile balance that had allowed migrants to be 'welcomed' in Turin ended along with the need for temporary, flexible workers. The last decade has seen the diffusion of nationalistic rhetoric like 'Italians First' or 'No to a Multi-Ethnic Italy' among a disillusioned population that seems scared and confused by the effects of the current economic crisis. This rhetoric has contributed to the endorsement of increasingly restrictive laws on civil rights and rights to work and residence for foreigners in Italy.[17]

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13 Francombe-Webb, Rich and De Pian, '"I move like you . . . but different"', 474.

14 Piero Fassino, in the video 'Extra Expo—ExpoTo: gli eventi del 2015 a Torino', 10 March 2015, available on *YouTube* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=smjcqwyPKq4 (viewed 10 February 2016). Translations from the Italian, unless otherwise stated, are by the authors.

15 Confederazione generale italiana dell'artigianato (CGIA), *Analisi finanziaria dei comuni italiani* (Mestre: CGIA 2014); Alessandro Macina and Elena Stramentinoli, 'Ricchi e poveri', broadcast *Presa Diretta*, 2 September 2013 on Rai3, available on the *Presa Diretta* website at www.presadiretta.rai.it/dl/portali/site/puntata/ContentItem-1ccc76c5-8ef0-4e14-a07f-d4e9aca56a07.html (viewed 10 February 2016).

16 Camille Schmoll and Giovanni Semi, 'Shadow circuits: urban spaces and mobilities across the Mediterranean', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2013, 377–92.

17 Alice Rossi, 'I corpi del reato: quando la resistenza passa attraverso il corpo', in Valentina Porcellana (ed.), *Il doppio margine: donne tra esclusione e cambiamento* (Turin: Libreria Stampatori

In the last two decades, the municipality of Turin, together with its main cultural-economic lobbies, responded to the city's economic decay and growing social tensions by trying to rebrand its image from a 'city that looked like a factory',[18] to a European and international capital of culture, tourism and leisure. Turin's progressive spatial and social regeneration resonated with the urban transformations enacted in several post-industrial cities across the (developed) world, which have been addressed in the literature by means of the concept of *cosmopolitan urbanism*.[19] This notion refers to a process of legitimizing neoliberal urban regeneration,[20] enacted by urban politicians, planners and boosters to attract 'global talent', financial capital and tourism by revaluing urban space.[21] It was in this framework that the concept of *a cosmopolitan* as a person who appreciated the Other became salient,[22] and ethnic, religious and cultural diversity started to represent 'the heart of what makes a twenty-first-century city "vibrant"'.[23]

Specifically in regard to the context of research, Camille Schmoll and Giovanni Semi's study has defined Turin's urban renewal as a form of 'multiculturalism from above',[24] and described this process as relying mainly on one of the most fashionable, consumable and less challenging aspects of multiculturalism: *food*.[25] Through the promotion of multi-ethnic street markets, the organization of high-end international food fairs (such as the internationally renowned Terra Madre and Salone del Gusto), and more ordinary '(multi)cultural festivals', the city of Turin endorsed a *palatable* and *visible* image of cultural diversity, appealing to cosmopolitan, sophisticated travellers, as well as to less

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2011), 111–30.

[18] Arnaldo Bagnasco, *Torino: un profilo sociologico* (Turin: Einaudi 1986).

19 Jon Binnie, Julian Holloway, Steve Millington and Craig Young, *Cosmopolitan Urbanism* (London and New York: Routledge 2006); Nina Glick Schiller, 'Diasporic cosmopolitanism: migrants, sociabilities and city making', in Nina Glick Schiller and Andrew Irving (eds), *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontent* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2015), 103–20.

20 For a more detailed discussion of 'actually existing' neoliberal urban transformation, see Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, 'Cities and the geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism"', *Antipodes*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2002, 349–79; and Pauline McGuirk and Robyn Dowling, 'Neoliberal privatisation? Remapping the public and the private in Sydney's masterplanned residential estates', *Political Geography*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2009, 174–85.

21 Binnie, Holloway, Millington and Young, *Cosmopolitan Urbanism*; Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar, *Locating Migration: Rescaling Cities and Migrants* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2011).

22 Schiller, 'Diasporic cosmopolitanism', 106.

23 Jon Binnie, Julian Holloway, Steve Millington and Craig Young, 'Introduction: grounding cosmopolitan urbanism: approaches, practices and policies', in *Cosmopolitan Urbanism*, 1–34 (1).

24 Schmoll and Semi, 'Shadow circuit'.

25 Ibid., 387.

affluent and (im)mobile residents fascinated by exotic tastes.[26] However, as Schmoll and Semi have noted, Turin's 'multiculturalism from above' represents a stark example of the divide between multicultural policies and multicultural realities in contemporary urban contexts. They highlight the fact that the city-sponsored multiculturalism enhanced an ethnicization of immigrants' trading and living practices. Turin's multicultural policies contributed to the essentialization of migrants' economic and social trajectories and identities by portraying an exotic, reified and aestheticized vision of local migrant communities, while at the same time eclipsing more concrete, daily practices of ordinary multiculturalism occurring in the urban context.

Conversely, this apparently progressive and socially inclusive project concretely excluded those who could not fit, participate in and consume the emerging city image and rhetoric: the homeless, the undocumented immigrant, the ambulant vendors and the 'disruptive youth' engaged in 'improper' practices and uses of city spaces. As the above mentioned radical process of urban regeneration took place, since the early 2000s the city also began to reconfigure public spaces in the name of security,[27] mainly at the expense of the latter social categories. The progressive militarization of public spaces in predominantly immigrant neighbourhoods also coincided with narratives that depicted migrants as 'too many',[28] and thus challenging their prerogatives as domesticated and (in)visible 'guests' in Turin's social spaces.[29] Turin's own way of being global thus accentuated symbolic, but effective boundaries between multicultural festive events/parades in regenerated areas and the neighbourhoods, and communities, defined by their segregating difference, be it poverty, ethnicity, religion or a combination of these factors. The indissoluble relationship between urban renewal and the surveillance of specific 'target minorities' has been justified in the logic of Turin's regeneration by concerns regarding security, crime (and increasingly terrorism).[30] As such, this process reiterated and made (in)visible both the 'desirable' and 'abject' bodies in Turin's redeveloped urban spaces, and constituted the rationale for the management, control and selective inclusion of specific bodies/phenotypes in the renewed cityscape.

The simultaneous presence of joint army and police patrols and aestheticized celebrations of 'multiculturalism from above' in Turin's urban spaces illuminated the paradox of the rebranding

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26 Ibid., 388.

27 Nikolas Rose, 'Government and control', *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2000, 321–39 (329); Loïc J. D. Wacquant, 'Urban outcasts: stigma and division in the Black American ghetto and the French urban periphery', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1993, 366–83.

28 Michael Skey, 'A sense of where you belong in the world: national belonging, ontological security and the status of the ethnic majority in England', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol.16, no. 4, 2010, 715–33 (719).

29 Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Annadale, NSW: Pluto Press and Wickham, Kent: Comerford and Miller 1998); Luca Queirolo Palmas (ed.), *Dentro le gang: giovani, migranti e nuovi spazi pubblici* (Verona: Ombre Corte 2009).

30 Bigo, 'Globalized (in)security'; Manley and Silk, 'Liquid London'.

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process. To accomplish and legitimate the spatial and social development of a renewed city, the differences of the Other were constructed as not only necessary for the success of Turin's 'renaissance', but also as a threatening source of anxiety to this form of city-making. The latter scenario was evoked and associated with images of incompatible (cultural) difference, poverty and 'disruptive' uses of space.

Immigrants or new citizens? Migration, space and the politics of belonging

In this heated context, the children of migration have become critical figures, heavily affected by current socioeconomic and political dynamics in Italy. Following Sayad, we argue that immigrants, and their children, perform a 'mirror function' within European societies,[31] as their conditions reflect the deep and hidden contradictions and inequalities of the those societies, their politics, postcolonial histories and their relationship with the Other, embodied in European history by the colonized and in the contemporary world by the immigrant.

According to current Italian law, almost half of all children of immigrants who were born in Italy must present a working contract or proof of enrolment in school upon turning eighteen if they wish to remain in Italy.[32] Despite having spent their entire lives in Italy, they have the same legal identity as their parents.[33] Given current high unemployment levels among young people between 16 and 24 in Italy and the collapse of public education, (post)migrant youth risk failing to provide the documentation needed to remain.[34] Such conditions bind many youngsters of migrant origin to an ongoing 'on probation' status in the country were they were born and raised, thus limiting opportunities for upward social mobility and positioning themselves as rightful members of Italian public life.

Following what Pierre Bourdieu has termed 'the law of the conservation of structural violence',[35] we argue that inequality is reproduced in this second generation in Italy through political economical processes that lead to social exclusion, loss of work security, unemployment and subordinate assimilation.[36] Drawing on a concept of citizenship as 'indisputable belonging to a community',[37] we underline in our analysis the spatial elements through which citizenship is achieved,

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31 Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 282.

32 Emanuela Bonini, 'Età bandite', in Luca Queirolo Palmas (ed.), *Dentro le gang*, 89–102.

33 Kitty Calavita, *Immigrants at the Margins: Law, Race and Exclusion in Southern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2005), 18.

34 Fondazione Leone Moressa, *Rapporto annuale sull'economia dell'immigrazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2011).

35 Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. from the French by Richard Nice [1998] (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2000), 233.

36 Maurizio Ambrosini, 'Oltre l'integrazione subalterna: la sfida delle seconde generazioni, in Giovanni Cacciavillani and Enrico Leonardi (eds), *Una generazione in movimento: gli adolescenti e i giovani immigrati* (Milan: Franco Angeli 2007), 63–99 (87).

37 Giovanni Semi, *Gentrification: tutte le città come Disneyland?* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2015), 15.

exerted and limited in the city.[38] In this paper, we thus look at (post)migrant youth engagement with capoeira, parkour and urban spaces as the medium through which struggles about belonging and citizenship take place. Henri Lefebvre highlighted how processes of representation and organization of space often represent the physical translation and articulation of dominant historical, socioeconomic and power relations.[39] Social groups excluded by dominant representations of spaces (that is, the homeless, ambulant vendors, migrants, 'disruptive' youth) see their legitimacy as members of the public being questioned and thus are routinely banished to a realm outside politics. Thus, the negotiations, conflicts and tensions created by contrasting meanings and uses attached to space both reflect the power relations and inequalities enacted in specific contexts, and provide opportunities for citizens and marginal social groups to claim their 'right to the city'.[40] Several authors elaborated the 'right to the city' as a political agenda to stimulate a radical restructuring of urban space, and the connected social, political and economic relations, through actors' creative and spontaneous spatial reappropriations: a concept summarized by David Harvey's oft-cited comment: 'the right to change ourselves by changing the city.'[41] However, this political agenda has been partially reworked by some authors drawing on Lefebvre's framework. Looking at skateboarders' reappropriation of urban spaces, Iain Borden has stressed that, although concerned with possibilities for social change, he could not consider the contested transformations of space he observed as implying changes in material conditions by skateboarders, since they rather implied changes in the *experience* of material conditions.[42] We consider this reading of the 'right to the city' as valuable for this study, since it allows us to appreciate the ambivalence and fragility of actors' daily practices and tactical transformations without eclipsing the implicit politics of space they convey. As Borden and Francisco Vivoni have shown,[43] practices of temporary spatial appropriation like skateboarding, but also parkour and

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38 Don Mitchell, 'The end of public space? People's park, definitions of the public, and democracy', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 85, no. 1, 1995, 108–33; Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press 2003); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. from the French by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell 1991); Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. from the French by Eleonore Kofman and Elisabeth Lebas (Oxford and New Malden, MA: Blackwell 1996); David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (London and New York: Routledge 2001); Anna Secor, '"There is an Istanbul that belongs to me": citizenship, space, and identity in the city', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 94, no. 2, 2004, 352–68.

39 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 37.

40 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Mitchell, 'The end of public space?'; Mitchell, *The Right to the City*.

41 David Harvey, 'The right to the city', *New Left Review*, no. 53, September–October 2008, 23–40 (23).

42 Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (Oxford and New York: Berg 2001), 2.

43 Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*; Francisco Vivoni, 'Spots of spatial desire: skateparks,

capoeira, cannot be simplified as acts of political resistance aiming to trigger social change, or as reproductions of commodified cultural practices, because generally the actors' motivation cannot be simply ascribed to these categories since they may include aspects of both.[44] Drawing on such considerations, the intention in this study is not to project political meanings and significance on to participants' bodily and spatial negotiations. Rather, an analysis of the participants' practices can provide an understanding of the stakes and tensions implied in children of immigrants' transformations of public spaces, thus revealing the 'anxious politics' targeting the socially pathologized bodies attending public spaces, while also highlighting participants' negotiations of these processes. This occurs while their unsolicited and mobile spatial transformations and reappropriations collide with other representations of Turin regenerated and 'multicultural' spaces, and established attributes of immigrants as invisible, silent guests in Italian society. Our arguments therefore interpret Harvey's reframing of Lefebvre's idea of 'right to the city' from its original phrasing to 'the right to change the city by changing ourselves'. By engaging in capoeira and parkour practices in Turin public spaces, our respondents claimed the right to change the city (or at least its subjective experience) by repositioning and re-imagining themselves as rightful members of the public rather than as bodies out of place.

Capoeira and parkour in brief

Capoeira and parkour may be distinct disciplines, but both have captured young people's imagination in various urban contexts.[45] One probable reason for the diffusion of the two practices is that neither have coherent definitions, thus enabling the capoeirista or the *traceur* (parkour practitioner) to find his or her own meaning through practice. At first sight the only commonalities between capoeira and parkour are that they are both bodily practices that significantly emplace the body in urban spaces. Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian art form, which includes music, dance, acrobatics and martial arts, and which was a form of physical exercise practised mostly by enslaved people. Due to the prohibitions of slave owners, practitioners hid their martial training in an apparently 'innocent' form of dance during religious festivities and gatherings. Capoeira was first documented in Brazilian urban areas from the late eighteenth century and, from the early 1970s, it began to gain worldwide recognition.[46] In 2015 UNESCO recognized capoeira as Intangible World's Heritage.

Although parkour does not rely on centuries of history, it became a global phenomenon soon

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skateplazas, and urban politics', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2009, 130–49.
44 Belinda Wheaton, *The Cultural Politics of Lifestyle Sports* (London and New York: Routledge 2013).
45 Sophie Fuggle, 'Discourses of subversion: the ethics and aesthetics of capoeira and parkour', *Dance Research*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2008, 204–22; Nicola De Martini Ugolotti, 'Climbing walls, making bridges: children of immigrants' identity negotiations through capoeira and parkour in Turin', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2015, 19–33.
46 Gerard Taylor, *Capoeira: The Jogo de Angola from Luanda to Cyberspace* (Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books 2005).

after its creation in the late 1980s. The main founders of parkour—Davide Belle, the son of French working-class parents, and Sebastian Foucan, the son of Guadeloupian migrants—were motivated to develop the practice by a lack of activities and opportunities for entertainment available to young people in their town of Lisses, located on the periphery of Paris.[47] The practice gained worldwide visibility and diffusion soon after it was created, mainly as a consequence of documentary films and the Internet. Parkour encourages practitioners to use all available urban obstacles to move from one point to another in the least number of movements while trying to avoid touching the ground, and paying attention to the fluidity and simplicity of movements.

Although much has been written about both capoeira and parkour, little attention has been given to the ways the two are often entwined through the everyday practices of young people around the globe or the extent to which both practices have become highly commodified global popular cultures predominantly managed by young men.[48] Despite the differences between the two,[49] many of the young men in our study practise both capoeira and parkour in public spaces, commonly mixing movements and techniques. For them, the two practices share many benefits, including the management of risk, danger and violence; increased bodily consciousness and awareness of emotional reactions; embodied ways of knowing and experiencing the world; and 'liberating' experiences in overcoming physical limitations. The fact that neither practice requires specific structures or equipment also makes them attractive, especially to young men who have few other opportunities to stay fit and socialize in public spaces.[50]

During our research, we rarely encountered young women who were regular practitioners of capoeira or parkour in public spaces. This suggests that hegemonic gender differences and power relations may be reproduced within capoeira and parkour groups, a concern also voiced by some male participants when asked to account for the scarcity of female participation. However, it might also reflect hegemonic conventions about femininity that take place in 'in-between' public spaces observed (that is, peripheral public parks, street corners, walking footpaths, abandoned buildings). Though a focus on gender relations is outside of the scope of this article, such elements indicate how the observation of everyday and physical practices can prove useful for understanding the reproduction, legitimization or challenge to gender and sexual norms and differences within the field of research.

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47 Fuggle, 'Discourses of subversion', 207.

48 With the exception of Fuggle, 'Discourses of subversion'; and Scott Stapleton and Susan Terrio, 'Le parkour: urban street culture and commoditization of male youth expression', *International Migration*, vol. 50, no. 6, 2012, 18–27.

49 For greater detail, see De Martini Ugolotti, 'Climbing walls, making bridges', 23.

50 In the case of capoeira, even though the practice is accompanied by singing and playing specific traditional percussive instruments (*berimbau*, *pandeiro*, *agogo*, *atabaque*), participants reported engaging in daring searches in flea markets or using similar traditional instruments available in their ethnic communities in order to create the capoeira *roda* (the circle in which a couple of capoeristas play and challenge each other).

'If I can climb a wall of ten meters': spatial tactics and bodily reappropriations

If I find the way to climb a wall of ten meters just with my imagination, I can use it for other obstacles in my life. (Samba, 18 years old)

Among the young men in this study, uncertainty was one of the only constants that shaped both their everyday lives and future prospects. Such uncertainty was perpetuated by the current corpus of policies and laws that regulate the lives and horizons of immigrants and their children in Italy, laws that, among other things, mean that, on turning eighteen, most would have to earn a 'permit to stay' to continue living in the country where they had been born and grown up.[51]

Participants and their family members reported that they did not feel they were in complete control of their own migratory projects and, consequently, their futures. Permission to remain in Italy could be jeopardized by many factors. These included the bureaucratic maze of the citizenship applications; becoming unemployed and personally losing the right to stay; or children being sent back to the parents' home country if parents lost the economic means to support all family members. More than imagined anxieties, these matters were concrete for many of the participants; several of those with whom we have worked over the years have been forced to leave Turin suddenly, moving to other cities or countries to search for (better) jobs.

Participants also reported feeling a sense of insecurity related to the ever present possibility of being harassed by adults and police when they were in public spaces. Such harassment was often marked by anti-immigrant and racist sentiments, as the following quote by seventeen-year-old Lazer makes apparent:

So, the other day I am walking with my friends at the park, there's a big car parked, a man and two ladies stand outside of the car drinking and listening to music from the radio. As I pass them I begin to move, cause you know, I can't stand still when I hear music . . . the man begins to shout at me 'come here and dance for us, you monkey, as you usually do where you came from!'

Similarly, as sixteen-year-old Cesar pointed out, even when discrimination was not explicit, it could easily be imagined:

I'm sure they send us away because we are foreigners, they may think we do this [practice capoeira and/or parkour] while we sell drugs, or we'll vandalize something, or just that we have less of a right to stay in public parks! This just makes me want to go on training, you know, these situations really help me to grow, to understand my

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51 Bonini, 'Età bandite', 99.

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direction. I keep on training at the park because I have no other place to stay fit and meet my bros and because I know I am not doing anything wrong. I am not as they see me.

In this context, uncertainty emerged from seemingly uncontrollable events triggered by various actors and social institutions, leaving the young men with little room for negotiation. Despite, or perhaps because of this, they seemed committed to developing new tactics to allow them to navigate and gain a grip on the unequal power relations and recurrent turnarounds that constituted their everyday lives.[52] These tactics also allowed them to strive to improve their life chances, to socialize among their peers, to create leisure opportunities and to achieve social recognition within wider Turin society. Although practising capoeira and parkour proved to be a crucial means for tactically navigating the ambivalent terrain that marked their everyday lives, few participants reported this as a motivation for having begun to practise. For example, sixteen-year-old Ricardo said he started training 'just for a joke' and 'because it seemed to be an entertaining way to work out for free and learn to do]some back flips', and eighteen-year-old Samba reported, 'I was already doing it [parkour] back at home [in Senegal], but I just had no name to call it!' As they engaged more with capoeira and parkour, however, research participants learned to use the skills they developed through training to address other needs and issues:

> I like capoeira because it teaches you how to move in every situation . . . we all fall one day or another, isn't it? With capoeira I learnt that when you can't avoid it, sometimes you simply can't; you have to have learn how to fall well, so that your fall will not stop you from getting your life done! (Ricardo)

> What also is great about *parkour* is that adrenaline—that feeling that you get when you jump an obstacle that hinders you from getting somewhere and you try everything to find a way to overcome it . . . You feel all these contrasting emotions: fear, deception, rage and excitement. But when you do it you feel so damn powerful, and you feel like: if I find the way to climb a wall of ten meters just with my imagination, I can use it for other obstacles in my life. (Samba)

Ricardo's and Samba's quotes demonstrate that the body is integral to the ways that capoeiristas and *traceurs* navigate the constraints and set-backs that characterize their daily lives and, furthermore, how bodily tactical engagements can take multiple forms, stem from various experiences and be employed to achieve multiple objectives. Ricardo's first motivation for practising capoeira was to

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52 Marie Rosenkrantz Lindegaard, 'Navigating terrains of violence: how South African male youngsters negotiate social change', *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2009, 19–35; Moyer, 'Street corner justice in the name of Jah', 50.

socialize and work out, but life experiences made him realize the practice also provided him with the skill to 'fall well' when confronted with obstacles, and to stand up again to pursue his goals. Samba committed himself to discover and push his limits and skills through his body as a means of preparation for overcoming any obstacle he might meet in life, physical and otherwise. Capoeira and parkour served as practices 'imbued with the flexibility and pre-adaptation necessary for unpredictable change' to address the unpredictability in their everyday lives, providing participants with the bodily skills required to engage with multiple and shifting constraints.[53]

By constantly working on their bodies they also became conscious of their postures and reactions in various situations, which helped them become aware of how they interacted with the social environment and how they might act differently to bring about change. It was this awareness that allowed them to navigate successfully, avoid harmful situations and maximize opportunities.

> Since I started to practice [both capoeira and parkour] I feel my body and I feel I know myself better. It is like my body has always been not mine, like on autopilot. Now I feel I know how my emotions and body react to certain situations . . . I am starting to become aware of when my breath starts to accelerate and get short, the muscles get tense, my mind sees fewer and fewer options or simply doesn't know what to do . . . Now I know how to face things in my life better: an obstacle, somebody provoking me or something even worse! (Ciprian, 16-years-old)

> Since I started doing capoeira I realized I gained this posture, this way of walking, relaxed, or else 'sly like a cat' . . . I think people read the way you walk or you look at them and react! I know this because, before capoeira, I was so insecure that in unknown or confrontational situations I always attacked others so they could not see how scared I was! (Wendell, 17-years-old)

The young men in this study used capoeira and parkour to engage in a process of reappropriation of their bodies. Both Ciprian and Wendell described how training their bodies helped them gain awareness, eventually leading to feelings of being more in control in the face of the forces, obstacles and 'looks' that had previously made them feel bad or and unable to gain a grip on their lives.

Based on research with the children of Algerian immigrants in France, Sayad reports that young people saw their bodies as disgraceful and ugly, betraying them in their desire to be 'like everyone else', by reminding them every day of their otherness in French society.[54] In contrast, our research suggests that, through a bodily engagement with capoeira and parkour, (post)migrant youth were able to develop a means to respond positively to conditions and social interactions that might have otherwise seriously undermined their sense of self worth. Capoeira and parkour were used proactively

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53 Vigh, 'Motion squared', 425.

54 Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 345–6.

by participants to navigate their social environments in a meaningful way and as a means to redefine their social positioning and identifications. As such, participants seemed to use both practices to address their immediate social space, as well as to address the broader social constraints affecting their present lives, and their prospective and imagined futures.

Drawing imagined horizons in the spaces of others

Although capoeira and parkour are also taught in gyms and social projects in the city of Turin, our respondents' engagement with these disciplines went far beyond designated training spaces, claiming they did not need a dedicated, regulated time or venue. Instead, they preferred to choose spaces for practice on the way to school, for example, or while looking after younger siblings in the park. By following participants as they moved through the city, the lead author observed them choosing and transforming in-between public spaces, including public parks, empty parking lots, street corners, abandoned factories, footbridges and walkways into playgrounds and free open-air gyms. Through these observations, we gradually developed the idea that respondents also used capoeira and parkour as forms of embodied and spatial tools of self-constitution,[55] *and* as means to declare in public their irreverent and uninvited presence in city life.

Unlike other young migrants we interviewed, capoeiristas and *traceurs* in the study did not perceive urban space as hostile and unknown, nor did they consider themselves to be stuck in the peripheral neighbourhoods where they lived, weighed down by a 'territorial stigmatization' that might limit or hinder their movements in the city.[56] On the contrary, they crossed and lived in the city on their own terms, using various in-between public spaces according to their needs, for socialization, amusement and self-improvement, as well as to gain recognition and visibility. By engaging in capoeira and parkour, the young men temporarily transformed the use of spaces as defined by urban planners and other dominant social groups, and also pushed bystanders and the wider community to take note of their spontaneous and self-determined participation in the city's public life. Referring to a public performance held in Piazza Castello, Turin's central square in the shopping and tourist area, Abdelrazak reported:

> At the beginning I was nervous. I was in the main square of the city; usually you go
> there just to look at shop windows, eat at McDonald's . . . everybody checks out
> everybody. If you cough all the people turn to look at you. If you yell a little bit louder,
> here comes the police patrol to check your documents and to warn you 'this is not a
> marketplace' . . . but then, when the music started, I felt just like 'buying the game'
> [*comprare il gioco*],[57] everything disappeared, there were just my 'bros' who were

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55 De Martini Ugolotti, 'Climbing walls, making bridges', 29.

56 Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press 2008).

57 'Buying the game' in capoeira refers to the act of interrupting two players in the *roda* to start

playing with me and the *roda*. I just felt such incredible energy coming from there . . . the crowd, people were not just looking at me, they were clapping, laughing, singing, while they were enjoying with me the capoeira games. I totally forgot where I was because I was doing capoeira, and wherever I was . . . that was *my* place. (Abdelrazak, 16-years-old)

Not surprisingly, however, the unsolicited, unexpected and sometimes irreverent performances of capoeiristas and *traceurs* in Turin's public spaces also created tension with adults and the police forces:

When we train in small groups at the park or in any open space large enough for us, sometimes people yell at us, they tell us to go away and sometimes threaten us. They tell us to get a job, that we are vandals, but we do not break anything! (Abdelrazak, 16-years-old)

Often it happens that police send us away while we are training [in a public park]; we both know it is not illegal, but they say 'this is not the proper place', and send us away . . . We go, because how can you discuss with them? (Cesar, 16-years-old)

The young men often discussed the symbolic and concrete acts of violence they encountered in their daily lives in Turin, ranging from 'judging looks' to threats of discriminatory acts and physical violence enacted by adults and sometimes police. Such anti-social engagements also occurred when they trained for capoeira and parkour in public spaces. Rather than inhibiting them from practising, however, such experiences seemed to push them to use capoeira and parkour to discuss and negotiate power relations. While they may not have had sufficient power to have open discussions with police—'How can you discuss with them?'—they used capoeira and parkour to counter and overcome daily dynamics of discrimination, violence and exclusion, while offering images of male immigrant bodies that challenged stereotypes:

More often, people, mothers, children stop to watch us, or take photos, some children try to do what we are doing . . . Sincerely I like it, because people look at us differently . . . through capoeira and parkour we can distinguish ourselves, people notice us and admire us because of what we are able to do. (Abdelrazak, 16-years-old)

As bodily practices developed by people who historically had little power and means to demarcate spaces of their own in their living environments, both capoeira and parkour seemed to

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playing with one of them. This practice enables capoeiristas to engage continuously with different players and to increase the energy and enjoyment of the *roda*.

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invite respondents to create and claim their own places within the spaces designed, demarcated and organized by others. Although such practices rarely enable participants to abolish or change the structural conditions or the everyday harassment and discrimination that shapes their lives, by reinterpreting the uses of public space to meet their needs, practitioners were able to temporarily negotiate such conditions and transform public spaces into sites where they could contest their marginal positioning as members of the Italian public.

Conclusion: capoeira, parkour and Turin's anxious politics

As this paper shows, in Turin, the permanent state of anxiety related to economic recession, crime, insecurity, undesirable difference and terrorism, has contributed to the justification and normalization of the enactment of anxious politics targeting a 'small number of people' increasingly framed as 'too many',[58] and as threatening the city's rebranding process and its emerging social and spatial order. In this emerging constellation—which integrates social anxieties, surveillance orientations and celebration/fear of diversity—immigrant bodies have come to be crucial *objects* of social control, as on to them are projected at the same time the worst fears and the highest aspirations of Turin's regeneration process. As such, the city's progressive image of multiculturalism, as espoused by its cultural entrepreneurs and leading figures, celebrates an apparently unproblematic diversity and inclusivity that is in fact *contingent* upon the capacity of immigrant bodies to adapt to established prerogatives as domesticated and (in)visible Others in Turin's regenerated spaces. Such processes have contributed to a division between bodies marked by class, gender and race in ways that allow them to belong 'without question' in Turin's regenerating spaces,[59] and the bodies of those whose membership depends on compliance with 'acceptable' forms of ethnicity—namely, as consumers or as objects of consumption—that fit with the emerging market-oriented constitution of a multicultural, rebranded Turin.

As if echoing Alberto Corsin-Jimenez's claim that 'the world happens with us and, in choosing what set of practices we will enact and engage in, we are also choosing what world we want to live in',[60] the young men in this study used capoeira and parkour to shape public spaces and to realize their desire for socialization, amusement and self-constitution. We contend that, by following these aims, respondents revealed, challenged and negotiated Turin's anxious politics. Through their spontaneous and unsolicited performances, young men in the study were able temporarily to question and transform the representations of Turin's regenerating urban spaces into places of creative and unmediated interaction, thus subverting established norms of 'proper interaction', and consumption, associated with such places. By transforming (supposedly) orderly public spaces while engaging in capoeira and parkour, practitioners also brought attention to the violent tensions and social dynamics that shape the

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58 Bigo, 'Globalized (in)security', 35.

59 Skey, 'A sense of where you belong in the world', 730.

60 Alberto Corsín-Jiménez, 'On space as a capacity', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2003, 137–53.

lives of immigrants, and their children, a topic that is otherwise rarely given space in contemporary Italian politics.

Rather than resorting to conflict or organized political action, participants have accomplished this through temporary and situated negotiations. Through these bodily and spatial negotiations, respondents have also pushed the wider community to take note of them and have simultaneously offered an alternative vision of 'the public'. Proving Lefebvre's argument that space is produced first from within the body,[61] the subjective reappropriation of city spaces results from the reappropriation of participants' bodies through their engagement with capoeira and parkour. The young men in this study used the unique 'sensuous geography' enabled by these practices to interrogate the urban environment,[62] as well as to redefine their presence in the cityscape of early twenty-first-century Turin. Yet, the reappropriations enacted by capoeiristas and *traceurs* do not seem to enact Lefebvre's neo-Marxist theorization that aims to voice and fulfil an explicit political agenda of social change. The spatial transformations enacted through the capoeira and parkour practices of immigrant youth in Turin are driven more by immediate needs for self-constitution, belonging and recognition, than by conscious political resistance and societal transformation.

The bodily experiences and perceptions of capoeiristas and *traceurs* map on to their efforts to navigate uncertain situations while seeking to escape confining structures.[63] The participants in this study have not approached capoeira and parkour with clear or long-term plans regarding the results they expected to achieve. Rather they started practising for reasons ranging from curiosity and pure enjoyment to lack of other resources. Only later did they realize that their training could prove useful for addressing other crucial issues affecting their lives and for helping them to optimize opportunities and improve their lives.

Nevertheless, the young men use capoeira and parkour to address what Henrik Vigh calls the socially immediate and the socially imagined in their lives.[64] Their bodily practices transform public spaces into resources they can use tentatively to draw imagined futures and trajectories. The young men in this study have been unable to bring about material and social change, nor to change Turin's anxious politics of space through their reimaging of space via capoeira and parkour. However, our analysis demonstrates how spontaneous embodied and spatial reappropriations can allow for the possibility to produce sites of contestation 'over the meanings and contours' of belonging and citizenship in Turin without the assertive foregrounding of an explicit transformative social project.[65] If, following Slavoj Žižek, we acknowledge that '*the very logic of legitimizing the relation of*

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61 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 175–6.

62 Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, 35.

63 Vigh, 'Motion squared', 419.

64 Ibid., 423.

65 Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell 1996).

domination must remain concealed if it is to be effective',[66] then we must recognize that the political significance of participants' spontaneous and temporary bodily and spatial negotiations lies in their capacity to make visible the spatial logics and consequences of Turin's anxious politics, and thus the possibility of recognizing and responding to them.

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66 Slavoj Žižek, 'Introduction: The spectre of ideology', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London and New York: Verso 1994), 1–33 (8), emphasis in original.