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Authenticity and Identity-Making in a Globalized World: Capoeira in Boston and New York

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authenticity, identity, globalization, culture, capoeira, modernization, COLA, Anthropology

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**AUTHENTICITY AND IDENTITY MAKING IN A
GLOBALIZED WORLD:
CAPOEIRA IN BOSTON AND NEW YORK**

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Honors Senior Thesis
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“From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
 Going where I list, my own master total and absolute,
 Listening to others, considering well what they say,
 Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
 Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.”

-Walt Whitman

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- I -
INTRODUCTION

Meu camarada,
My comrade,

o capoeira é muito mais
the capoeira player is much more

que um lutador que da pernada.
than a fighter who delivers kicks.

Ele é um artista,
He is an artist,

sua força é a alegria de viver.
his strength is in the joy of living.

Ele conhece a palavra-chave “Amor”,
He knows the key word “Love”,

e no entanto o capoeirista sabe:
nonetheless the player knows:

a maldade existe.
evil exists.

Será que tu ainda nao ouviu
Is it possible you haven't heard

o que se anda cantando nas rodas por aí:
what is being sung in the circles here and
there:

Galo já cantou,
the cock has already sung,

já raiou o dia.
the day has already dawned.

-Capoeira song, translated and qtd. by Nestor
Capoeira (2005)

The two men crouched down, staring into each other's eyes and gripping each other's hands in a display of strength, friendship, and respect. One of the men, dressed entirely in white, closed his eyes peacefully as though listening to advice from the *berimbau* resounding its steady rhythm nearby. The other kissed his forefingers and touched the instrument in reverence. They seemed to be enclosed in silence, ignoring the clapping and bobbing of those circled around them, frozen in a moment of concentration and tranquility. All of a sudden, in perfect unison, the two men cart-wheeled out of their crouching stance and began a series of fluid, swift, and controlled flips and kicks, complementing and responding to each other as though they could predict exactly which movement the other was about to make. The music's intensity swelled

with excitement as the men quickened their dance—spinning, dipping, crouching, kicking, hopping, and back-bending—delicately, precisely, powerfully. Though each movement was meant to deceive the other and throw him off balance, each continued to return to each other's gaze, occasionally smiling in response to a particularly crafty move, while their audience sang and clapped, responding to the calls of the *berimbau* and their master's song. In one swift move, one of the men thrust his leg into the air towards the other's head, who responded by spinning to the right, grabbing his opponent's leg, and pulling him to the ground. The circle erupted in laughter along with the players, who were already embracing and shaking hands. Moments later, two others were crouched in front of the *berimbau*, about to begin their own dance.

This small but vivacious piece of Brazil has found its way into a modest, unassuming ballet studio in Boston. *Capoeira*, an Afro-Brazilian martial art dance form as it is almost unanimously defined, exists as a “child of slavery” (Joseph 2008, 506), a cultural product of the oppressive constraints of slavery that dominated several hundred years of Afro-Brazilian history. It originated as an illegal slave activity of self-defense disguised as dance (Lewis 1992, 40) and has since evolved into a valuable display of Brazilian culture and identity. Throughout its evolutionary process, the face of *capoeira* has changed remarkably in style, demographic of participants, intent, and popularity and has, in more recent years, experienced an international diaspora. One can now join a *capoeira* group and pay for classes in such diverse nations as Thailand, Turkey, Japan, Australia, Mexico, the Czech Republic and the United States.

Because *capoeira* has traveled from Brazil to the international market, the contemporary practice of *capoeira* has diverged enormously from its historical counterpart, whose own origins are still undetermined (Fario 2005). Thus, anthropologists and sociologists have attempted to explain this phenomenon through theoretical categories and constructions, objectifying those

who practice it and claiming that *capoeira* has surrendered to the cultural downfalls of capitalist consumerism and commoditization (Joseph 2008). Using such concepts as *habitus* and embodiment (Delamont and Stephens 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010), structure and deep play (Lewis 1992), and modernization and globalization (Assunção 2005), defining the ‘authentic’ *capoeira* has become a task convoluted by irony. However, when taking into account that both culture and our modes of analyzing culture are always evolving, it has also become necessary to understand how participants themselves perceive and experience this supposedly “inauthentic”, commoditized *capoeira*. This will allow for a more holistic understanding of whether or not this conceptualization of authenticity affects the ways in which individuals use *capoeira* in their construction of Selfhood.

In this way, my research will attempt to examine the role of authenticity in the construction of identity amongst *capoeiristas*—those who play *capoeira*—and their groups in the United States. Though *capoeira* is a cultural product of Brazil, it has taken many different forms having various degrees of authentic intention and can now be “played” by many types of people with assorted motivations. It can be found on the streets of Manhattan or a university quad in Vermont, in gym-run fitness classes, nightclubs, and dance studios. Informants have mentioned they feel more fulfilled, confident, spiritual, socially receptive, and free, along with a number of other observed and discussed conditions of experiencing and participating in not only the physical but also the sociocultural aspects of *capoeira*.

Anthropologist Charles Lindholm examines many aspects of the concept of authenticity in numerous fields, from its role in creating personal style, music, and art to navigating nation-state and identity politics. In his work titled *Culture and Authenticity*, he contends that, “Authenticity gathers people together in collectives that are felt to be real, essential, and vital,

providing participants with meaning unity, and a surpassing sense of belong... The hope for an authentic experience draws us to charismatic leaders, expressive artists, and social movements; it makes us into trendy consumers, creative performers, and fanatical collectors” (2008, 1).

Capoeira can certainly be considered one such collective to which people are drawn and for which they are willing to pay. However, the last part of Lindholm’s comment assumes that consumers are only artificially connected with reality. Does this mean that the participants’ experiences are any less significant? And what actually draws such a diverse crowd to these groups and motivates them to take classes? Are they paying for an authentic experience, thus looking to artificially identify themselves with the exotic? Or, is the pursuit—be it planned or unintentional—of a multicultural, multidimensional self an inevitable, postmodern appetite resulting from our increasing connection and interaction with other societies than that which we are born into? If this is the case, is it possible for people to truly experience and connect with another culture and internalize the qualities that they were drawn to in the first place?

In this study, I will be arguing affirmatively for the latter. Following a yearlong period of fieldwork and personal ethnographic research, namely interviews and observation, it has become possible to build a case study based upon the Americans who play *capoeira* in Boston and New York City, thereby examining and analyzing globalization and authenticity’s effects on modern or, perhaps more accurately, postmodern modes of identity-making.

- II - METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

This project was preceded by a preliminary research period during the spring semester of 2011, which investigated the role of music in *capoeira* and provided the foundation and inspiration for this more developed product. Initially, the demographic and proximal convenience of Boston in relation to the University of New Hampshire inspired an Internet search that resulted in email contact with several *capoeira* groups in the region. The first to respond was a high-ranking member of a group known as Bachata Capoeira^{*}, based out of Brookline, Massachusetts. With a great enthusiasm and appreciation for my interest in the group, I was welcomed to observe and participate in their practices, anniversary celebrations, *batizado* [moving up ceremony], and gatherings.

Upon deciding to create a more thorough study of *capoeira* with groups based out of both Boston and New York City, I used another Internet search to find a group in Manhattan known as Capoeira Maculélé. A member of Maculélé with the rank of *profesor* responded with similar enthusiasm for my project, allowing me to visit, take his classes, and attend a community *roda*. Thus, I spent ten days collecting data in January 2012 based on my participation in one beginner class, one all-levels class and the observation of two higher level classes and a community *roda*.

After approximately 16 months of intermittent contact with Bachata and about one week with Capoeira Maculélé, I collected a total of nine formal interviews and made informal conversation with members of lower, middle, and higher ranking members of each group with

* All informants' and groups' names/nicknames have been given pseudonyms so as to protect their anonymity. It is customary in *capoeira* for the players to receive nicknames that are usually nouns or adjectives in the Portuguese language. Therefore, even American names are in the form of Brazilian *capoeira* nicknames.

the intent of gaining as many perspectives as possible in order to analyze the concepts of identity and authenticity in *capoeira*.

As almost all expenses were paid without outside funding, a lack of sufficient financing limited the amount of trips possible and thus time spent with both groups. Moreover, while the most effective anthropological studies are those in which the researchers are in frequent if not constant contact with the target group or groups, the nature of undergraduate research in which time must be shared with a myriad of academic pursuits is less than accommodating for such an approach in this case. With further research aided by funding and more consistent contact, it might be possible to supplement this current investigation. The greatest limitation, of course, is that it is nearly impossible to propose an all-encompassing analysis on an authentic *capoeira* or otherwise without having traveled to its origin country and only having interviewed or talked to a handful of *capoeiristas* who *do* have such an experience. However, great care was taken to account for these limitations through extensive review of the literature and the collection of data from a variety of encounters, from significant events and celebrations to the most commonplace of interactions.

A note must be added that, as is customary in postmodernist ethnography (McGee & Warms 2008), this study has been conducted somewhat subjectively as it reflects upon my own culture and in large part my own generation's contact with the modern world. As I am very much involved in the building of a multicultural self, that self being my own, it is nearly impossible to remain entirely objective in the analysis of my experiences, observations, interactions, and studies. However, self-reflexivity is the less of many factors and voices contributing to my interpretations, being those of past theorists and present collaborators.

- III - LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of authenticity and identity making are enormously broad in themselves. The body of literature concerning both topics expands with each new era of globalization and its resulting trends, ever-changing and ever-evolving. In deciding to study the relationship between them, it became a challenge to synthesize the overarching significance of what it means to build individual and group identities within the complicated framework of authenticity—or, perhaps, inauthenticity. How *do* people in this globalized world, in which identities are more and more often shaped by almost inevitable contact with cultures of the “Other”, navigate through promises of authentic experiences and people when they are sometimes commoditized and perhaps thus altered? To answer this question and engage with the broader scope of this project as a whole, I will analyze related anthropological theory and acknowledge the existing literature surrounding the topic of *capoeira* from which much conceptual discourse arises.

Scholars of Capoeira

A fundamental limitation to this literature review lies in my lack of fluency in Portuguese. There are many works written by Brazilian scholars on the topic of *capoeira* that would be especially informative and could offer a different though perhaps more subjective perspective. Because almost all of the literature used in this research has been written in English, the arguments presented could become more comprehensive and balanced with further study in Portuguese, the primary language of *capoeira*. However, one author who has made it possible to broaden the perspective of this study was both a Brazilian born and educated *capoeirista* and a

scholar of communication. After becoming a *mestre* in 1969, Nestor Capoeira (2002; 2005; 2006) was able to teach *capoeira* to members of Brazilian high society and in the streets and travel the world performing, playing, and engaging with different cultures. Moreover, he was able to meet Mestres Bimba and Pastinha, the chief founders of academy-based *capoeira*, and become friends and colleagues with some of the most influential personalities of the game. His trilogy, from oldest to most recent, includes *The Little Capoeira Book*, *Capoeira: Roots of the Dance-Fight Game*, and *A Street-Smart Song: Capoeira Philosophy and Inner Life*, all of which he translated into English from Portuguese himself. It attempts to compile the knowledge and philosophies he was able to acquire in his personal experiences with the sport, beginning with a broad overview of the sport, continuing with a sociohistorical contextualization and finally imparting a deeper analysis of *capoeira*'s impact on Brazilian society and "in forming the mentality of younger generations" (xxii), both socially and metaphysically. Because his work is influenced and informed by both his experiences and his studies at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in Communication and Culture, it is possible to use it as an almost primary source as well as an important scholarly contribution to this study.

Notably, the second part of his book *A Street-Smart Song* was written fourteen years after the first. In this addition, he imparts the knowledge he ascertained as a result of his graduate studies in communication and culture in which he focused on globalization's effects on *capoeira* and younger generations of *capoeiristas*. One of his most important arguments that I will continue to return to in detail throughout is that there is ultimately no "pure" *capoeira* (2006, 194). Even that which was 'played' in the 1830s – sometimes argued to be the "Mother Capoeira" -- has had to "absorb" many new components in order to resemble the 1930s Capoeira Angola style that others argue is the traditional *capoeira*. Due to a countless number of styles,

variations within styles, perceptions, perspectives, intentions, and historical changes, there is no objective way to pinpoint the “authentic” *capoeira*. In addition, he both distinguishes and links two types of change that has affected its evolution—one of which is change that occurs with the natural progression of time and another that occurs due to outside forces, such as Western ideology and consumerist values, which are symptomatic of modernity. He recognizes that it becomes difficult to “measure the ‘unnatural’ distortions that might have occurred” (196) without having a decidedly authentic *capoeira* as a reference point. However, he urges the reader to “accept that if capoeira survived all persecutions and prohibitions during these last couple of centuries, it is because it has maintained its roots. To a great extent it has been faithful to its ‘essence’ despite all the changes, because only like that would it have the strength and integrity to survive” (2006, 196-197). This is an extremely relevant line of reasoning that I will attempt to support with my own data and analysis of authenticity.

Bira Almeida (1986) is a famous *capoeirista* and has written one of the most important accounts of *capoeira* in Brazil and the United States. In his book, *Capoeira, A Brazilian Art Form: History, Philosophy, and Practice*, he provides an important Brazilian perspective in his overview of the logistics and history of *capoeira* and an almost theatrical account of his own experience as a student of Mestre Bimba and as a *mestre* himself in San Francisco. “Mestre Acordeon,” as he is known in the *capoeira* world, is almost unparalleled in significance as a primary source of Brazilian *capoeira* as many of Bimba’s earliest students actually experienced it and of American *capoeira* as one of the first *mestres* to introduce it to the United States. As a white middle class adolescent, Acordeon was introduced to other socioeconomic realities by interacting with poor *capoeiristas* in neighborhoods he had never before encountered. As he describes it, “My generation of *capoeiras* fought the police and inhabited the narrow streets of

the old Bahia side by side with the old prostitutes, pimps, bums, drunk sailors, and police detectives, drinking in all the honkytonks on the hills and docks” (122). He acknowledges his most rowdy experiences as part of his personal development. Today, I presume many individuals find the need to do the same and *capoeira* is a way for them to do so; just as Acordean transcended class boundaries in his construction of his own self-identity, so may Americans as they transcend national boundaries. However, he also acknowledges that *capoeiras*’ move away from such violence and unruliness is part of its process of positive growth as well. He explains that he uses the lessons learned from his mistakes in his own teachings in the United States, imparting to his students the same energy and spirit of the game, known as *axé*, without the physical scars.

J. Lowell Lewis, scholar of cultural and performance studies, wrote perhaps the most crucial and widely cited anthropological work on *capoeira* in 1992, following an eighteen month period of fieldwork in Bahia, arguably the center of *capoeira* practice in Brazil. As one of the first (if not *the* first) studies conducted on *capoeira* by an English speaking anthropologist, it provides an exceptionally thorough description of its etiquette, history, process, music, symbols, linguistics, and physical movements. His central focus in doing so is in the study of signs in the “communicative channels” of “movement, music, and text” using his own expertise in semiotics (1992, xxvii). While this framework is beyond the scope of my own study, he offers several important points in his analysis of how and why playing *capoeira* and human play in general can be considered forms of cultural and self-expression. From these arguments emerge the issues of identity making and authenticity in *capoeira*. Lewis draws attention to the fact that, because one inherently “experiences a sense of freedom” during play, play is “a creature of freedom” (3; 8). Thus, he deduces that “*capoeira* is able to express the ideal of freedom in play so well because it

was an outgrowth of slavery” (4). I will return to and expand on this point to argue that this characteristic remains today in *capoeira* as a form of modern liberation. Like Nestor Capoeira, he also supports the idea that *capoeira*, even throughout its evolution, has survived in part due to the retention of its most imperative qualities.

Lewis (1999) also writes of *capoeira* in an entirely different and broader discussion of everyday life in Brazil. Through the themes of sex and violence, he gives a phenomenological account of *capoeira* and *carnaval* and explains their dialectical relationship to ordinary experience. It seems one of his main goals is to demonstrate how rules are renegotiated in sexual or violent acts such as those that occur during *capoeira* and *carnaval* and how these events manifest themselves in opposition to the quotidian. Ultimately, in relation to my own objective, he explicates that both *capoeira* and *carnaval* allow participants to imagine tension-releasing experiences that take pressure off the “daily grind”. As he points out, “People say that ordinary struggles build up tension, but *capoeira* fighting releases it, so that one does not actually have to attack people in murderous *brigas* [fights]...” although there seems to be a more profound motivation in these instances than just venting (546). He argues that “the point is to play around with transgressions of the conventions, to break some rules selectively while respecting others, to bend the boundaries without breaking them, in order to *broaden one's own experience and discover one's own limits*” (547). To clarify this point, he concludes with a discussion of imagination versus the reality “which is spoken or written about” (554) in which the former influences the latter to the extent that *actual* human reality should consciously involve and assume both. In this case, *capoeira* and *carnaval* are powerful imaginative experiences that profoundly affect the everyday reality of Brazilians. I will use this argument in relation not to the Brazilians of Lewis’ study but to the Americans and Brazilian-Americans in my own.

Matthias Röhrig Assunção (2005) and Maya Talmon-Chvaicer (2008) offer probably the two most thorough histories of *capoeira*, both of which document its earliest known origins, its move into an academy-based setting, and its international diaspora. Most literature on *capoeira* provides at least a basic historical outline since its background is undoubtedly the most important source for understanding the game itself, aside from actually playing it. However, Assunção, scholar of history and Latin American studies, breaks down and analyzes *why* its history is so important while Talmon-Chvaicer, scholar of history and gender studies, uncovers historically significant documents in order to fill in otherwise unknown or ignored information. The latter includes maps of Africa and Brazil; illustrations and photographs that depict early and contemporary *capoeiristas*—their styles of dress, instruments used, settings of play, etc.; charts that reveal demographics of slaves and arrests made in *capoeira*-related crimes; and primary documents such as journal entries of travelers and letters written that provide the literate higher classes' perceptions of the slave activity. Especially important in examining the earliest forms of *capoeira* are the police records that document arrests of *capoeiristas*. Without such records, very little would be known about eighteenth and nineteenth century *capoeira* as its players were almost all slaves and thus illiterate. Assunção is the more speculative of the two historians, more focused on the developments of the globalized *capoeira*, its cross-cultural popularization and commoditization, and resulting issues of authenticity. Ultimately, he concludes that although globalized capitalism threatens to commoditize *capoeira* and surrender it to homogenization, it also acts a reinforcing agent: “No doubt that *capoeira*'s globalization and transformation into a capitalist commodity contribute to a dilution of its ‘original’ meanings and undermines its ‘authenticity’. On the other hand, people around the world playing Afro-Brazilian instruments, singing Portuguese songs composed by slaves and their descendants and moving according to

African-derived aesthetics remains a major achievement in a world dominated by Hollywood, Nike, Sony, Coca-Cola and Microsoft” (226). In this case, I concede that modernity has the potential to ‘undermine *capoeiras*’ authenticity’, which in some forms it undoubtedly has, such as in fitness clubs and in Hollywood films in which it lacks context. For example, a fitness class in which some *capoeira* moves are used to create an aerobic workout for its participants is not *capoeira*, let alone an authentic *capoeira*. Films who portray *capoeira* without showing the *roda* the *berimbau*, for instance, or channeling the real energy of an actual game, such as “Meet the Fockers” in which one of the main characters *says* he is doing *capoeira* but does not demonstrate anything resembling it, are simply using it as entertainment value. However, to place it into a socialized and historically connected arena, like classes who venerate their lineage and teach their students not only technique but tacit and subjective knowledge, may successfully and genuinely “provide a new identity” to the many new actors who pursue it, as Assunção suggests, which I suggest contributes to a new conceptualization of authenticity itself as will be discussed further on.

Neil Stephens and Sara Delamont (2006; 2008; 2009), the first being a sociologist and a *capoeirista* and the second being a feminist scholar in the sociology of education, have emerged as two leading collaborative authors on the subject of diasporic *capoeira* in Great Britain. Sometimes authored in cooperation with *instrutor* Claudio de Campos Rosario (2010), Delamont and Stephens are some of the first since J. Lowell Lewis’ original work (1992) to have written on their extensive fieldwork in the world of *capoeira*. Thus, their work provides an updated look into globalizations’ effects on the game. Delamont had found in earlier research (2005) that an understanding of *capoeira* is more profound with participation, though due to her own physical limitations she was unable to participate. Thus, Stephens uses his own knowledge of *capoeira*

through personal experience as a *capoeirista* to inform Delamonts' sociological analyses.

Together, their research aims to discover how Brazilian *mestres* teach culture and how non-Brazilian *capoeira* students in the UK express social cohesion and embody "aspects of Brazilian identity" (104). Additionally, they are able to compare continuities and discontinuities between diasporic and Brazilian *capoeiras* that will inform this discussion of non-Brazilians' experience of the sport.

As sociologists, they are less concerned with the question of authenticity. However, their collaboration with Stephens' *contra-mestre* (one teaching level below *mestre*) examines the reasons for the non-Brazilian attraction to *capoeira* and the ways in which Brazilian teachers use this to become successful outside of Brazil in their discussion of 'Authenticity and Authority' (*Sport, Education, and Society* 2010). Delamont and Stephens use Campos' perspective as a Brazilian teacher in the UK and Bourdieu's (1999, 340) argument that "Pedagogical action can...open the possibility of an emancipation founded on awareness and knowledge of the conditionings undergone" in concluding that teachers of a diasporic *capoeira* are able to use cultural capital in their methods to navigate and engage with critical elements of *capoeira*. In other words, the teacher gains respect by using his Brazilianness and imparts on his students the knowledge and personal development they are seeking by engaging with this Brazilianness and embodying it themselves. Ultimately, this has a profound, 'emancipatory' effect on both teacher and student. As their main informant and co-author, Rosario explains the feasibility of his goal to teach his students the Brazilianness of *capoeira*: "When they show him and each other loyalty, demonstrate social cohesion, enjoy and understand aspects of Brazilian culture, play beautifully and their embodiment includes flexible waists, his work is visibly successful" (118). Their investigations of the successful acquisition of tacit knowledge through practice (2009) and

peripheral participation (*Teaching and Teacher Education* 2010) support my own demonstration that an individual's experience of *capoeira* is the most paramount way in which he or she learns its culture and uses it in the process of identity making.

Janelle Joseph (2008), scholar of exercise science and the sociology of sport, writes on the transnationality and authenticity of *capoeira* in Canada. Her original intent was to note the differences between Brazilian and Canadian forms of *capoeira*. However, after four years of experience training with her ethnographic subjects in a *capoeira* group in a metropolitan city, she found that the issue of commoditization was a primary catalyst for their divergence thus sparking her interest in the “competing discourses of authenticity” (504). Essentially, she argues that the primary motivation for non-Brazilians to pursue *capoeira* is to fulfill their desire to connect with “a culture that is of another time and place” (498) and to escape the ‘artificiality’ (501) of everyday life. Unlike Stephens and Delamont, however, she finds that the primary motivation of their *mestres* is to make more money than they would in Brazil because of these desires, even while knowing that their *capoeira* lacks authenticity. She states, “Mestres and *graduados* (student teachers) use their authority to define (in)authentic teachers, students, and classes” (499). In this sense, discourses of authenticity are employed purely for financial gain. The group identity that is created is intended not to promote bonding, a sense of pride, or strengthened selfhood but to draw in new students in order to “fulfill their economic imperative” (499). This, she says, is the *logical paradox*, of *capoeira* and cultural commoditization in general; globalization has influenced the spread of the sport and its manifestations in different realms of space and time which has in turn given teachers the opportunity to financially benefit from “contradictory definitions” within discourses of authenticity (2008, 501).

Henceforth, this review of literature moves to those works that will help to conceptualize the concepts of authenticity and identity making in order to provide a foundation for *reconceptualization* of modern authenticity.

Discourses of Authenticity

From this point of view arises the source of debate in which this research is situated. Joseph operationalizes the term ‘authentic’ in its most ironic form, citing scholars such as Seargeant (2005, 330) who notes that, in the modern age of globalized culture, “calling something ‘authentic’ merely becomes shorthand for saying it “appears authentic” (500). Joseph uses the term in this sense, contending that it not only assumes that at, one time, there did exist a “pure, original form” but also that it “presupposes an inauthentic, dubious, replication, a fake” (499). As she is suggesting, *capoeira* provides income to Brazilians that teach it in other countries, and the same could be surmised of other practitioners of culturally specific activities such as karate or yoga. In this way, the issue of authenticity intensifies the complexity of identity. Is it less meaningful to use character-building type elements of a sport such as *capoeira*—which is based upon such attributes as discipline and respect—when its authenticity is a commoditized and perhaps thus altered? As medical anthropologist Gilles Bibeau (1995, 626) proposes in his review of Michel Taussig’s *Mimesis and Alterity*, which we will return to below, “if imitation always presupposes a (distant) prototype, how can one avoid the danger that derived copies may lose authenticity and aura and become trivial objects?” Is it possible that imitation of a commercialized authenticity trivializes the process of identity making in *capoeira*? While this could be true under certain decontextualized circumstances and depending on the overall

intention of the ‘commercializer’, I would argue that it would be a mistake to assume this possibility of trivialization in all contexts.

In his book titled *Culture and Authenticity*, American anthropologist Charles Lindholm (2008), provides an analysis of the ways in which people perceive authenticity as it relates to art and culture. The goal of this work is to provide a thorough, multifaceted conceptualization of ‘authenticity’ in order to distinguish between the actually authentic and the perceived authentic.

To do so, he asks the following questions:

“How has the global quest for the certainty of authenticity been realized in practice? What are its certain forms, when and why do they occur? What consequences follow from pursuing various modes of authenticity? What are sources of the modern thirst for the genuine?” (2008, 2)

While he recognizes the ironic version of authenticity described in Joseph’s and others’ scholarships, he argues that defining something as authentic or inauthentic is a process based on the circumstance of whoever is attempting to define it and concludes that it is not the place of the anthropologist or the outsider to discredit anyone else’s definition or search for one. Thus, Lindholm uses multiple case studies to illustrate “how people from different cultures and periods have sought refuge and inspiration in their own pursuits of authentic being” (2). For example, in one of these case studies on authenticity and music, he creates a dialogue between the threats of commoditization in that many artists must often appeal to popular aesthetic value in order to become successful, and the tendency of this trend to create stereotyped performances and performers. Significantly, he brings up the issue in relation to country music that, “...if the music is always changing, and if its genealogy is vague and hard to substantiate, and if it has grown ever more distant from its rural roots, how can any country performance today be defined as authentic?” (33). We can compare this question to *capoeira* in our recognition of its evolution and its modern form’s differences from its many historical counterparts. To answer his question,

we may return to his conclusion that “human beings are creatures of imagination. We invent the world as we go along, and as we do so, we collectively construct cultural frameworks of meaning that are external to us...” (144). In other words, people create meaning in order to feel fulfilled; thus I concur that any ironic ‘definition’ of authenticity in relation to *capoeira* is only one perspective of many. This research looks at another perspective, which is that of the participant as a result of his or her experiences.

Modernization and Identity: Imagined Worlds, Real Selves

Janelle Joseph suggests that, “wealthy (Northern) citizens turn to the authentic sporting practices of economically disadvantaged peoples—associated with other historical times and geographic locales—to fulfill a desire for wholeness, difference, and real multicultural experiences,” (501) and I fully agree. However, returning to Lewis’ (1999) case that the “imaginal process” is a legitimate—*real*—experience for the one who is doing the imagining, I counter that Joseph’s above statement overlooks the ontological status of imagined selves.

To broaden our understanding of imagined selves, one of the most central theoreticians to consider is Arjun Appadurai, an anthropologist who examines the processes of modernity and globalization. In his essential work *Modernity at Large* (1996), he discusses the ways in which individuals and societies navigate their way through expanded modes of defining national- and self-identities in response to the effects of migration and media. His main argument is that the imagination plays a new role in modern society and is now a large factor in the process of identity making. His conceptualization of deterritorialization offers that nationality and national attachments begin to manifest themselves elsewhere in the world, creating a forum for the idea of imagined worlds. In deterritorialized contexts, the ‘homeland’ exists in those who maintain its

character elsewhere, primarily through imagination. Echoing the idea of Lewis' "fantasy of reality" (1999, 533), Appadurai explains that the migration of people and the images produced by the media have fashioned the modern opportunity for 'possible lives'. In his statement that, "In general, imagination and fantasy were antidotes to the finitude of social experience" (53), he illustrates that tradition and the everyday experience were recognized as the reality in which people had lived until the mid-twentieth century. Today, however, media and transnationalism have allowed the importance of possible lives and imagined worlds to increase, necessarily constituting just as much of reality as the quotidian.

What Appadurai described as *imagined worlds*, essentially being our capacity in the modern world to envision new selves of the Other's design, can be likened to what anthropologist Michael Taussig, in his work titled *Mimesis and Alterity*, describes as the "optical unconscious", or the "opening up [of] new possibilities for exploring reality and providing means for changing culture and society along with those possibilities" (1993, 23). This notion is involved in the theme of *mimesis*, which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as, "the deliberate imitation of the behavior of one group of people by another as a factor in social change". In examining the Cuna Indians of San Blas, Panama, he notes their representation of the Western world in certain objects they manufacture, such as wooden figurines of white men and images that are produced in which the Indian is perceived as rich and the Western man poor. Another example includes their production of *molas*, or cloth prints that they use to adorn shirts or head wraps. In these *molas*, Indian women take images of Western popular culture and sew them into clothing. Taussig comments on this phenomenon by asking, "What could better highlight, magnify, and bring out the viscosity hidden in the optical unconscious than the auratic sheen of mimesis and alterity provided by these demure women stitching the West on

their chests with the same gesture as they preserve tradition?” (231). Taussig’s convoluted discussion ultimately elucidates the ways in which people borrow from, assimilate into, and adopt certain elements of culture through mimesis and inherently expose cultural differences by doing so, which he refers to as *alterity*. In this study, I consider that the social change found in modern mimesis is derived from the social force of multiculturalism.

Walter Benjamin, to whom Taussig responds in his analysis, suggests that it is not enough to simply imagine another world. One must experience that world, “slipping into Otherness, trying it on for size” (Taussig 1993, 33). Other scholars of mimesis describe the urge to imitate as “an almost drug-like addiction” (Taussig 1993, 43). Taussig further extrapolates that this current state and our current means of self-identification that include borrowed elements of the Other are simply indications of our postmodern reality. Further supporting Appadurai and Lewis’ arguments that imagined lives and everyday experience could both be considered forms of reality, he states, “History would seem to now allow for an appreciation of *mimesis as an end in itself* that takes one into the magical power of the signifier to act as if it were indeed the real, to live in a different way with the understanding that artifice is natural, no less than that nature is historicized” (Taussig 1993, 255).

Anthropologist Martin Sökefeld (2001), specialist in politics and identity, leads us through the evolution of anthropological concepts of identity in his article “Reconsidering Identity” in an effort to defend the importance of the discourse of identity in social sciences. He does not base his argument on ethnographic work, instead focusing on arguments that have already been made and offering his viewpoint on the reconceptualization of identity in modern contexts. He first points to Fredrik Barth’s early concept of “ethnic identity” in 1969, which limits an individual’s selfhood to classification based solely in terms of his society of origin and

ignores the “constructive social creativity of human beings” (532). In other words, it fails to expand on the plurality of the self and other ways of defining the self than those solely based on nationality such as those made possible by Appadurai’s concept of imagined worlds. Taking these new possibilities for identity construction, Richard Handler (1994), anthropologist of global development, proposes that in the modern age, “rationalization” will altogether nullify the “irrational” claiming of identities [solely] based on ethnicity. Sökefeld finds this to be the case but expands his own definition to acknowledge and include ethnic identity in relation to globalization and the politics of identity. He offers a definition of identity that this study will operationalize extensively in saying, “The recognition that identity is a matter of claims, rights, and power has resulted in the replacement of a simple concept of identity in many cases by the notion of *politics of identity*. To argue that the concept of ‘identity’ may not be applied to others because they lack certain definitional characteristics presupposed by that application is to miss the political contents and intention of the concept, its character as a *project*” (2001, 534). This idea is paramount to examining the building of a multidimensional selfhood in that, first, it must be considered a project or, in other words, a development. Second, it refutes the idea relating to *capoeira* specifically that authentic *capoeiristas* cannot exist in the United States simply because the participants are not ethnically Brazilian. Returning to Barth, this defies the most basic form of identity. However, this research will rely more on the redefinition offered by Sökefeld in order to encompass a more modern perspective on the politics of identity.

Going further, there has long been a debate of whether or not culture exists within or without the individual. When conceptualizing identity making, it is important to distinguish between collective and individual identity, though this study will address both. As Richard Handler writes, “Cultures get constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed as people pursue

their identities” (qtd. in Sökefeld 2001, 530), which is a statement that accords with the greater scope of this research and strengthens our concept of identity as becoming ever more multidimensional as a result of globalization. However, he also suggests that imposing an identity on an individual implies that he is “bounded and constant” (Sökefeld 2001, 531) though I have found that, in accordance with Sökefeld’s critique of this argument, it is important to remember the fluidity of the concept, both theoretically and individually. Accepting Self-building as a process through which we are shaped by our experiences and education (Levinson et. Al. 2000), we must also accept this process as changing as we are molded by our increased exposure to new cultures, peoples, and ideologies.

Interestingly, though neither cites the other, Jan Scholte precedes and supports Sökefeld’s outlook in his analysis of globalization’s effects on the concept of collective identification by saying, “It is therefore better to exchange primordial, biological and otherwise rigid concepts of the self for the maxim that 'identity should always be a process, never an artefact'. Identity is always en route rather than rooted, and it 'must be continually assumed and immediately called into question'” (1996, 597). As a convenor in research initiative “Building Global Democracy” and specialist in globalization and regionalization, Scholte’s article ‘The Geography of Collective Identities in a Globalizing World’ recognizes the ambiguity of selfhood in a globalized world and the postmodern condition in which people are now building that sense of selfhood. Furthermore, in comparison to Sökefeld and in agreement with Appadurai, he is more concerned with the diminished capacity of the nation to provide a means of self-identification. In his discussion, he addresses important questions that could be answered in relation to the research presented here: “Have supraterritorial social relations fostered fundamentally different kinds of self-identification and collective solidarity? Is the expansion of global space so

redefining the nature of boundaries that the age-old formula of distinguishing self and other along territorial lines is being superseded?” (Scholte 2001, 574). The answers to such questions have, in recent years, fallen significantly with the affirmative that identities are no longer defined by geography. As Appadurai makes clear, *landscapes* are no longer the primary *-scapes* we recognize as affecting, if not defining, our sense of self.

Applying the Literature

Perhaps it may be going too far to consider postmodern self-making, in reference to mimesis, artifice, and agency, as existing within a “postreality” of sorts. However, this is the manner with which I will approach the concept of authenticity. This study is largely based on and will attempt to supplement Janelle Joseph’s study on the commoditization of authenticity in Canadian *capoeira* and her assumption that inauthenticity is ubiquitous in diasporic *capoeira* in general by offering a more phenomenological, subjective approach to the pursuit of multicultural selfhood. I will attempt to refute any sort of stereotype by using actual people and their actual experiences and perceptions, thus offering a reworked and less ironic definition of authenticity as it affects *capoeiristas*’ identity-making processes in real ways.

- IV - HISTORY

While the above theoretical conceptualization both amplifies and influences *capoeiras*' many intricacies, its history is a paramount element of the game and its players that explains much of *why* it has become so complex. Ultimately, it has influenced nearly every aspect of *capoeira* as it is known today, from lineage to custom to presentation and beyond. That *capoeira* is often referred to as an "Afro-Brazilian" dance fight is a direct reflection of the fact that the origins of the sport are quite convoluted. Slaves taken from Angola and brought to Rio de Janeiro are said by historians (Assuncao 2005; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008) to have inspired the game that is known today. However, modern *capoeira* is itself very different from its historical counterparts in Brazil, in part because its popularity has spread internationally and largely because, even in past, the players have experienced many varied levels of societal status, from persecution to acceptance to reverence. Thus, in the debate concerning authenticity, a significant question to be addressed is whether or not an "authentic" *capoeira* even exists. In order to discuss this issue, it is first necessary to further consider and engage with its evolution.

In the early 1800s, Rio de Janeiro and Bahia of northern Brazil were some of the most active hubs of the slave trade. Between 1808 and 1821, the slave population increased from 20 to 45 percent of the overall population in Rio (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008). With this influx of African culture came organized activities previously unknown to Brazilian society. Talmon-Chvaicer documents traveler John Robertson who said that 300 to 400 people, "natives of Mozambique and Quilumana, Cabinda and Luanda, Benguela and Angola", would gather in circles to dance and play a "warlike...violent game" (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008, 8). In this, there are distinctly African qualities in the most fundamental respects. Music being a principal element of social

gatherings in West Central Africa, it remained so upon the slaves' arrival in Brazil. Though there are many instances in which *capoeira* is not documented as having music present, least of all the *berimbau*—the main instrument present in contemporary *capoeira*, the *atabaque*, or drum, has been most often depicted in paintings and mentioned in numerous written accounts in which *capoeira* was described. According to Talmon-Chvaicer, drums in the early 19th century largely played the roles that the *berimbau* has taken on in its more recent manifestations and have been brought into the historical *roda* as a result of African influence (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008).

As a result of the public disturbances caused by an ostensibly more violent form of *capoeira* than that which is played today, authorities began zealously prosecuting anyone caught playing in public. The hostile relationship between police officials and the *capoeiristas* was largely related to the fear of a slave rebellion in the mid-19th century. A substantial gathering of slaves who were skilled, often armed, and fraught with “lustful heat” were assumedly capable of violent uprising and were thus dangerous to the structure of society (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008, 12). As a result, army officers and policemen increasingly arrested slaves on the grounds of “disturbing the peace” and would either sentence them to a certain number of lashes or forced labor for public works projects (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008, 8-9). Talmon-Chvaicer credits historian Leila Algranti for systematizing police records from the nineteenth century and from them uncovering the most knowledge about early *capoeira*. Algranti reported that, from 1810 until 1821, the Royal Police Guard's records attribute 9 percent of the 4,853 arrests made to *capoeira*. Attempts of escape were the only cause of arrest more common than playing *capoeira* (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008, 8-9). Interestingly, despite its violent nature, police records were also among the first sources to refer to it as a game.

While these records revealed much about the demographics and punishments of *capoeiristas*, it depicted little concerning the actual game. Because the players themselves were often illiterate, they were unable to provide such information themselves except through verbal storytelling. However, there were several artists of this time period that engraved and painted scenes of *capoeiras*, such as J.M. Rugendas, who painted one of the earliest depictions of *capoeira* (right: “Jogar capoëra ou danse de la guerre”, 1835). They often illustrated such details as the circles and settings in which the games were played, techniques



and weapons used to fight, styles of dress, and use or lack of instruments that would otherwise remain unknown but for the limited personal or literary accounts from observers. Rugendas arguably provides one of the most illuminating depictions of the violent form of *capoeira* characteristic of the early 19th century, explaining that the goal of the players was “to hit with their head the chest of the opponent they want to hit to the ground... by throwing themselves against each other, more or less like he-goats, they sometimes get badly hurt at the head: therefore one sees often the jesting being displaced by fury, to the point that blows and even knives stain the game with blood” (Assunção 2005, 72). Many slaves also tended to carry razors known as *navalhas* which often came to enter the *roda*, resulting in the violence that provoked the condemnation of the game by the authorities.

Capoeira was then considered to be a part of the street culture of the lower classes and eventually, due to the original nationality ties of the slaves, its participants arranged themselves into gangs. Since it was illegal for slaves to carry any real arms with which to protect

themselves, they were instead required to arm themselves with objects they had regular access to such as knives or matches (Lewis 1992). Thus, the distinctive gang mentality of *capoeiristas* derived from its historical emphasis on the cunning and deceit that could allow a slave to defend himself against a man with a gun, mirrored by the sentiment written by Lewis that, “It was a matter of pride that one didn’t need a firearm to emerge victorious” (Lewis 1992, 41). In this way, many *capoeiristas* were sometimes regarded for their physical prowess and defense tactics, especially once slaves—many of whom were *capoeiristas*— were called on to fight in the Paraguayan War (1865-1870) alongside their masters and white men. After the war, public opinion began to perceive it less as hooliganism and more as a martial art linked to self-defense. Moreover, the earlier elements of organization amongst groups could be seen, thought by some to be an attempt to dissuade persecution (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008). Despite this, the ‘slave-sport’ was officially outlawed in 1890, two years after the abolishment of slavery itself (Assunção 2005).

In many places, *capoeira* began to disappear but remained intact in the northern coastal region of Bahia, hence its significance in many of *capoeira*’s songs. J. Lowell Lewis provides the argument that it survived in Bahia because its rural areas were able to give “refuge” to those from the city, where police forces and officials were more effective in suppressing the sport, who wished to continue playing without facing persecution. He make the point that, “In some cases, rare arts are ‘preserved’ in the Recôncavo [outlying rural region] until rediscovered by urbanites and turned to their own purposes” and explains that it is not actually preservation but merely a result of the slower rate of cultural change characteristic of rural areas. Thus, when *capoeira* was eventually brought to the classroom, it was privy to the “stimulating cultural diversity and forum for specialization” of the cities, which led to “reinvigoration” and change (Lewis 1992, 55-56).

In an early attempt to institutionalize the sport, two Brazilian athletes attempted to integrate *capoeira* into the martial arts scene, which had become popular around the 1920s. Both Anibal Burlamaqui and Agenor Moreira Sampaio largely ignored the ritualized aspects characteristic of its Afro-Brazilian roots, instead focusing on its physical aspects and applying rules and regulations for how it should be played. However, this form was more likened to physical education and did not create a significant legacy. On the other hand, the military revolution of 1930 that gave power to Getulio Vargas brought about a cultural shift in racial perceptions. Vargas' search for popularity led the government to "[ease] up on repression of popular cultural expressions, including *capoeira*" (Almeida 1986, 31).

In 1927, Mestre Bimba helped to formally institutionalize the sport as the first to move its arena from the streets to an academy setting, founding the Centro de Cultural Física e Capoeira Regional (Lewis 1992, 59). Soon after, Mestre Pastinha opened his own practice based on his more traditionalist style, the Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola, and the two have since become the most highly recognized *mestres* in the history of the game. Brazilian president Getulio Vargas officially legalized *capoeira* in 1937 after the government licensed Bimba's academy, allowing and encouraging the more "hygienized" version taught there (Assunção 2005). Nestor Capoeira argues that it is possible that *capoeira* would not still exist were it not for its institutionalization as Vargas would not have allowed the more underground, violent *malta* (gang) activity involved with *capoeira* that existed until Bimba and Pastinha's structures emerged (2006, 193).

Distinct styles began to emerge in Bahia. Bimba's particular style became known as *Regional* and was more popular among the middle and upper socioeconomic classes that he was credited for attracting. The traditional, "more conservative" style developed by Mestre Pastinha

was known as *Angola*, named after the country from which most slaves were taken. Pastinha was focused on retaining the “freedom of expression and individuality” that is characteristic of many folk art forms which is evident in the *Angola* style (Lewis 1992, 60-62).. The *Atual* style, largely attributed to Mestre Nô’s style of play, integrates aspects of both *Angola* and *Regional* styles, which Lewis refers to as a ‘postmodern trend’ (64).

Another important characteristic of capoeira is in its involvement in globalization. Once institutionalized, Bimba inspired and produced many *mestres* who brought his system to many other countries, especially in Europe and the United States. Jelon Viera essentially initiated the trend of capoeira in the United States when he began giving lessons in New York City in 1975 and the first capoeira tournament in the United States occurred in 1982. Today, *capoeira* has increased in popularity in cities such as Boston and New York where I collected the following data in order to demonstrate its manifestation in this modern setting.

- V -
DATA & ANALYSIS

This section will begin with an illustration of *capoeira* as I experienced it in my research, first providing a focused overview of the game itself in order to provide the reader with an understanding of my ethnographic study along with how the game is actually played. Then it will become more abstract in nature, reflecting on more intangible qualities and entering into a phenomenological account of how my informants describe their experience with *capoeira*. Lastly, it will become theoretical in nature and I will analyze how this phenomenology of *capoeira* relates it to the broader themes of modernity and authenticity.

a. As Capoeiras

Of course, each group is the sum of the individuals which comprise and represent it. My main informants included the creator of Bachata Capoeira, Contramestre Protetor; his most advanced and loyal student, Gracioso; Abraço Domundo, my original inspiration for the project who became an *instrutor* in San Francisco several months after the start to my project; Camarade, who was somewhat of a beginner when I met him but who became my most accommodating, open, and interested contact and friend; Aguia, a college student who discovered Bachata in Gracioso's class at his university's recreation department three years ago and who now teaches that class when Gracioso is unavailable; Sorriso, *profesor* of Capoeira Maculélé and my main contact in New York; Barco, a student of Capoeira Maculélé; along with several other unnamed auxiliary contributors. Demographically, all of my interviewed informants from Boston and all but two (Sorriso and Barco from Brazil and Indonesia, respectively) from New York were born in or close to New England.

When asked how each one became involved in *capoeira*, I received varying answers ranging from family ties to random intrigue, the latter of which was often the case. Sorriso was born in Salvador, Bahia's capital, and trained under his uncle's instruction, later moving to the United States along with many of his peers who now teach or train in cities such as Miami, Denver, and San Francisco. He now essentially runs Capoeira Maculéle in New York City. Comparatively, Gracioso, whose parents are from Haiti, heard of *capoeira* through a friend but had never taken interest in his prodding until he decided it might be beneficial to bring the autistic children he works with to a class: "When I started bringing the students I started going myself then it just took off from there." Both Sorriso and Gracioso mentioned that they never planned to take it as far as they had but ended up becoming devoted, integral actors within their respective schools.

The majority of the *capoeira* students I worked with were like Aguia, attending college full or part time as either upperclassmen in undergraduate studies or working toward Masters' degrees. A number of them, interestingly, were in programs revolving around mental health or psychology, which often showed in their interview responses or simply in casual conversation by offering an intriguing, often self-reflexive perspective on the benefits of *capoeira*. For instance, many noted increases in self-confidence, discipline, respect for diversity, and open-mindedness.

b. Playing, Fighting, Dancing—or Communicating?

There are several ways to refer to *capoeira* due to its obvious multifaceted qualities. While it is referred to as an "Afro-Brazilian martial art dance form" most commonly when described by nearly every one of my informants ("I tell students it's a mix of dance, martial art

and acrobatic movements”, as Sorriso explained), linguistically, *capoeira* is referred to as a *jôgo*, or game, in Portuguese. Thus, I will most often use this terminology in my own writing.

In my first few conversations with informants, though, it was unclear as to why they kept telling me that they “played” with this opponent or had to try to “play” a certain way in certain situations. In one interview with Aguia, I asked him why he thought people referred to it as a “game” rather than a fight or a dance. He responded,

“Because it’s supposed to be fun, I think, for one. It’s not a battle, not a competition, it’s really hard to decide who’s the winner because in nice games you don’t hit each other. If you were playing for keeps it could be over quickly. It’s because it’s so back and forth and there’s no clear winner but it’s about keeping the game going, not about a winner. It’s about flow. As a martial art, if I were to get in a street fight with someone I wouldn’t do all the things I do in *capoeira*. I’d be trying to strike quick and end it. In reality I’ll go straight for the head. *Capoeira*’s not about that, it’s about question and answer, it’s fun to continue to question and continue to answer.”

This latter point in which he brings up the issue of dialogue was something I had become aware of after my very first interview with Camarade. I asked him to elaborate on the “conversational aspect” that he had brought up earlier in the interview:

Camarade: It’s huge. And I think that’s why it’s such a powerful synthesis of dance and martial movement and that it really requires active participation of both people in paying a lot of attention to what the other person is doing while still being very mindful of what you’re doing. Kind of what we were talking about before [prior to interview], of being aware of where your body is and how...

M: In relation to...

C: Yeah, in relation to the person you’re playing with. And I hesitate to say opponent, you know? Because that sort of implies competition. And I feel like competition is really secondary in a lot of *capoeira*. And when it gets to be very

competitive, the *mestre* will sort of rein you in. If you're not competing with yourself then, you're out of line.

M: And like he was saying today, these cords don't kick, don't make contact, don't be aggressive, just kind of play.

A: Yeah, so it's conversational with the other person very, very much, but it's also a really intense internal conversation. It can be very meditative in that way.

Many describe the *mandinga*, or game, as a dialogue—a composition of questions with many possible answers between two people. Often, the conversation provides a window into both players' characters. It can transform two strangers into either best friends or enemies without a word spoken between them, simply through judgment of the manner in which the other approaches the game. The ways in which this conversation manifests itself can be understood further in the context of the field of play, central in any “sport” (as *capoeira* can also be termed), which is known in this case as the *roda*.

c. The Roda

The *roda* is unquestionably the most significant and fundamental aspect of the game of *capoeira* symbolically, socially, physically, and emotionally in that, aside from class and outside interactions, it is where the *mandinga* (magic) happens, so to speak. As aforementioned, the word ‘*roda*’ (pronounced Haw-duh with a harsh “H”) means ‘ring’ or ‘wheel’ and can either describe the arena in which the game is played or a particular *capoeira* event or competition. Logistically, the players stand in a circle around the outside; those with the instruments stand next to one another at the head of the circle. The player with the leading *berimbau* stands at the direct center with two other *berimbaus*, two or three *pandeiros* (tambourines), occasionally the *agogô* and/or the *reco-reco* playing to his or her right and three *atabaques* (drums) playing to his

or her left. When two players are ready to enter the *roda*, they crouch “*ao pé do berimbau*, ‘at the foot of the *berimbau*,” and wait for the lyrical invocation or the chorus sung by the player of the *berimbau*, who also controls the mood, tempo, and etiquette of the *roda* and its players. They then enter into the *roda*, sometimes by cartwheeling (*auí*), displaying an elaborate movement of deception, or by quickly flipping or spinning. Once inside the circle, the players re-establish the eye contact that should remain relatively constant throughout the game and commence “basic interaction patterns [that] resemble conversational ‘turn taking’, where partners alternate initiatives (‘attacks’) and responses (‘escapes’)” (Lewis 1992, 12).

However, it is important that neither player trust this conversation or his partner as one of the most basic rules in capoeira is that, “rules are made to be broken” (Lewis 1992, 102). The mastery of deceit or trickery, known as *malícia*, is essential to ‘winning’ a match. Protetor explained this concept of *malícia* to the class one day, making it clear that one must constantly be aware of his surroundings and must never allow his opponent to catch him off guard, as this would grant him a victory of sorts. He also made explicit that everyone involved in the circle is also involved in the game and thus not immune to attack, elucidating this point by gently tackling someone in our small huddle who was not paying attention. Likewise, if one has to move out of the circle to accommodate the two acting players, it is important to jump back in right away so as not to disrupt the formation. In this same talk, Protetor declared that, “there are no rules in capoeira, only ethics”. This is evident in the balance between respect and *malícia* that an experienced *capoeirista* knows should be maintained.

In both styles and tempos and at all neutral moments while playing or practicing *capoeira*, the movement always returns to the most fundamental step of any sequence called *ginga*, a side to side backwards lunge of the legs. The arms move in unison with the left arm

rising to cover the face as the right leg steps back and vice versa. The main focus is to always protect the face and maintain the momentum of the *ginga* so as to be ready to attack, defend, or counterattack in response to an opponent.

The length of any one competition varies greatly depending on the amount of people in the *roda*, the players' experience levels, the music, and the will of whomever decides they wish to play next. It is generally unacceptable to call someone who is ranked higher out of the game, but otherwise one may simply begin entering into the center space, catch the eye of the person he wishes to take on, and wait for the rhythm of the game or the music to allow him to flow into the next match. This is indicative of the fact that usually there is not a clear winner to the game but rather a constant or semi-constant transition of new participants into the conversation or encounter. There is an almost constant movement of the game until the *berimbau* determines its end.

While playing within the *roda*, the two opponents play with either the *Angola* or *Regional* style depending on the rhythm and style of the music. If the music is slower and more deliberate, it is considered the more dance-like *Angola* style. Today, efforts to lessen the gap between the two extremes have resulted in a third aforementioned type known as *atual*, a term coined and used almost exclusively by Mestre Nô, that combines aspects of both styles. Lewis describes the fundamental difference between the two poles within the spectrum as *Angola* being more "ludic," of a directionless playfulness, and *Regional* being more aggressive. As he notes, "The claim is that the former is usually more playful, of the nature of a pastime, while the latter is primarily a competition, a martial contest" (Lewis 1992, 113). Even in this description, one notices the distinction between the traditional and contemporary styles played out in *Angola* versus *Regional* and their resulting differences in intention. There are two common tempos

known as *São Bento pequeno*, or *Angola*, which is accompanied by lower kicks and ground movements and an intense, tricky musical style; and *São Bento Grande*, which is the quickest and inspires mostly higher spinning and kicking movements characteristic of the *Regional* style (Lewis 1992).

Symbolically, as Lewis explicates, the circle shape of the *roda* and the intense interaction of the people that comprise it is very much representative of the world itself. In the slave era, the happenings of the *roda* and the songs that were sung often reflected the political, emotional, or overall life circumstances of its participants. Today, this tradition reflects the current goings on of the group or of *capoeira* as a whole and often pays respect to its complex history. In this way, Lewis explains that, “The outcome [of a game] is (usually) only a metaphorical death, and the real end is more akin to liberation: a liberation from slavery, from class domination, from the poverty of ordinary life, and ultimately even from the constraints of the human body” (Lewis 1992, 2).

Likewise, as many of my informants made clear, the lyrical themes in the music in *capoeira* are carefully selected so as to be appropriate to any situation that occurs within the *roda*. It may invoke folk themes of the past or symbolic moments in Brazilian life that apply to which kind of game is being played or which game the players or the *mestre* would like to see. As Lewis notes, it is the duty of the *berimbau* player to pick an “appropriate song to capture that moment in the game, to highlight the action and allow the audience and players a chance to express their delight in the quality of play” (Lewis 1992, xxi-xxii). Abraço Domundo illustrates the expressive nature of capoeira songs in describing a *roda* in which he participated in New York City:

“I remember very distinctly, I was in a *roda* in New York and Mestre came in to play. There were a few visitors there who had never met Mestre before, and

there's this one hot shot guy who goes in to play Mestre and all of a sudden I start singing... to just send a message: "Look, hey man, work! Work so you don't get beat! You better watch out." Or you might say..., "There's a snake curled up around here so you better watch out." ...You're warning players, you're talking to the players, you're calling the game. And the themes? Love, travel, slavery, talking about different people, different characters... They talk about everything." Historical references in the lyrics to songs may include slave rebellion; daily life on the plantation; injustices or suffering of the slaves; certain jobs of freed slaves; ships arriving from Angola carrying those who had yet to be sold; Bahia, the area where capoeira was and remains most prevalent; or moments of joy and love, to name several (Lewis 1992).

d. Hierarchy

One of the most visible and essential logistical attributes of capoeira is the presence of hierarchy in almost every facet of the game, especially in the *roda*. Almost every time a player acts or reacts in capoeira, he or she must take into account both role and rank. From my very first class, it was clear that each member of Bachata has a calculated place in the group determined by experience and the *mestre's* discretion. When I first walked in after meeting the group, I noticed the student named Aguia taking charge of the others who were running in circles or in specific patterns around the room and counting in unison in Portuguese. Another student named Aviso then ran in and, as they sat down to begin a series of crunches, sat down ahead of Aguia and it was clear that the responsibility had quickly and wordlessly transferred. When they continued running around the room, Gracioso moved several students to different places in line and it later became clear that he was organizing them by experience level. He also explained during the next class that he made sure they were not only ranked by skill but also by their ability to respect his fellow *capoeiristas* and their demonstration of significant personal growth.

i. Cordas and Social Hierarchy

One major characteristic of any group is their cord system. Though most groups have somewhat variable color coding, the premise is to make visible its hierarchy that exists according to experience, skill, knowledge, and personal development. Each student has a belt, or cord, of a different color that signifies his or her “rank”. In Bachata’s system and mostly in Maculéle’s as well, lower cords are white and yellow while the highest cords are generally navy blue, brown, and black. However, the cords are not actually able to be quantified or systematized due to the weight of the *mestre*’s judgment in deeming his students worthy or unworthy of a specific role. During a grand ceremonial event known as the *batizado*, a *capoeirista* is given the opportunity to prove himself and his progress made throughout the year. The *mestre* takes into account not only the ability of the student to demonstrate a particular sequence or his performance against those of a higher rank, but also remembers his different positive or negative actions throughout the year.

When I asked Abraço Domundo about rank, he explained his experience thus:

Abraço: In terms of rank...it’s when students are ready, time and experience.

There is no road, oh you have to know this you have to know that. There is some of that but it’s not all that. My student, [name omitted], is getting ready to get his second cord this July and what I’ve told him is, hey, if you want your second cord you have to be able to play all the instruments very proficiently in a *roda* setting. You have to be able to sing and play and you have to know sequences one through five like the back of your hand.

M: Is there a ceremony for moving up?

B: There is; it’s called a *batizado*. *Batizados* are, they happen once a year within any academy. That is the name of the ceremony. It means baptism. And that’s the traditional ceremony.

M: And how does that work?

B: Well, you play a master. My first *batizado* I had no idea what was going on and I got called by some masters. I played a master, he tripped me a few times, he

was really playful, didn't hurt me at all. You know, *capoeira*'s not really about hurting people, it's about game, camaraderie. I just remember he was just always on top of me. Wherever I went he was just right on top of me. At the end of the game he shook my hand and tied a rope around my belt, around my waist. That was it. That was my first time I got baptized. I've been baptized a few other times since then. I've skipped a few levels and the games get tougher and tougher as you get older because the *mestres* say, oh he's getting older, we have to lay it on thick this time. And then for twenty minutes I'm huffing and puffing and guys are trying to take my head off. It's a lot of fun.

M: Do you play a bunch of different people in the *roda* or is it just the *mestre* in the *batizado*?

B: Yeah during the *batizado* I played five different people in a row.

M: All with more experience than you?

B: Oh yeah, ohhh yeah. Far more experience. I played five different people in a row. It was extremely exhausting. It was brutal. And at the end, my arms were out and they tied a new cord around me and they said, congratulations, you are a *monitor* now. So there are different levels of graduations. It takes about twenty years to become a master. At least.

Furthermore, he explained that the roles also change as your rank increases. It becomes a balance between responsibility and privilege. While some believe the amount of privilege one carries should increase along with rank, he clarifies that it is just the opposite: "the fact is that as a higher cord I have more responsibility than I do privilege because the privilege is being granted to my students now. Whereas I would love to be very privileged and to play the whole time in the *roda* that I'm leading, I can't. It's my responsibility to sit there and lead the *roda* and play the *berimbau* and make sure that the conduct in the *roda* is very appropriate and everything like that." J. Lowell Lewis describes a similar sentiment when he says, "...the role of the *mestre* in *capoeira* might be seen not as someone who does the best acrobatics or even defeats all

opponents, but rather one who is responsible for the success of the entire event, the orchestration of the *roda*. From his commanding position holding the lead *berimbau*, he controls the tempo of the game, initiates most of the songs, and enters the ring to play the most beautiful games at the propitious moments” (Lewis 1992, 96). This responsibility stems from the origins of *capoeira* as a part of slave culture. Because *capoeira* was illegal and dangerous if discovered by the master of the plantation, someone was put in charge of the safety of the practicing group. As Abraço Domundo illustrates:

“Generally the person who is leading the *roda* is the most advanced cord there, the highest corded person there. So the highest ranking person is the person who is going to be in control of the whole space. So in Brazil, if I were going to do a... so in Brazil, back in the day, *capoeira* was illegal. So whomever was leading the *roda* had to be aware of everything that was going on. So it got to a point where, their back was facing maybe the woods, and the front was facing wherever the entrance was to wherever. So whoever was leading the *roda* is actually in charge of communicating to the players if the cops are coming or not. So we have different rhythms that we play on the *berimbaus* which call for different games and also communicate different things to the players. There was a rhythm invented called “*cavaleria*” and *cavaleria* means cavalry and it goes “donch-dinch-dondon-dinch, donch-dinch-dondon-dinch, donch-dinch-dondon-dinch, donch-dinch-dondon-dinch” okay so, what it sounds like is, [plays rhythm with hands], and it’s made to sound like a horse galloping and by playing that rhythm it lets everybody around who’s listening know, scatter the police are here. So that’s why it’s the highest student who leads the *roda* because that, it’s the most responsibility. They have to take responsibility for not only the people standing around the *roda*, the players in the *roda*, they have to take responsibility for the correct execution of the music, and they have to be aware of who is coming and going so, where are the cops on horseback? Are they coming here? Do we have spectators? You know, what is going on?”

This high-ranking person was and should still be the player with the ability to stay aware and alert of all incidents occurring within and outside the *roda* in order to communicate the players if they were in danger. Since awareness usually increases as experience increases, those with a higher rank were given the more important roles.

Lewis disagrees with D’aquino’s conclusion that a higher status in the *capoeira* hierarchy

is connected to a more distinguished social status in the outside world, explaining that upper class Brazilians do not give this level of respect to the usually economically lower class *capoeiristas*, no matter the color of their cord. Economically, this still seems to be the case. However, in the United States, the *mestres* I have observed seem to hold at least an aesthetic, almost celebrity-like reverence both from outside spectators and peers. In examining this as Bourdieu would, “teachers have capital in their field, which does not travel outside *capoeira*” (Claudio de Campos Rosario, Stephens, and Delamont 2010, 109). Thus, this is cultural capital that invokes a higher respect socially but perhaps relating more to the aesthetic value of the exotic we seem to hold in the United States

ii. Musical Hierarchy

This hierarchy within capoeira is so deeply embedded that the music remains its most fundamental representation. In this way, the roles of the *capoeiristas* include which role they must take in the playing of the instruments. The *mestre* or the highest rank in the room is the person in control of the *berimbau* for the same reasons that he is in charge of the *roda*. Gracioso explained that it takes many years to master the playing of the *berimbau*. Thus, to be able to take responsibility for the welfare of his comrades, a *capoeirista* must be confident in his abilities to recognize danger, lead the game, and correctly execute the appropriate rhythms applicable to the situation at hand.

The instruments themselves represent the most significant symbolism of social hierarchy. During my final participant observation, Gracioso assembled us in a huddle and explained to the class in detail the function of each instrument as a ranking mechanism. Just as the players

themselves have a role within their rank, their instruments provide for the same structure within a musical context.

The “mestre” of the orchestra is, of course, the *berimbau*. Its components include a metal wire (*arame*) which is strung between the ends a wooden rod (*pau*) with enough tension that the *pau* bends and resembles a bow. When a thin stick-like object measuring a little over a foot in length called the *vareta* strikes the *arame*, it produces a relatively loud, wiry tone. The pitch of this sound can be raised or lowered by applying pressure with a *pedra*, or stone, at the base of the wire near the *cabaça*, a hollow gourd, which stabilizes the *berimbau* when resting upon the player’s stomach. Last is the *caixixi*, a small wicker object that produces a rattling sound when shaken by the hand using the *vareta*. As such, the *berimbau*, like the *mestre*, is the most highly respected, essential, and complex element of the game. When lying on the floor, it is customary to either walk around the *berimbau* or pick it up to lean it safely against the wall as a sign of reverence. As one would expect, not everyone can or should play the *berimbau*, especially during a *roda*. Because it takes so much practice to master and has the important role of “the ‘soul’ of capoeira,” the most experienced (and the most highly ranked) should always be given the instrument unless this person insists on allowing someone else to play (Assunção 2005). Moreover, it has three sizes; in order from large to small and highest to lowest importance in rank, they are known as *gunga*, *médio*, and *viola*.

As the *berimbau* starts each song, it must set the tempo before the *atabaque*, or drum, may begin its accompaniment. Next, the *pandeiro*, or tambourine, may start, followed by the *agogô* (a metal double bell) and the *reco-reco* (a notched piece of wood or bamboo that makes a hollow scraping noise when a stick or rod is rubbed against the grooves) though the latter two instruments were never played in Bachata’s classes and seem more rare than the others. Finally,

once the entire orchestra is playing and has established their song, the *capoeiristas* may begin clapping and waiting for a call-and-response initiated by the player of the main *berimbau*.

e. Rules and Classroom Management

One of the ways in which a student may rise in rank is by understanding and internalizing the rules and etiquette of the game. Despite Protetor's aforementioned invocation that "there are no rules," the most fundamental way that Mestre Bimba was able to institutionalize the previously *capoeira da rua* (of the street) was to create rules within his own methodology. Examining Bimba's handbook for his students of Capoeira Regional, the rules of the traditional academy can be compared to those of Bachata and Maculélé and reveals a great deal about their group styles. Originally in Portuguese, these rules are as follows:

1. *Smoking is prohibited during training.*
2. *Alcohol inhibits muscular metabolism.*
3. *Avoid trying to show off to your friends outside of the roda. Remember that the element of surprise is the best in a fight.*
4. *Avoid conversation during training. You are paying for time in the academy and you will learn more from others by watching.*
5. *Always seek to ginga.*
6. *Practice the fundamentals daily.*
7. *Don't be afraid of getting close to your opponent. The closer you are the more you learn.*
8. *Always maintain a relaxed body.*
9. *It is better to gather in the roda rather than on the streets.*

It is clear that, while both groups are influenced by these rules, Bachata and Maculélé use

them differently and to varying degrees. In order to compare and contrast them, it will be useful to refer to the two illustrative field note entries that follow, taking note of student interaction, clothing, hierarchical relationships,

A. *“Boston—Monday, December 17, 2011 – 8:30-11:00*

Took a class today with [Bachata]. Met Camarade in Western Boston at his apartment... He went to class to watch and played instruments with [another student]. Since he wasn't using them, he let me borrow his white pants (abadas) even though they were huge on me. He said the white would be better than my black yoga pants ('no offense')... When I got there I was greeted warmly by [student], an older player who I found out later was new, and others, almost all university students, talking about classes and assignments... We meandered to class which started at least a half hour late and starting running around in a circle, I took my place near the back. Various ways of running (forward, sideways, skipping, etc.) all led silently by the leader of the line (Aviso). Aviso gave me a half-approving, half-bemused “nice outfit” when I came in. Protetor played traditional sounding music from a CD player over speakers. We worked on several moves/blocks/ginga led by Protetor and switching partners on cue. I worked a lot with Aviso who gave me quiet pointers throughout and let me ask questions throughout even though we weren't supposed to be talking. I learned 'cabezado' (where I head butt him in the stomach as he does an 'au' – closed cartwheel). After this we split up into two groups, one with experienced members and the other with 6 of us beginners. As the others continued partner work, we set up in two lines of 3 to work on kicks and kick blocks and eventually a sequence. Protetor would come over intermittently to adjust or give us a new move but it was only toward the end that he started paying attention to me. We were counting in a mix of English/Portuguese though it was clear that at least 3 of the 6 could speak Spanish or Portuguese. After this we got

water and lined up in 3 lines at one side of the room to practice different moves. The first of each would step out and start a ginga, Protetor would call out a move to be executed (from the opposite side of the room), they would do it and continue out to allow space for others to follow. The moves were complicated and those of us on the end were hardly able to follow but at one point he stopped to tell us to make sure we were trying anyway. After this we circled up into a roda. Aviso seemed quiet and didn't play as much as usual. It started out slowly and quickly got faster. At one point Aguia left the circle and grabbed my shoulders with a smile, leading me to the head of the circle. He played with me for about 3 minutes or so, sometimes telling me to kick or duck but mostly letting me just struggle along with him. I didn't notice anything outside the circle and though I was very much aware of myself I didn't really feel self-conscious. The second time Camarade made me try again so I could learn how to buy into a game. I kept trying to ask who I would play and when to do it and he told me to look for an approving nod from mestre but instead he told Gracioso to play me. We crouched and he asked if I was ready and I said, "I guess so", which I'm pissed about. Why such a lame response? But we played and I could tell he was going easy on me... They brought over the instruments and we were in a tight roda clapping and singing but everyone except [one student] seemed sort of lackluster. Protetor made up a song about [his girlfriend] and then lined us all up to repeat after him a 'pledge' in Portuguese. It basically was him telling the class that they must honor themselves and their mestre by avoiding excess. 'I am not your father and I can't really tell you what to do' but he was urging them not to drink/smoke/etc."

Notice this final element to class that was added about a month before I took this class. It is largely reminiscent of and seems to be an invocation of Bimba's rules. When I asked

Camarade about the classes, he explained that Protetor was teaching in a different, more disciplined format recently.

M: And are classes usually constructed the same way?

C: They've changed recently. Recently he's changed them to incorporate more exercising in the beginning of class. Tonight's class wasn't really typical. Usually he'll have us do a lot of exercises at the beginning, wear us out. Do a brief *roda* to get the energy up, and then have us learn new movements. Drill those for a while and then jump into a *roda* again for the rest of class. That's been the format more recently.

M: Why do you think there's been a shift to more exercise?

C: Because he's hurt. And because the warm ups feel good, they get people's blood flowing. It helps you get into it. You might be a little more tired but you're more in touch with where your body is at. And he's been really interested in making sure people have a lot of control over the movements. Instead of just wildly kicking he wants you to know that you can execute a kick very slowly and in a very controlled fashion.

M: ...his pledge tonight, was that different??

C: That appeared maybe a month ago. And I don't know it yet so I can't tell you too much about it. But [pauses]... I like it. It feels sort of militant. Which was shocking at first....

M: Yeah! I was kind of surprised, that was the first time I had seen it.

C: Yeah I think that's a good way of describing it. It's sort of militant for me. I understand why he's doing it but it's uh... it's different, it'll take some getting used to. It's very group think. So...

M: And his philosophy is interesting, or the philosophy he's adopted. Because I mean, there's a party where everyone is...

C: Drinking. A lot.

M: Drinking a lot. How do you think that plays into what he's talking about? Do you think that had an influence on it?

C: [referring to a party held in Aguia's apartment after their *batizado*] I think it did have an influence on it because he wasn't drinking at the party. And I think he saw a lot of excess and that worries him. Because he is very paternal and he does worry about us. So he's entitled to a certain extent to be patronizing I think in that we subscribe to his experience. But in the same breath it feels a little overbearing. So I mean, it might be a little easier for me to say this because I don't really drink and I don't smoke and I take really good care of my body so maybe it feels redundant and maybe that's why it's sort of... militant, overbearing to me?

M: But the people who...

C: Yeah but for those who...

M: Do you think that they, I don't want to say take it seriously because of course, I know they would. But how much do you think that plays into their real lives, like when they go out drinking are they going to be thinking about *mestre's* words?

C: I doubt it. I doubt it. And I think that the shift in the class both in terms of the, more P.T., more physical training and exercises, and also the adoption of this pledge as a more holistic approach to *capoeira* as a physical discipline, would speak more strongly to someone who doesn't have a physical regimen. Who doesn't have a nutritional regimen. And that that might be more inspiring for them, more applicable just at its very core. So maybe it has an impact on them. I think it might. But for me it's sense of redundancy sort of renders it less appealing. And even a bit aversive in some ways.

B. "*Capoeira [Maculélé]* (NYC) – January 10, 2012 – 7pm

The school is located in a large building in the city...the lobby is filled with kids and younger adults, probably teens to late twenties, plus parents. I go downstairs to change in a tiny bathroom and it's filled with girls standing in front of the mirror, listening to hip hop and performing dance moves for each other, dressed in their dance clothes. Definitely a hugely

*different feel than the Boston ballet studio but maybe it's really just the same thing on a grander scale. *Both in dance schools though... Classes begin – and end – almost exactly on time +/- 5 minutes. Much talking, laughing, conversation while doing partner work. Sorriso very hands on, everything I did wrong he was sure to point out, paying attention to everyone. Majority of class was non-white, all in 20s, 30s, some 40s in beginner class and maybe 50s. Some songs like a jazzy remix of capoeira music, berimbau and saxophone. While demonstrating, Sorriso uses one student in particular who seems tired, a blue/orange cord. Sorriso seems mildly annoyed, telling him to wake up, get it together, etc. 'Start moving man!' This class is everyone together for the first hour then higher level but with some lower level students staying for the second hour, hanging in the back. Sorriso urges them to take their time, 'It's an art form, express life through capoeira!' Emphasizes control, understanding the mechanics before adding the power. Lower level students not required to wear whites if they don't have them. Several wearing the pants and a white tank top, seems less strict, though at Saturdays' roda they can't participate unless they have them. Move to a roda, call and response. Sorriso: 'Let's keep it simple', tells them a few moves to focus on. Players buy in from all around the circle, not just at the berimbau. Students take turns playing instruments and leading songs. Sorriso says that every person must learn two songs and learn to play the instruments, Tuesdays especially he wants everyone to play. Apologizes after the roda for being so hard on people but he brings 100% so he expects his students to do the same. 'We're still cool, I'm still your friend!'"*

f. Capoeira in Brazil

In this latter field journal entry, the last comment made by Sorriso in my field journal entry—“We’re still cool, I’m still your friend!”—and the comment by Camarade that the new, harsher style seemed somewhat militant brings to light Joseph’s (2008) argument that instructors of non-Brazilian students have to “water it down” for “students who might not be ready for a ‘boot camp-type class’” (507). In Brazil, instructors would not necessarily be so sympathetic, nor would their students expect it. Acordeon provides us with his account of his first encounter with Mestre Bimba, which might illustrate a much different experience than that of an American capoeirista:

“We were two middle-class white kids walking down the narrow streets of the Terreiro de Jesus... This old and poor part of Salvador was filled with drunks, outlaws, and half-naked prostitutes inviting in the transient... Mestre Bimba listened to our desire to learn the art, and said, ‘Let me test you to see if you can learn.’ He asked us to squat down, keeping our feet flat on the floor. We did so, and he made a sign of approval. Then he put one of his strong arms around my waist and made me do a back bend, which was shaky but accepted. Unexpectedly, he grabbed my neck for one minute in a strong hold that left me breathless, but alive. Finally, the last part of the test was to go from a squatting position to a balance on our hands, keeping our knees on our elbows. My friend Manoel fell forward. Immediately a bump came up on his forehead. I did not have any better luck. Although I was careful, I could not hold my balance and fell, kissing the dust on the floor. Mestre Bimba laughed and said: ‘You will do all right. Show up in class tomorrow.’” (Almeida 1986, 113)

Of course, this is a comparison between *capoeira* in a New York City ballet studio in 2012 and *capoeira* in Mestre Bimba’s first academy ca. 1965 in Bahia, Brazil—two extremes. However, it is our first illustration of the differences between US and Brazilian *capoeiras*.

J. Lowell Lewis (1992) provides his informants' accounts of the oral tradition of capoeira, from which we gain narratives dating from the turn of the century to his ethnographic work in 1992. In this, we see the culturally defined differences between Brazilian capoeira and that which I observed in Boston and New York.

In the United States, capoeira is played by those who notice it. In Bahia, it is nearly impossible to miss. From a very young age, Bahian boys can participate as audience members in a street *roda* and can be seen imitating the older men. Once he reached a certain age, if he was interested in pursuing it seriously, he would have to make himself present and hope to get noticed by an experienced *capoeirista* who would then agree to take him on as a student and prepare him to enter into a *roda*. This is, of course, not generally the case in the United States.

An aspect that has not changed seems to be the role of the *mestre* as overseer of all events and the hierarchical nature of any group. Just as players in the *roda* will look for guidance from their *mestre* as to when they should enter the game, students in the past were required to wait for permission from their *mestres* to play. Today, however, *mestres* are also usually responsible for the administrative aspects of running a school and are less involved in the actual teaching of classes. It is up to the *contramestre* or sometimes *profesores* and *instrutores* to lead the classes using their *mestres'* teachings and promoting their ideals and styles.

Around the turn of the century, pickup games were often used as forms of training but if a guest from another group was present, it likely became a competition. For a while, the most distinguished games were played in the festivals preceding *Carnaval* in Salvador, Bahia. However, more recently these festivals became so increasingly crowded and rowdy with intoxicated party-goers that the more reputable *mestres* and their groups stopped participating.

Thus, the “toughest street players” began controlling the *rodas* to the point that they became less about skill, celebration, and music and more about aggression and violence.

This violent form of capoeira is found very rarely in the United States. Some informants have presumed that this is due to the fact that lineage bonds are not as strong as they do not involve blood ties or the gang-like mentality that comes with neighborhood representation. However, these qualities exist strongly in Bahia, especially due to the historical connections in the region and the fact that rank and esteem seems to play a more significant role in the hierarchy of society rather than just in the group. As Lowell offers, “Many teachers, then as now, urged their students to avoid the players (*malandros*) who might start *rodas* in the central city during business hours, or late at night, since these games were usually not supervised by a reputable master and anything could (and did) happen” (Lewis 1992, 57).

In an effort to evoke the way the game was played in its supposed original form by slaves, *capoeiristas* today wear white shoes and shirt and train and play barefooted. However, this dress code, following the standards of Bimba’s *Regional* style, is actually an ironic imitation of slave tradition. “No self-respecting Brazilian would go out in public (*rua*, literally meaning ‘street’) without shoes on... To go out on the street without shoes and shirt (with some exceptions) is to admit publicly of the direst poverty and lack of regard for social decency.” Though Bimba’s intentions were to attract middle- and upper-class students, having them wear such clothes is actually a contradiction of social decency in more contemporary Brazil. This is partially attributed to Bimba’s restriction of his students to play in the streets. If they were to go out in the required dress, they would be considered indecent. *Angoleiras*, on the other hand, continue to wear shirts and shoes to maintain the tradition in which some players, even before

the institutionalization of *capoeira*, would “frequently show up at games all ‘duded up’ in their fanciest clothes” in order to avoid social impropriety (Lewis 1992, 57).

Somewhat more reminiscent of pre-classroom *capoeira* in Brazil, Sorriso organizes summertime *rodas* in the streets of New York, explaining that most *capoeiristas* seem to come out of hibernation and play right in the main squares (though metropolitan New York squares are most likely thousands of times larger than those near the turn of the century in Bahia).

Sorriso: There’s a lot of capoeiristas in New York. A lot. Now most people, they’re very quiet cause of the winter, but in the summer...

M: In the summer how does it change?

S: In the summer we have like three rodas. I do also a street class, there’s a lot happening so people come out more.

M: That’s really cool. [Another student] was saying that you give free classes on Wednesdays?

S: Mmhmm.

M: Are they outside?

S: Right in front of the apple store on 14th street. This past year was the third year I did it, it was really nice.

M: Do you have a lot of people who are new that come by?

S: Not really, there are people that watch sometimes but they are afraid of trying. We get a lot of people watching. And the good thing is that we have a license to do the class outside so the police don’t have to bother anything.

M: [laughs] Well that’s good. In Brazil do you have to have a license to practice on the street? [laughs]

S: No, nope. Not really. In New York, a lot of people know what capoeira is but if you go anywhere else, to other states people still don’t know what capoeira is. People are like, what? What was that?

Abraço Domundo expressed his perspective on the difference between Brazilian *capoeira* and American *capoeira* after practicing in Brazil for two months. He explained:

“...in Brazil, it’s real. It’s like play or die. It’s part of life there. Whereas here [in the U.S.]...it can be part of this touristy, Brazilophile [fad]: ‘Oh yeah we love Brazil so we’re going to come do capoeira because it’s hip and it’s cool and we like to get exercise.’ It’s fun to play. But in Brazil it’s like, this is life. It’s do or die. It’s play or die....they kill each other in the rodas in Brazil... We live in America, we’re not exactly living in squalor. But for a lot of people, capoeira is their means for life. It’s how they make their money, it’s how they get around the world, it’s how they meet people and it becomes very real. But at the same time it has the tendency to become a little touristy, in terms of the practitioners. It’s like yoga in the West. Everybody does yoga. We’re going to go get our stretchy pants, we’re going to get our yoga mat, we’re going to say “om” three times, and we’re going to say “namaste” and then we’re going to do these movements and we’re going to drink our Vitamin Water and that whole thing. But it’s like, in India you’re born a... yogi. You sit there and you do your yoga all day. For your whole life. That’s what you do. It’s so much about freedom. America is such a free place that capoeira is not really *necessary* for people to find their freedom. Whereas in Brazil, it’s not necessarily oppressive but it’s dirty and it’s poor so people use capoeira to escape those confines and create something greater.”

g. Teaching Culture

Ultimately, it seems as though the most significant and perhaps most obvious difference affecting the debate concerning authenticity is the fact that non-Brazilians, of course, are not born into the culture and therefore skip the Brazilian childhood process of enculturation. Kids do not (usually) grow up knowing who the most accomplished *capoeiristas* are, practicing their moves and following the sport as some American children do with baseball, for instance. Their pop culture heroes are often the ones they see in American media or on any number of sports fields which, moreover, are usually unconnected to their national histories.

When I asked Sorriso, who was born in and had started playing in Salvador, Brazil, where the difference lies, he responded quite simply: “Actually the difference is in the way people learn...

S: Usually Brazilians learn *capoeira*, they pick it up quicker because they speak the language. They already grew up with all that... I don't know if you understand, *malendragem*, *malicia*. They have that in daily life, they understand that... to fake you're going to the right then moving to the left, you grew up in that culture.

M: Especially in Bahia right? [mispronounces Bahia]

S: What??

M: Bahia [mispronounces again]

S: Bahia [corrects]. You know, so you grew up in the culture, you grew up listening to the music. But you're exposed to the art at a very early stage. Not exposed like training but you always see it, you already have an idea of what it is. So it helps a lot. I think that's one of the main difference. So if you grew up in a place where you see the art everywhere, it's not something you have to try and understand from scratch. Even if you're new back in Brazil, even if you're completely new, you have an idea, you know what it's all about. In the States, you have to teach students the music, they have to learn the language, you have to understand the culture.

M: Everything's foreign...

S: Everything, you know, you're not only teaching them about just capoeira, you're teaching them the culture. That's one of the things, you know, is the culture.

Therefore, it is almost as though they simply start lower in the hierarchy. They are starting a new process of enculturation. Many of the informants I spoke with were eager to learn all the nuances and become as involved as they could with the actual Brazilans of the game. If they fail to pursue the language, the music, the dances, there remains a disconnect in a sport in

which your connection with your fellow players is just as important as your ability to move your body in certain sequences.

If one takes a fitness class that happens to involve *capoeira*, the physical aspect is the goal rather than immersion in the martial art and dance aspects. However, many people actually find that their interests eventually transcend the physical benefits and focus more so with its culture. An interview with Gracioso illustrates his thirst for more than the basics.

“It’s interesting because a lot of people start capoeira because of the dancing, because of the music or because somebody told them about it. In my case, yes I found out about it, I started doing it, I liked it. It was a workout. But the workout part faded very fast and I fell in love with, okay, this new art that I’m taking in more so than anything else. It was in a language that I didn’t understand but I was determined to learn this language because I want to know what’s going on. The style of music they were playing, I wasn’t used to it but I was determined to get it, so basically I fell in love with the culture of it and try to kind of get as much of it as I can.”

As Aguia of Bachata explained, Gracioso gives classes at his university through the recreation department. He started there himself while looking for a martial art based exercise program and eventually decided to attend Protetor’s class in the ballet studio. It has been three years since he started and has since become one of Bachata’s most dedicated students, even stepping in for Gracioso when he is unable to make class at the university. Though he notices new students every semester as one would in any fitness class, many of the most loyal students have trickled out of the fitness group in order to find out more about the actual culture behind the introduction to the nuances and simple sequences taught in what Aguia calls refers to as a buffer class.

In other words, it may take longer for those who were not born into a culture in which *capoeira* is the norm to become in some ways “Brazilianized”. At the very least, most will eventually adopt certain habits, practices, socialization techniques, or traditions into their everyday lifestyles, knowingly or not (de Campos Rosario, Delamont, Stephens 2010). Aguiar explains that along with instrument playing, singing, movements, physical training, and etiquette, the students of Bachata not only learn about but develop an appreciation for the culture, values, and customs:

“History, derived from slaves, it’s just awesome. The way they disguised it as a dance when it was really a lethal art. And being around the Brazilian culture you learn the cultural differences. The food’s amazing. The dancing, not just the capoeira dancing, the samba, Brazilian nights. It’s eye-opening to see another culture and to be a part of that. It expands your mind... [Protetor] teaches discipline and respect, respect for yourself, your body, empowerment, for your body and your mind. I feel so much more confident in everything I do because of *capoeira*.”

Respect and appreciation are only two forms of tacit knowledge that non-Brazilians gain through experience and interaction. In this way, they are introduced to the culture of *capoeira* as a feeling rather than a commodity. Those that are abstract are the aspects of the game that people are drawn to and connect with. Despite the inevitable discontinuities of *capoeira* as it exists in its homeland versus its diasporic expression, they seem to be culturally specific but phenomenologically universal.

h. Axé

In this way, energy is a quality of *capoeira* that transcends philosophical or physical understanding and can only be understood through experience. Songs that invoke certain themes, for example, also invoke the emotion and sense of identity emanating from them. Lindholm explains of collective effervescence, which can be considered the coercive energy of the group, “Durkheim argued that these revitalizing powers, thought by the aboriginals to inhere in the totem, actually emanated from the group itself, arising during the ritualized state of ecstatic communion he called collective effervescence. In a real sense, the group *is* God...” (Lindholm 2008, 14). In this case, *capoeira* creates an energy that is felt throughout the group which, in turn, reinforces states of belonging and selfhood. This energy, known as *axé*, is absolutely essential to a “good game”, as was often emphasized by both Protetor and Sorriso in their leading of a class. “Bringing good *axé* to the *roda*” is a goal of any *capoeirista*, a point that is elucidated by my interview with Camarade:

M: ...you have to be fully aware of what’s going on in yourself and outside and in the *roda*.

A: Yeah I mean you’re communicating with yourself and that unfolds into communicating with the person who’s playing with you to communicating with the *roda* as a whole. And all the people watching because they’re all directly involved. More than just providing rhythm by clapping, they’re directly involved in a lot of ways. So it’s a conversation but it’s multifaceted.

Those on the outside of the *roda*, including both players of the instruments and the players who form the circle and clap are ensuring that those in the center can continue on with their game.

This *axé* is one of the core forms of tacit knowledge that must be experienced in order to develop a deeper understanding of the sport. After several months of reading the literature on *capoeira*, I asked Abraço Domundo to explain to me what it meant since none of my sources

elaborated beyond describing it as “energy”. When I did, he fumbled with his response and could not get much further than the explanation I had gotten from my books. However, anyone who stands in a *roda* or, better yet, plays in its center can undoubtedly feel their heart beat faster as the music and the volume of the *berimbau* and the *atabaques* grow. I can imagine that this is the reason I was constantly urged to play as often as possible; a physical encounter provides a much more profound cognizance of its phenomenology than any objective literature possibly could.

i. Nicknames and Personal Identity

Another element of *capoeira* that offers non-Brazilians a sense of connection with it is the self-awareness that results from personal expression inside the *roda*. This is evident in the ways *capoeiristas* respond to the nicknames they are traditionally given by their *mestres*. In most cases, the name reflects anything personal about them from their style of play to a particularly distinguishing physical feature to their personality.

M: How would you describe your own style, and how does your nickname describe your style?

A: I would say my style, and the secret of my success [laughs]...

M: [laughs] Yes, please tell us.

A: It's been, mimicry. I have this natural ability to duplicate what I see, physically. And that's the best way to learn, is seeing what's being done and crafting my body to do the same thing. I mean there's a limit of course. Still workin' on that back flip [laughs]. But yeah that's just kind of how I learn and how I approach the game. And I do have a pretty good vision about it and you really just have to think in an abstract way. I visualize in my head, if someone did this what could I do, could I do this move, could I do that move, could I get him here? Things like that. My nickname I think fits very well, and I don't know how he does but it but he gives us all just perfect names... [nickname has been

omitted] What he means is that I take things and see things from afar, like a sequence of moves, and I internalize it quickly. And when he gave me that name I realized that that's how I've been kind of learning. Just sitting back, watching him and internalizing it. It's amazing that he sees that before...

M: Did you know that about yourself before he gave you that nickname?

A: Yeah but it really became clear in hearing that, that someone saw that in me. It's cool that, that's what I really love, he takes the time to give us proper names. Cause a lot of people just get names out of nowhere. They go to *batizado* and some *mestre* comes by and says 'oh, that guy's got a big head, let's call him Big Head'... The ones who have names based on the way they play is so much cooler cause you take that on in the way you play. One guy, in the first *batizado* I faced and my brother saw it, he was gonna kill me. He was this big guy and he was so good. His name is Musegu, and that means 'the bat', and that's exactly how he played. He barely touched the ground. And it's just cool... your game defines your name but it works both ways I think.

M: When did you get yours?

A: It was actually in class, at the old place we used to train at. I started there around November, December and I probably got my name in January or February? So 3 months I think, and that was pretty quick for a name. I've seen quicker since but. It was just a class and he had come up with a name... and when you get it you have to go to the center and play every single person in the class and you're not allowed to leave and if he can he'll come up with a song for you and he'll sing about your name, and give you the meaning of your name and why he chose to give it to you. It's a really awesome experience.

M: So it's fairly ceremonial.

A: Yeah, yeah definitely.

Abraco Domundo describes his name:

M: And everybody has a name. How do you gain your capoeira name?

B: Oh that's a good question. *Apellidos*. Or nicknames.

M: Yeah it's the same in Spanish.

B: They're not gained through any type of merit system, they're totally spontaneous and awarded based on anything. You could wear a ripped shirt to class and somebody might call you *momia*, cause you look like a mummy.

M: Yeah, so that becomes your apellido for the rest of the time.

B: Or somebody could have giant arms and tiny little legs and hips, and somebody could call you *miku*, or a monkey. Or they could call you *brazillos*, which means little arms. There's different ways that we make fun of each other and they're all endearing names. The most names are gained in the *roda*. Meaning the name, my Mestre's philosophy is that the game should always call to how that person plays in the *roda*. So my game is very light, it's very high-flying, acrobatic and bright. Also, I have a giant nose. And in times of intention I am known to squawk. And also birds are kind of mean, they're not the nicest animals. They're kind of [makes a bird like snapping gesture]. That's kind of how I play so [that's my name].

As *Aguia* mentioned, even American students begin to internalize their nicknames and often express themselves physically through their personality and style.

j. Relationships and Group Identity

Another significant experience for each student is their role in and loyalty to their group and the ways in which *capoeiristas* interact. Each match, following the "metaphorical death" of one or both of the participants, almost always ends with a gesture of friendship or gratitude for the experience they gave each other. This acknowledgment is only one of an immeasurable collection of signals for respect that capoeira embodies in its fostering of human connections on a deeper level. The relationships formed between *capoeiristas* are incredibly profound, especially when compared to many of the shallow, trite interactions found in Western society, simply due to the nature of the *roda* and its participants' objectives. As J. Lowell Lewis

describes a specific game he encountered in Brazil between an older *mestre* and his former student,

“they were immersed in a fundamental communication of bodies and wills, of slashing feet and twisting torsos: they were seeing into each other, trying to discern physical habits, emotional weaknesses, and rational resources which could be brought to bear in the ring. As the two men hunkered, trying to slow their breathing, they each stared into the other’s eyes, as if to take the measure of his soul” (Lewis 1992, xvii-xviii).

The depth with which a person finds himself wordlessly communicating with his opponent, be it friend or stranger, is, as Abraço Domundo stated, a true “phenomenon”. To enter into the *roda* is to enter into a mutual agreement of respect.

“It’s like meeting somebody for the first time, never speaking to them and becoming best friends instantly. It’s really quite a phenomenon because...you don’t meet them in a social context, you meet them in the *roda*. And in *capoeira*, how you play is everything. How well you play, how respectful you play. And I met people I didn’t like at all. Never spoken a word to them, big smiles, high fives, and then when we get to play they’re taking cheap shots and they’re kind of adding drama to the game and I’m not into it. So those people aren’t exactly my best friends in *capoeira* but I have other people in *capoeira* and we just keep it fresh all the time in the game and you don’t have to speak to anybody... You’re really walking out of the place with a best friend and then you introduce yourselves. ‘Oh we’re best friends! What’s your name?’”

In such a community-driven sport, it is also necessary to play modestly but skillfully,

“expressing one’s potential with great style... A great player should also bring out the potential for greatness in his opponent and should manifest his attunement in the music.” (Lewis 1992, 96). It is this final manifestation that brings together the many facets of a *capoeirista* identity.

The ability to maintain individuality whilst demonstrating skill, knowledge, ethical styles of play in a representation of your education and your *mestre* are highly respected qualities in a *capoeirista*.

Lewis remarks that recognizing history and lineage are imperatives to a feeling of group identity. “I want to ally myself with those who have demonstrated that expressive performance co-create contexts for the social and cultural world as it is changing around them... For example, this kind of approach helps to explain why debates about the origins of the game, or even about rules for play, should be so crucial for those whose emerging identity is tied to the sport” (Lewis 1992, 64). Lineages exist partially so that *capoeiristas* can connect to its past through shared hardships and can feel like a crucial part or product of its evolution. However, groups have shaped themselves based on their own unique experiences, thus group identity is an important value to maintain.

In addition to a constant reverence toward his historical connections and lineage, each *capoeirista* also strives to express himself individually as well as show off the quality of his group. Therefore, when attending a competition or a gathering of many different groups, there is often a feeling of celebration along with that of protectionism of one’s own micro-culture. This is evident especially when examining each *capoeirista*’s style of play. From the *ginga* to the knowledge he demonstrates of common etiquette, many players are easily identifiable to a certain group. As Abraço Domundo explains,

“I’m representative of my academy, of my master, and of everything I’ve learned. Whereas X other person, she might be representing her academy and her master and she might feel very defensive about it so she might play a very defensive game. Whereas I might be very open about it and not really worried about it so I might play a really open, easy game. Maybe I got it from my master, my grand master, Mestre Nô. Cause he’s always very protective of his *capoeira* and also very critical of others’ *capoeira*. So he kind of taught me, well, why do we do the things we do in our *capoeira*. Why don’t we do certain things that they do in their *capoeira* and why is it better? What’s the advantage that we have?”

Why is our style more effective or more true to the art or more fun, more liberating?”

Moreover, many or all groups identify with their slave backgrounds. This common feeling of liberation and the overcoming of obstacles create a unique and uniting connection among even rival groups (Lewis 1992).

k. Modern Liberation

This invocation of the theme of liberation brings us to my final point. If we may return to Abraço Domundo’s statement made in explaining the differences between American and Brazilian *capoeiras*:

“It’s so much about freedom. America is such a free place that capoeira is not really *necessary* for people to find their freedom. Whereas in Brazil, it’s not necessarily oppressive but it’s dirty and it’s poor so people use capoeira to escape those confines and create something greater.”

Interestingly enough, Abraço Domundo comes from an upper-middle class family and his two-month trip to Brazil followed his graduation from a highly respected university. Note his comparison and resulting renunciation of *capoeira* as a search for freedom for Americans. The irony of this statement is not lost in his early career shift from salesperson in Ohio to *instrutor* at a *capoeira* school in San Francisco. While he was originally equating freedom with economic capital, I argue that *capoeira* offers a different means of liberation through social capital and is very much connected to a postmodern individual’s propensity toward imagined selfhood.

Aside from simply acting as a disguise of the slaves’ fighting movements, its dance-like characteristics gave the player a creative and hopeful outlet that would have been absent from the work and hardship involved in slave life. In the words of J. Lowell Lewis, it would “seem to

embody this joyous sense of the potential for liberation... the physical interplay in *capoeira* is improvised, which not only allows for but demands maximum creativity on the part of the players.” Lewis goes on to compare *capoeira* to Jazz, both being creative responses to slavery that inspire feelings of hope and liberation when performed. In this way, it can also be seen as a game in that “play, being a creature of freedom, resists the boundedness of arenas and enters into every sphere of social life, sometimes in disguise, to lend vitality and coherence to human encounters” (Lewis 1992, 8). In other words, slaves originally used *capoeira* not simply to defend themselves but also as a means of escaping the hardships of slave life. In order to grasp more fully the changing demographic of participants in *capoeira*, it is necessary to consider this history of shifting popular attitudes concerning race and nationalism.

Lewis suggests that the ideas of “liberation and domination, of freedom and slavery, of cooperation and deception” (85) are basic themes within *capoeira*, manifested both physically and socially. In the past liberation was obviously a paramount issue within slave life. *Capoeira* emerged from the desire to escape the constraints of slavery placed on Africans by their Western counterparts. Today, Western society embraces the sport, institutionalizing it and calling it ‘Afro-Brazilian’ with pride rather than shame as in the nineteenth century.

However, Lewis speaks of a modern liberation that *capoeiristas* invoke today, not equal to the historical connotation with slave culture but instead one that resonates with modern circumstance. “Because of the fluid interchange between tacit and overt, between semiotic and social, the meaning of *capoeira* play can change in response to historical conditions while still ‘conserving,’ in latent form and iconic potential, older interpretations for the future. Yet the past is always new when it comes into future being, and it may well be that what seem to be completely new interpretations have unsuspected continuities with the past” (Lewis 1992, 85). In

other words, though we may not experience the same oppression involved in a physical master-slave relationship of the 19th century, there seems to be a growing need to escape the constraints of everyday life (Lewis 1999).

In Lindholm's analysis of the countercultural opposition to "bourgeois norms", we may imagine a return in *capoeira* to this goal of lower classes and now bored, upper-middle classes alike. He explains that, in reference to audiences of 'alternative music venues', individuals are found in their more authentic forms when placed into these musical settings, free from their jobs, families, and other responsibilities (Lindholm 2008, 34). They belong to a type of realm in which certain people are able to be "real" if they feel otherwise constrained. This may be one venue for a modern liberating experience. However, it would seem that *capoeira* differs from other profound experiences that are only significant while the music plays; once the *berimbau* ceases and class or a *roda* ends, the energy and the values that comprise the foundation of the game remain. He goes on to explain that, even more so than opposition to "bourgeois norms" being a benefit, there is a "comforting feeling of belonging to a subculture with more genuine values than the mainstream" (Lindholm 2008, 35).

It is possible that modernity has created a feeling that, in this age of guarded or screened communication, people have lost the opportunity for physical and emotional contact with each other, thereby losing sight of the inherent human qualities of empathy, cooperation, and sociability? Moreover, if people feel a lack of connection with others via a national, ethnic, familial, or other such uniting force, they may attach themselves to an intriguing, perhaps foreign, but otherwise welcoming community such as *capoeira* or yoga in order to regain not only a sense of self but a much-needed sense of camaraderie. Generally, a person's wellbeing is enhanced by a sense of belonging, be it through a common national history or through shared

experience, even if the experience itself takes place on opposite sides of the globe. In considering the review of literature presented in this research along with the data I have collected, I surmise that *capoeira* is indeed a form of modern liberation.

If we are considering non-Brazilian *capoeiristas*' multicultural selves, it may be that they are not looking to escape the confines of poverty but instead the confines of the modern quotidian. Lindholm cites Jean-Jaques Rousseau as the inventor of authenticity in that he recognized civilization's greed and corruption as the dampener of the feeling of authenticity, such as the one we feel as children or when in touch with our 'inner child'. Further, Rousseau discusses a "trance-like states of consciousness" in which true, inner authenticity may be felt and one could transcend everyday reality in favor of the modern "search for the really real":

"As long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient complete and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul" (Lindholm 2008, 9).

Nestor Capoeira, who has played and taught *capoeira* in both Brazil and the United States, offers that,

"*Capoeira* can be a tool in the First World, a tool against the forces that tend to turn people into robots that do not think, do not wish, do not have any fantasies, ideals, imagination or creativity; a tool against a civilization that increasingly says on simply has to work and then go home and sit in front of a TV with a can of beer in hand, like a pig being fattened for the slaughter. (2005, 37)

In 1992, Lewis recognized this along with a hope for the shift in consciousness that slowly seemed to manifest itself in opposition to this bored state of the individuals of the most developed nations. In this way, he addresses the postmodern realization that progress often eliminates certain qualities that maintain its uniqueness and inherent value, leading sometimes past postmodernism to 'antimodernism' (Lewis 1995, 213). He urged his reader to,

“Notice that the image of personal, direct competition is in line with the dominant ideology of many industrialized societies, often combined with a ‘democratic’ mythos that in order to win one needs only to work hard...It is interesting that this renewed skepticism about economic and social progress should correlate with the reunification of *capoeira* in the stylistic trend I have called *atual*” (210).

In this statement, Lewis is acknowledging that the *Regional* style institutionalized many otherwise traditional practices within *capoeira* and that *Angola* in a sense attempts to re-root the art within its own history rather than a ‘hygeinized’ one.

- VI -
CONCLUSION

“A Coexistence of Many Realities”: Subjective Authenticity

Perhaps Joseph’s severe point of view is her attempt to produce a fiercely objective study. However, her analysis of the Brazilians teaching *capoeira* in foreign countries, or at least in Canada, pinpoints their motivations as being strictly based on financial gain and manipulating the desires of Western consumers to connect with the exotic. In the same vein, she pigeonholes Western consumers and “wealthy *capoeiristas*” as inauthentic spenders of money, with a seemingly naïve and shallow pursuit of “Blackness” or “Brazilianness”. While this may be true in an etic sense, many of those that I interviewed or spoke with were conscious seekers of a higher purpose. Because they do not live in a time when *capoeira* was free and could be found spontaneously on the streets as it was when played by slaves, they have no choice but to pay for the group experience. However, I have met many whom, when asked what *capoeira* is or why they decided to pursue it, do not associate with the one-dimensional intentions of athletic classes, for example.

As many multicultural beings exist in this era of globalization and Appadurai’s shifting – *scapes* (1996), they are simply open to new “symbols, emotions, and sensations of another geography” (Joseph 510), accepting them into their lives with the modern ability to imagine new worlds and identities and taking part in what could be called a subjective authenticity rather than inauthenticity. In place of relating oneself to the past “authentic” *capoeira* (which Nestor Capoeira argues does not even exist) by having an Afro-Brazilian lineage or by having access to *capoeira* from birth as some Brazilians do, it could be the purity of intention and the openness

with which a *capoeirista* weaves the practice and its ideals into their beings that could deem an American *capoeira*, for example, as authentic.

Of the most fundamental concepts to contemplate is that of Durkheim's social facts. "[Social facts] consist of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion [social currents], by reason of which they control him. These ways of thinking could not be confused with biological phenomena...; nor with psychological phenomena, which exist only in the individual consciousness and through it" (McGee & Warms, 74). Subjectively, it would seem that Americans who choose to take part in *capoeira* are doing so on their own terms, agents of their own personalities and all of the prior experiences which had led up to their curiosity and eventual decision to take a class, for example. Additionally, we must also heed Durkheim in considering that there are, in fact, coercive forces defined by our own cultures that we are inevitably shaped by and that guide our decisions towards a certain direction.

Accepting this concept, I have attempted to explain the tendency towards multiculturalism that many in the rising generation exhibit. Such elements of culture as music, food, film, sports, and ideology are internationally shared. For example, walking the streets to *capoeira* class in Manhattan from my brother's neighborhood in Queens (where almost all signs are written in Spanish), I noticed Chinese, Italian, and Mexican restaurants, a Turkish food stand, several yoga studios, and a music store blasting an unfamiliar Indian-sounding pop song in a language I didn't understand. Though recognizing that this abundance of culture can also be attributed to urbanization, which of course brings together many ethnic groups, it is also an inevitability of our time that has exposed almost everyone, to at least some extent, to multiculturalism. Thus, it is likely that, even should we feel as though our psychological attraction to the Brazilianness of *capoeira*, for example, reflects a *choice* to take part in the

exotic, it seems to have transcended the individual and has instead become a part of the collective unconscious.

Reflecting further on my walk through New York City, in a matter of thirty minutes and several miles, I came into contact not only with geographical landscapes but also with the ideoscapes, mediascapes, ethnoscapas, technoscapes, and financescapes proposed by Appadurai (1996). This conceptualization lays the groundwork in explaining trends in modern society “at large”, one of which being a new, or at least expanded, dimension of the imagination. He initially addresses the aspect of modernization theory that acknowledges post-nationalism as our latest way of identifying ourselves. Through “electronic mass mediation and transnational mobilization” (Appadurai 1996, 10), national borders have become less meaningful. Nearly all fields have become transnational, and in this manner, so inevitably has culture. While we may maintain various degrees of association to our homelands, we are presented with “new ways in which individual attachments, interests, and aspirations increasingly crosscut those of the nation-state” (1992, 10). In recognizing culturalism as “identity politics mobilized at the state level” as Appadurai does (1992, 15), multiculturalism is the process in which we now find ourselves, immersed in identity politics that transcend the state level.

While it is important to acknowledge the ironic connotation of the concept in modern discussions of authenticity, it is perhaps too cynical not to acknowledge different forms or ways of accepting authenticity. Is her idea of the logical paradox based in pessimism or realism? Though it is true that teachers are often attempting to sell “Brazilianness”, there are other motivations for doing so than simply making money. There is pride and deliberateness in the passing on of *capoeira*'s ideals. Moreover, people can imagine a Brazilian life and take on Brazilian qualities and identities because of media and imagination. As Mestre Acordeon

declares in comparing the ways in which he acquired *capoeira* versus how his students acquired it in the United States,

“Nowdays, one does not need to feel the cold contact of the straitrazor on the skin, to regret the blood of another person on his or her hands, to have eyes opened in the back of the head, or to feel goosebumps on one’s neck while walking through dark alleys, in order to discover the power of Capoeira and be able to follow its path” (Almeida 1986, 123).

Brazil is no longer confined to Brazil in that each *capoeira* group tries to teach Brazilianness and bring as much culture and energy as they can to American students, who are fully capable of experiencing such intangible qualities as *axé*, *mandinga* and *malicia* if they are engaged in their own practice. The receptivity of these students lies in the fact that, as Appadurai asserts, “fantasy is now a social practice” (1992, 54). In other words, both mimetic faculty and imagined or possible selves seem actually to be, like ethnic identity, additional forms through which we may define or build our multidimensional identities, authentically in our own minds if no one else’s.

Assunção concludes that, “With respect to the term *capoeira*, ‘a spatial and temporal diversity exists, which allows the coexistence of many realities under one single concept’” (75). In my research, I support that culture is simply an amalgamation of individuals with their own perspectives. Analogously, a transnationalized sport such as *capoeira* takes on the personalities of its many diverse perspectives and essentially becomes that which it has been made up of.

Commenting on the importance of individual perspective in *capoeira*, Assunção remarks that, “*Capoeira* practice is a quest for beauty, which every adept pursues in one form or the other. And if the notions of what is beautiful differ, does it matter?” (2005, 210). Reflecting on an interview with Aguiá, one of my most reflective informants, I believe this question can just as easily be applied to the concept of subjective authenticity because it shows his personal

reverence for the practice, for his fellow *capoeiristas* around the world, and most importantly, for what it offers in his own process of identity making.

M: Why do you think it works for so many people around the world? It's a Brazilian art but it's also in Indonesia and Turkey and Japan and Mexico and Spain and the United States and, what do you think about it makes it work?

Agua: I think, well, as awesome as other martial arts are, the eastern arts are amazing, they do, they've got their own system. *Capoeira* allows you to express yourself, you know? You don't have to conform to this style of martial art and be in line and know the moves and train, train, train. It's learn the moves, but learn them your way, and express yourself through this dance, through this martial art, and it's like... no one, *no one* plays the same way. No two people play the same way. Everyone has their unique, almost like a fingerprint. Even their *ginga* will be a little different. Groups have styles of *ginga* but within those groups, each individual is different. And I think that's what's so universal about it, is it allows any culture, any person, to be themselves within this art and just express yourselves completely through your body.

Ultimately, this offers Agua's own perception of the authentic *capoeira*. And when he is playing freely in the *roda*, surrounded by friends, music, and their resounding energies, indeed this is the only perspective that matters.

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