

Embodying Mobile Cultures:

A case study of Capoeira

Vou no balanço das ondas, vou no

Balanço do mar

Eu vou, vou no balanço do mar

Vou jogando Capoeira

Seguindo o meu ideal

Vou na energia da roda

No balanço do berimbau

Ouvindo as histórias do mestre,

Imagino aonde posso chegar,

Dou asas ao meu pensamento,

Sou leve para voar

O vento que sopra na praia,

Na areia balança o coqueiro,

No toque do gunga na roda,

Balança o jogo primeiro

Aprendo com o mestre jogar,

Artista pintando uma tela,

Hoje no mar vou jogando,

E amanhã está na tela.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the way embodied cultural practices travel through space and how this can cause the transference and reinterpretation of cultural manifestations and traditions. The investigation follows a central story of changing learning experiences in different geographical and cultural contexts, amid the broader theme of cultural transposition focussed on the scale of the individual body. Specifically, the movement of Capoeira, a Brazilian cultural manifestation, is explored with reference to the travel experiences of members from the ‘Abolição Oxford’ Capoeira group. The investigation focuses upon the variation of participants’ embodied experiences when travelling to new cultural and geographical environments (UK to Brazil), and how bodily dispositions are negotiated, questioned and created in order to learn Capoeira. The difference of multisensory and affective qualities within Capoeira spaces in different geographic locations are considered important to learning experiences and the maintenance of tradition. Finally, the ways in which the mind and body are unified in learning an embodied form successfully is considered, with reference to the development of style and tactical elements of the game. Throughout, the use of participatory techniques and importance of the body in transferring skills and dispositions, is explored with reference to non-representational theory and the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of *habitus*.

CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	1
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	4
<i>List of Figures</i>	5
<i>List of Boxes</i>	6
<i>Notes</i>	7
INTRODUCTION	8
Cultures in motion	8
Embodiment and participation	10
Capoeira	11
Culture and bodily dispositions	12
METHODOLOGY	16
CHAPTER I:	
Networks and Cultural Exchange: Routes of Culture	23
Capoeira in Oxford: Abolição	23
Abolição Oxford in Brazil: foundations and context	26
CHAPTER II:	
Rules and the Foundations of Dispositions	29
CHAPTER III:	
Axé: multisensory spaces of learning	37
Traditions	38
Agents	40
Sound	42
Buying the game	46
CHAPTER IV:	
Developing Malícia: Unifying the Mind and Body	51
CONCLUSIONS	57
GLOSSARY	60
REFERENCES	
Books and journal articles	62
Websites	66

Films	66
Music	66
APPENDICES	67

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SALVE!



Source: Author

List of Figures

1	A member from the Crianças Raizes do Abaeté	8
2	Flow diagram of research process	19
3	Google Earth image of Brazil	20
4	Google Earth image of Itapúa	20
5	Google Earth image of UK	21
6	Google Earth image of Oxford	21
7	Table of Methods	22
8	Abolição Oxford members at Cowley Carnival	23
9	Workshop at East Oxford Games Hall	25
10	Crianças Raizes do Abaeté in Brazil	26
11	Members of CRA and Abolição Oxford	27
12	The outside space at CRA	28
13	Photograph of players at Filhos de Bimba Escola de Capoeira	29
14	The <i>ginga</i> in the <i>roda</i>	32
15	AOC members performing the <i>ginga</i>	34
16	An evening percussion session in Brazil	37
17	CRA members performing the traditional ‘Salve’ at the end of the class	39
18	Experienced AOC members playing in the <i>roda</i>	41
19	Brazilian players playing the berimbau	43
20	Photograph highlighting poor axé in the <i>roda</i>	44
21	Abolição Oxford members playing the atabaque	45
22	Mestre Olavo playing the berimbau	46
23	Leão about to ‘buy the game’	48
24	Some CRA members showing off their abilities	50
25	Filhote catching Do Morso off-guard	51
26	Photograph of an opportunity to strike	52
27	Do Morso executing a well timed rasteira	54
28	Playful take-down between CRA members	55
29	Two young players from Cairu waiting to enter the <i>roda</i>	57
30	Junior	59

List of Boxes

Box 1	Vignette of Capoeira experience	8
Box 2	Reproduced rules of Capoeira play, from Lewis (1992:92)	30

Notes

1. All Portuguese words and Capoeira specific terminology will be translated/defined in the footnotes and/or the glossary at the end of the paper.
2. All Capoeira players are given Capoeira nicknames (an '*apelido*') when learning the art; these, or fictional nicknames, shall be used as approved pseudonyms to refer to participants throughout the discussion to ensure anonymity where desired.
3. Any quote followed by a month but with no Capoeira nickname refers to comments or diary extracts from the author.
4. The photo on the front cover is by the author and the reproduced Capoeira song lyrics are from Instrutor Perninha, R.J. available from www.abada.org (accessed 3/01/10) and translated in Appendix 4.
5. CRA is used to refer to Crianças Raizes do Abaeté; and AOC is used to refer to Abolição Oxford Capoeira throughout the dissertation.

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1 One of the members of the Brazilian project run by Abolição Oxford Capoeira. Source: Author

Box 1

The berimbau begins to twang away in that familiar rhythm; silence falls around the roda. The silence is compounded by the inner excitement sparking and crackling; axé filling the air, as the second berimbau and pandeiro join in the rhythm. The two crouching by the foot of the berimbau either cross themselves or kiss the Virgin image on their gold chains. There is a brief flicker of eye contact, broken by the larger of the two, Do Morso, who opens the ladainha in a beautifully tuneful, though deep and authoritative tone.

The ladainha finishes and we all clap in time, bellowing out the response as Do Morso and his opponent, Junior, somersault into the centre of the circle with the elegance and accuracy of ballet dancers, whilst commanding the respect of dangerous warriors. The action begins immediately, there is no faltering in this game. Do Morso follows a swift Armada with a meia-lua de compasso, as Junior ducks and dives in perfect time and responds with an attacking martelo. Do Morso feints an esquiva but uses his superior malícia to execute a perfect sweeping rasteira as Junior's foot makes contact with the cold, hard floor, unbalancing him in this unstable part of the movement. Junior masterfully maintains his balance as his legs simply spread wider and he escapes from his opponent with a one-handed au.

Meanwhile, the roda is captivated, maintaining the vigour and melody of the singing and clapping as a new player sneaks to the foot of the berimbau in response to a authoritative nod from their respected Contra-Mestre.¹

¹ Box 1: This vignette draws upon my experience watching and participating in Capoeira. It describes the beginning of a *roda* between two players I met in Brazil, to give a glimpse of the excitement and constantly moving action and interaction involved in Capoeira.

Cultures in motion

'Currently one of the most vibrant and contested sub-fields within human geography, "cultural geography" has both a long scholarly tradition and multiple contemporary expressions' (Johnston et al, 2000).

'It is the juxtaposition, mutations and connections of different cultural spaces, in the overlaying of contradictory cultural landscapes over each other that creativity and vitality may emerge' (Crang, 1998: 175).

It is widely accepted that *'cultures are relational'* (Crang, 1998: 169). We only explicitly recognize our own culture and its traits through exposure to one that is different. This permits cultural geographers to explore literatures of travel, moving cultures and practices that help to form and transform identities and ways of being. This is important for geographers as cultures are increasingly criticized for losing authenticity through processes of globalisation, migration and communication. Identity and cultures are no longer understood as static or believed to possess an innate nature, but instead are subject to transformation and change (Bayart, 2005). Cultures and their expressions thus assemble and reassemble in unique and interesting local combinations, and it is the way in which these processes of transculturation occur in particular times and places that is vital for geographers to understand contemporary cultural practices (Appadurai, 1990). Geographers can help to reveal the value and processes of these alterations and exchanges that occur as cultures travel. This requires an interdisciplinary approach and, accordingly, this investigation will draw upon work by philosophers, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers.

Culture is described by Deleuze and Guattari as a *'system of routes'* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) formed through connections and travels across borders and social groups (Crang, 1998: 172). These connections and exchanges lead to a continual process of transculturation; a product of migration, communication, transport and the generally increasing fluidity of the global system. This has been argued as creating *'between cultures'* (Bhaba, 1994:9) rather than cultures bounded by nationality, ethnicity or religion. Cultural practices, rituals and traditions manifest themselves in particular temporal and spatial contexts, but *'are neither static nor unanimous'* as they are reinterpreted, contradicted and altered on multiple scales (Bayart, 2005). Culture is highlighted as a product of not only historical *'tradition'*, but also the everyday subtleties of movement and interaction which distinguish particular groups. De Certeau sought to find something deeper than *'learned culture'* or *'popular culture'*; and

rather focus on the “*disseminated proliferation*” of anonymous and “*perishable*” creations’ (de Certeau, 1998), which followed the research domain of ‘*cultural operations that are movements*’ (Giard, 1998). The emphasis on everyday practice has led to research focusing on the embodiment of culture as a set of fluid, evolving practices. This is opposed to the ‘culturalist’ view that is composed of a ‘*stable, closed corpus of representations, beliefs and symbols that is supposed to have an affinity...with specific opinions, attitudes or modes of behaviour*’ (Bayart, 2005). The study of how connections, alterations and exchanges of embodied knowledge can create ‘*hybrid cultures*’ (Bhaba, 1994) have been areas of considerable academic interest, with distinctive methodologies developing to observe and analyse the complex processes involved.

Embodiment and participation

It has been recognized that analysts cannot step outside a culture in order to analyse it, and thus researchers may benefit from participating in the practices they choose to study whilst maintaining self-reflexivity (Crang, 1998: 178). This departs from a tradition of participant observation into a field of observant participation, whereby the researcher is actively involved in the subject under investigation. The increased use of participatory techniques in geography comes alongside an acknowledgement of the importance of embodiment, reflexivity, emotion and affect in understanding people and places (Longhurst et al, 2008). This is especially significant in investigations with an experiential quality enacted through the body, such as dancing, consuming foods or playing sport and music (Manning, 2007; Longhurst et al, 2008; Andrews et al, 2004; Morton, 2005). The centrality of the body as a research tool has thus been important in the understanding of knowledge which is partial, situated, and often embodied.

Consequently, participating researchers may more fully understand the corporeal strain or pleasure involved in particular embodied practices. Geographers therefore recognize and incorporate emotional entanglements into their research, as they are no longer required to ‘*deny, avoid, suppress or downplay*’ (Bondi et al, 2005: 1) them, resulting in what should become a clear and well positioned account. Additionally, this allows the exploration of affective and emotional experience in creating certain phenomena. Thus, studying embodied knowledge and the experiential qualities of cultural expression using participatory techniques may reveal new interpretations of certain social groups and processes that may otherwise be overlooked or perhaps even misunderstood (Stephens and Delamont, 2006).

In this investigation, I will explore the relationship between moving cultures and embodied knowledge, an area touched on by geographers, (see McCormack, 2008), through reference to the travel experiences of a Capoeira group. This might reveal ideas about the way in which transculturation and the exchange of embodied knowledge occurs through individual experiences; how the process of transculturation manifests itself and creates 'hybridity'; and how participation can aid and inform the research of embodied practices.

Capoeira

'Whole geographies can be written around specific genres' (Crang, 1998: 172)

Brazilian Capoeira is a complex manifestation of cultural tradition and embodied knowledge, with ambiguous origins in the slave society of north east Brazil. Capoeira is not strictly a dance, but has a hazy definition due to its unique combination of history, philosophy, music, dance and martial arts: it has been labelled a '*blurred genre*', (Lewis 1992, after Geertz, 1983). Capoeira has been likened to a type of fight-dance, and ambiguous scoring systems have meant structured competitive elements are a less common aim for players than a desire to improve in rhythm, fitness, fluidity and the art of *malícia*.² Capoeira and those practising it suffered persecution followed by national celebration in Brazil, and it has now become an exported tradition enjoying worldwide popularity. Despite the internationalisation of Capoeira, there is a continued association of its development from African slave activity in the plantations of colonial north east Brazil. This is reflected in the music and song lyrics accompanying the physical activity, which are considered (by Brazilian and serious international practitioners) an essential part of learning Capoeira. The historical context and development of Capoeira is ambiguous due to its initial suppression and informality, as adepts were feared due to its lowly origins and the association of *capoeiras*³ with illegal activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Downey, 2005).

Throughout this time Capoeira has been altered by different practitioners and in its contemporary form, two distinct styles can be distinguished: *Angola* and *Regional*. Capoeira Regional is practiced by the Abolição⁴ Oxford Capoeira (AOC) group, where enthusiasts in Oxford train with a '*contra-mestre*'⁵ from Brazil. This group is situated in a global network of Capoeira practitioners, maintaining connections through their shared enjoyment of the

² Malícia – to be cunning

³ This was originally a term with negative connotations referring to vagrants in Bahia (Lewis 1992)

⁴ Abolição: abolition

⁵ The level of training below a Mestre (i.e., contra-mestre is the second highest ranked player and teacher) in Capoeira

game. Such connections are maintained in the '*circulation of acts that give something a dimension*' (Latour, 2005:220). The acts that define Capoeira are the ensemble of instruments, singing, clapping and the reciprocal movement in the *roda*⁶ (see Appendix 5, clip one), where players immerse themselves in an imaginative cultural tradition separate from the actual social, political and geographical location of their existence. Indeed, Calliois (2001) has asserted that the game's domain is a '*restricted, closed, protected universe: a pure space*'. This may be interpreted as a 'pure' space as individuals often express a feeling of freedom from their everyday lives and social constraints whilst playing in the *roda*. This could be compared to Huizinga's notion of '*the play element in culture*' which he argues is performed by children as unselfconscious and pure, and thus almost unachievable by adults conditioned to behave within particular social boundaries (Huizinga, 1949). However, Capoeira may give adults a forum for behaving in a less self-conscious, socially restrained manner and exhibit elements of the 'play' Huizinga refers to.

How, and to what extent Capoeira practiced outside of Brazil truly maintains traditions from its Brazilian origins and how these are learned through embodied knowledge and social interaction will be the broad theme of this study. The main theoretical arguments will be influenced by notions of cultural extraversion (Bayart, 2005); the hybridity of dislocated culture (Bhaba, 1994); and whether the transference of meaning from one practice or place to another results in '*reinterpretation and deviation*' (Bayart, 2005). However, as Capoeira is a largely embodied practice, another strand to the investigation will focus on the importance of the body in aiding this movement of culture.

Culture and bodily dispositions

Different concepts of place and culture offer a variety of opportunities to approach the study of Brazilian Capoeira. Some writers believe that material objects are important in shaping place, as the goods that are available will shape the consequential human activity (for example, Brey, 1998). This may be considered irrelevant in Capoeira, as the embodied, 'playful' element can be located anywhere without necessitating physical equipment. It is rather the accumulation of knowledge and physical ability that creates the site for human activity in Capoeira. Thus, the affective quality and enactment of the game may be altered depending on local amenities and atmosphere, but it is more likely that the people (and what

⁶ The *roda* is the circle formed by the group of players, in the centre of which the game of Capoeira is played out between two players

those people embody) will be the greatest influences in changing the experiential and embodied practice of Capoeira due to the physical, social and reciprocal nature of the game.

The motivation for playing Capoeira will clearly differ depending on the specific contexts of players. Thus, the association with specific cultural values or historical meaning may not be '*irrespective of location*' but might be more bound up in the mobile spaces created by players (Urry, 2000). The physical *place* in which Capoeira is practised is considered ordered and stable, but will clearly have an impact on Capoeira *spaces* which only exist through movements. Rather than consider the affective quality of Capoeira on players as a product only of geographical place, the spaces created in its practice must also be analysed as integral to the broader theme of the mobility of embodied knowledge (Urry, 2000). This can be explored through the narratives of individual experiences of playing Capoeira, and the ways in which the movements and spaces are constructed by the participant's rhythmic encounters with place.

Practitioners of Capoeira will have different degrees of 'embodied Capoeira knowledge' and may enact certain motions differently even when they are subject to the same teaching, demonstration and verbal instruction. This may be due to variances in physical ability or interpretation; and/or the different visual, textual and personal influences to which practitioners are subject. The examination of the body has, within the last two decades, been seen as a '*productive site for analyzing aspects of contemporary culture*' (Pizanias, 1997: 145), and has thus produced some useful theoretical insights into the way in which embodied action contributes to the construction of social life. The way in which group or individual's bodily repertoire of Capoeira movements varies can be usefully interpreted using Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* combined with ideas of 'the signifying body' and 'action-sign' systems of semasiology (Bourdieu, 1990; Williams, 2002a; 2002b).

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* refers to sets of 'dispositions' which create practical movements in people's everyday lives. These dispositions are not seen as static sets of gestures or movements, but are understood as '*manifestations in practice*' which can undergo change within the fluctuating social field (Pizanias, 1997: 158). The way in which *habitus* is acquired cannot simply be explained by a 'regularity of dispositions'. Bourdieu debates the importance of formalised rules in creating dispositions and denies the concept of the rule as '*the principle which really governs the practice of agents concerned*' (Bouveresse, 1990: 46). Instead, Bourdieu expresses regularities in terms of strategies or dispositions (*habitus*), which

should not be mistaken for rules. The *habitus* is recognised as a more fluid concept than a rule, whereby the individual ('agent') has control over how their individual context and differences express a particular regularity. For example, Cristina Pizanias' study on post 1960s North American artists developed a common *habitus* acquired through shared training, but this varied in its eventual expression due to the differences in local communities and specific agent differences (Pizanias, 1997). This is the level and type of socially regular actions which Bourdieu argues is where the *habitus* intervenes, which '*do not appear to be explicable in a satisfactory manner either by the invocation of rules on which agents intentionally base their behaviour or in terms of brute causality*' (Bouveresse, 1990: 49).

Particularly useful for the study of Capoeira and other physically embodied 'games', is Bourdieu's discussion of the *le sens pratique* (practical sense) and *le sens du jeu* (the feel for the game) alongside his conception of the 'rules' of the game (Bourdieu, 1987). Bourdieu argues that when rules are not explicitly stated individuals may learn the appropriate actions through experience of the game (whether it is 'the social game' or game in the traditional sense), (Bouveresse, 1990). Individuals may appear to have mastered the game through regular behaviour and experience rather than adhering to explicit rules. In Bourdieu's terms this understanding through experience becomes *le sens pratique* and *le sens du jeu*.

Consequently, in social life and in scenarios where rules are difficult to express linguistically, regularity without rules is the ordinary practice (Bouveresse, 1990). This can also be related to the idea of corporeal memory, as '*the past is*'... '*sedimented in the body*' (Connerton, 1989: 96)⁷ and thus, the body is a site for cultural practices.

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* has been criticised for his claim to overcome the disjunction between the mind/body dualism, as it is argued that the notion of *habitus* often privileges body over mind (Margolis, 1999). For example, in the Logic of Practice, Bourdieu claims: '*practical belief is not a "state of mind" ...but rather a state of body*' (Bourdieu, 1990: 68-69). This is contended by semasiologists, who argue that the roles of mind and body are combined in producing action-sign systems: '*in a living, moving human being, the verbal and the actions are as one*' (Williams, 2002a: 12). Indeed, it is true that individual's dispositions will not necessarily only be physical movements, as '*real, moving human bodies exist in semantically loaded spatio-linguistic fields – not in impoverished behaviouristic...vacuums*' (Williams 2002b: 31). However, in the context of a dance, or any physical activity such as

⁷ Quoted in Farnell, 1999: 353

Capoeira, movements will largely predominate, even if they are located within a broader spatial, semantic context. Bourdieu escapes the mind/body criticism as the practical knowledge *habitus* procures is '*below the level of calculation and even consciousness, beneath discourse and representation*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 128), which may be demonstrated by the ease with which skilled dancers express themselves through physical movement (Williams, 2002a).

Further criticism of *habitus* lies in the implication of a society with a collective *habitus*. The agent is seen as the site for action (or 'practice' in Bourdieu's terms), but it is not possible to have a collective agent. Thus, if an agent is the proponent of action, *habitus* is inappropriate. Furthermore, Bourdieu argues that the *habitus* develops in response to individual or collective self interests. This may be true in certain situations, however it seems the regular dispositions which the *habitus* represents could equally develop from the practice of movements an agent desires to learn (such as dance steps or Capoeira movements), or through culturally and socially constructed norms of movement that have no clear advantage to those practicing them (for example, a handshake).

Despite this, if the general schema of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* rather than the particularities are utilised (Margolis, 1999), such as *le sans de jeu*, *le sens pratique* and the accumulation of regular dispositions, the concept can provide a useful analytical framework for the changing embodiment of cultural practices. An exploration of the ways moving cultures and embodied knowledge are related and may create hybridised cultural practices will be informed by the work of Homi K. Bhaba and other multi-disciplinary authors addressing embodied practices (see Morton, 2005; Manning, 2007, Longhurst et al, 2008; Andrews et al, 2004; McCormack, 2008). The same authors, and theorists discussed further in the next section, will inform the affective and experiential qualities of embodied practices. These considerations will help to construct a methodology which highlights the importance of using the body as a research tool in the investigation of embodied practices.

METHODOLOGY

‘Humans learn not only through the verbal, the transcript, but through all the bodily senses, through movement, through their bodies and whole being in a total practice’.
Okely, 1992:13

An exploration of tourist encounters with Capoeira in Brazil may elucidate concepts of movement and will pose methodological challenges in the ways to convey the swift and spontaneous movements of Capoeira bodies. Using the body as a research tool and focussing on embodied movements as being both product and creator of cultural transposition and significance is well suited to the case study of Capoeira. To what extent the notion of *habitus* is a useful tool to analyse Capoeira ‘dispositions’ or ‘strategies’ and how players’ dispositions and experiences may change with contact with new cultural, geographical and embodied Capoeira spaces will be explored with the use of non-representational theory; centralising the body as a research tool; novel data collection and presentation techniques to confront the problematic of converting the embodied practices of dispositions and affect into a written, analytical account.

The emergence of non-representational theory (NRT) (Thrift, 1996) and new participatory methodologies have made significant steps towards a theoretical and analytical framework for the investigation of mobility. Concepts from NRT (Thrift, 2007) have created the opportunity for researchers to analyse not only the linguistically, artistically or formally expressed representations of culture, but the more innate and subtle expressions made through practices, bodily experience, movement and affect. NRT presents a similar case to the work of de Certeau whereby practices previously regarded as ‘trivial’, such as the interactive, the productive, and play, are regarded as an important focus (ibid: 147; de Certeau, 1984). Such underlying principles support that concepts of culture and identity are now widely understood as matters of *‘becoming as well as of being’* (Hall, 1990). Thrift claims, rightly, that ‘trivial’ processes have been relatively undermined in research and argues for their emphasis, as the *‘unsayable has genuine value’* in the shaping of cultures and identities (ibid: 147). It is also highlighted that dance in particular embodies the underpinnings of NRT, as *‘identity can be constructed by dance at the level of individual experience, or at the level of social assemblages’* (ibid: 142).

The importance of researchers participating in the practice they are observing has also been highlighted as an important exploratory tool within Thrift's work and that of geographers, anthropologists and human scientists alike (Thrift, 2007; McCormack, 2008; Andrews et al, 2005; Okely and Callaway, 1992). Embodied and participatory methods have gained acceptance in geographical and anthropological research through the acknowledgement that it is impossible to *'fully extract the self'* from studies that involve immersion in social situations (Okely and Callaway, 1992). Thus, studying cultural processes on the micro-scale of the body is usefully explored through the participation of the researcher, so that the difficulty and complexity of activities can be recognized (Stephens and Delamont, 2006). Through observant participation, the researcher can observe others in an 'unobtrusive fashion' (Andrews et al, 2005: 879). Combined with gaining potentially more insightful information on the experience of others through informal and relaxed conversations and observations, the researcher's participation can provide shrewd reflections on his/her own experience and understanding.

To avoid narcissistic accounts or neglecting the experiences of other players, it is useful to combine participation with sedentary observation (following the more traditional use of participant observation), as effectively executed by Stephens and Delamont in their collaborative study of Capoeira (Stephens and Delamont, 2006). Direct quotations used in the argument will be justified by their representativeness of the group or acknowledgement of their difference. Rigour is maintained through self-reflexivity and the acknowledgment of the researcher's positionality and the changing relationships between participants and observer (Bailey et al, 1999). Authors utilising such methods place the body as *'a primary tool through which all interactions and emotions filter in accessing research subjects and their geographies'* (Longhurst et al, 2008), highlighting the importance of interaction as well as participation and self reflection.

The general concepts of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) will aid the structure of the investigation, with an emphasis on the need to be continuously reflexive. This will help the process to be *'systematic and "scientific"'*... *'remain[ing] open to unexpected paths of questioning and discovery'* (Bailey et al, 1999). The focus on reflexive management in grounded theory whereby *'the researcher is also considered a social being who creates and recreates social processes'* (Baker et al, 1992: 1357) is an important aspect in my research plan as I will be participating alongside other individuals in Oxford and later in Brazil

playing Capoeira. The reflexivity and open nature of the research process can be seen in Figure 2.

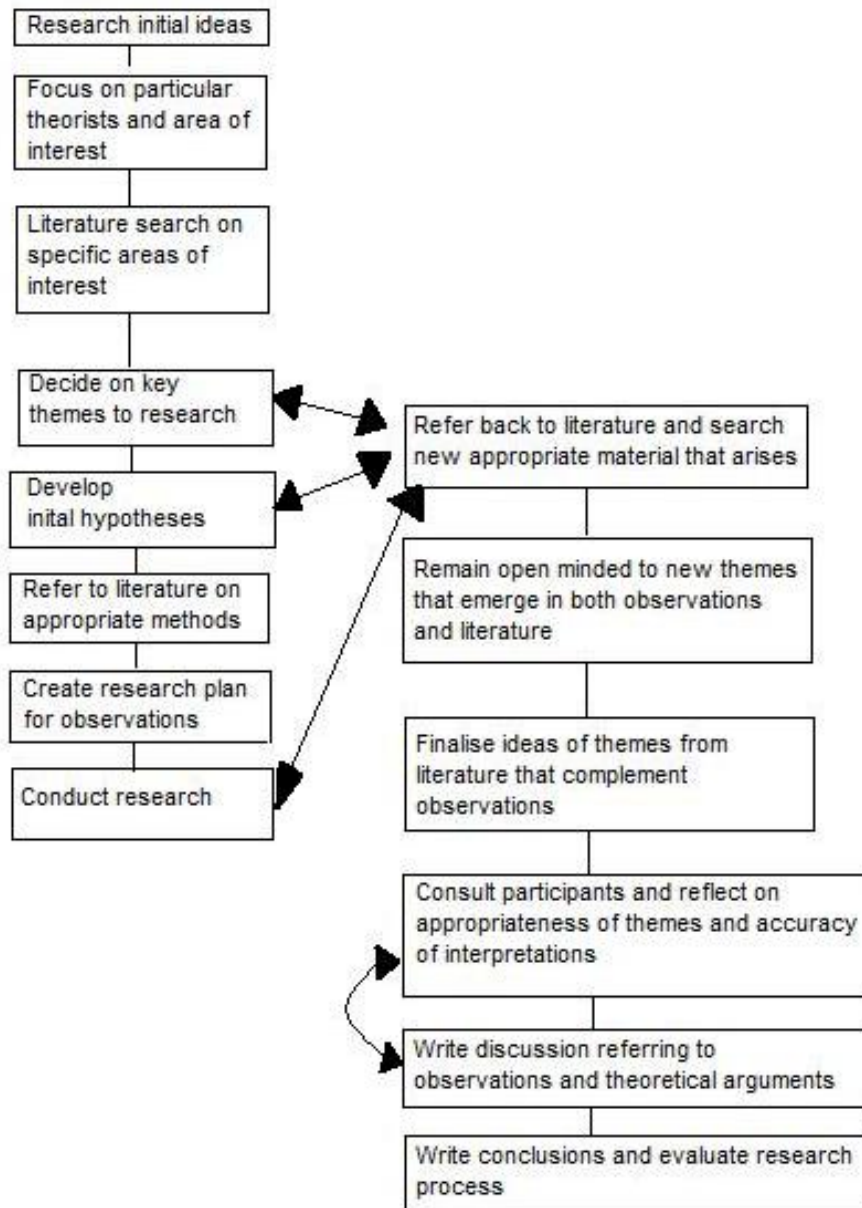


Figure 2 Flow diagram showing the research process.

Combined with the value of the author's participation, observations and conversations with participants, other tools must be adopted to record information. A major component will be the use of diaries with focus points outlined at the beginning of the study, following similar work by Downey (2005) and Manning (2007). The other participants playing in Oxford (and travelling to Brazil) and I wrote diaries to span the range of experiences, interpretations and affective spaces that are created whilst playing Capoeira in different cultural and geographic

contexts. Examples of a participant's and my own account are included in Appendix 2 and 3. Photographic and video evidence⁸ will aid the presentation of these experiences; also providing a point of reference for myself and the other participants when discussing particular movements and experiences (see Knoblauch et al, 2009). I have chosen not to use a specific notation system, such as Labanotation (Williams, 2002) as I believe that movement is too bound up in affective, emotional, complex, conscious and unconscious action to be reduced and separated into a set of positions or symbols, as Farnell agrees:

'For many, movement is conceived of as a series of positions of the body or its parts, such that a series of photographs or positions of the limbs plotted on a two-dimensional graph, are deemed adequate records' (Farnell, 1989: 1-2).

Thus, video and photographic evidence combined with descriptive accounts will contribute to the problematic of presenting an accurate depiction of an activity essentially based on constant, often unpredictable, movement. Despite Farnell's question *'Where is the movement?'* (ibid) when viewing still photographs of human activity; I believe photographs alongside descriptive passages (created in collaboration with participants) will aid the presentation of complex embodied spaces, without discarding the use of valuable photographic evidence.

This will be achieved through the participation and observation in 1.5 hour classes at least once a week at Abolição Oxford Capoeira classes for nearly four months (April - July 2009). The AOC group was chosen due to its connection with Brazil and due to its close proximity which allowed more participation and in-depth research to take place over a long period of time. I will then join five other members of the group and Contra-Mestre Negão in the annual trip to Brazil, where we will train daily at the Crianças Raizes do Abaeté⁹ (CRA) classes. Alongside diaries, I will record informal interviews and conversations focussing on the physical practice and consideration of comparative cultural and embodied aspects of Capoeira practiced in the UK and Brazil. Maps showing the location of Itapúa in Brazil and Oxford in the UK, and the main locations of the fieldwork are shown in figures three to six.

⁸ Video clips available in Appendix 5 on CD

⁹ Translation: Children, the roots of Abaeté



Figure 3 Google Earth image showing major cities on the eastern coast of Brazil, and the location of Itapúa within Salvador.



Figure 4 Google Earth image of Itapúa. Location of CRA project, the Logoa de Abaeté, and the Participant's Hotel are marked

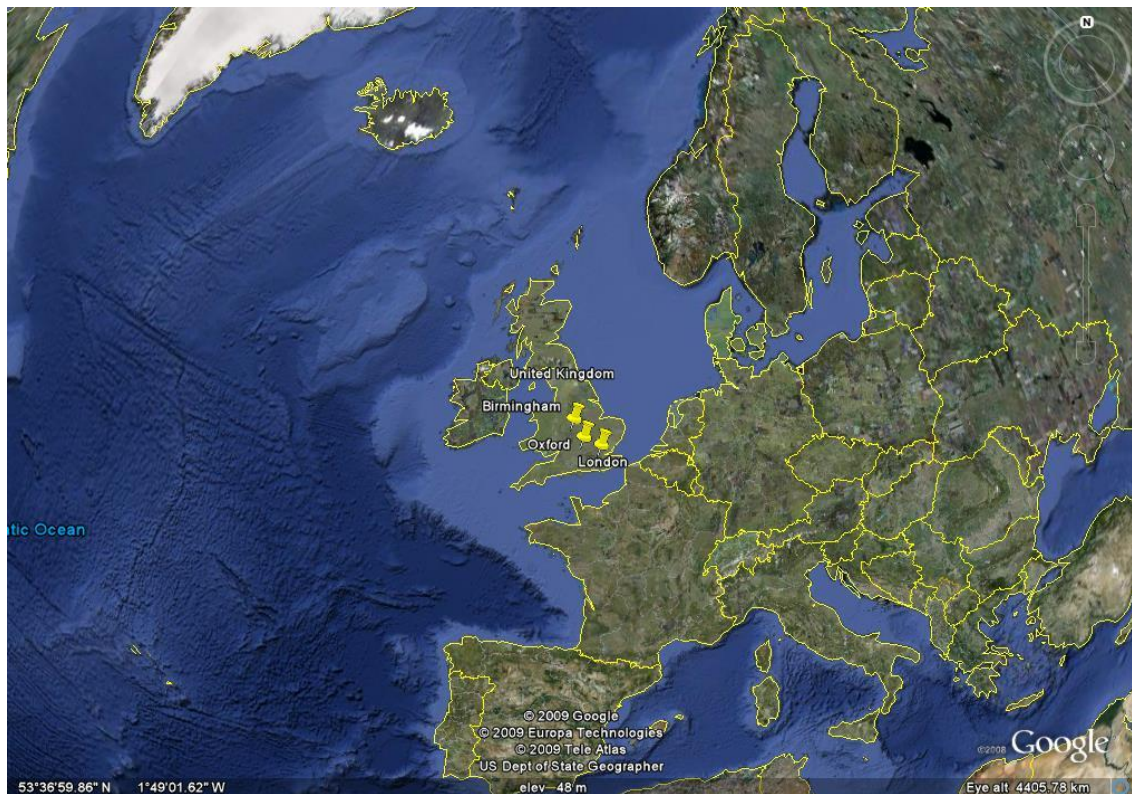


Figure 5 Google Earth image showing the location of Oxford within the UK, alongside two of England's largest cities, Birmingham and London

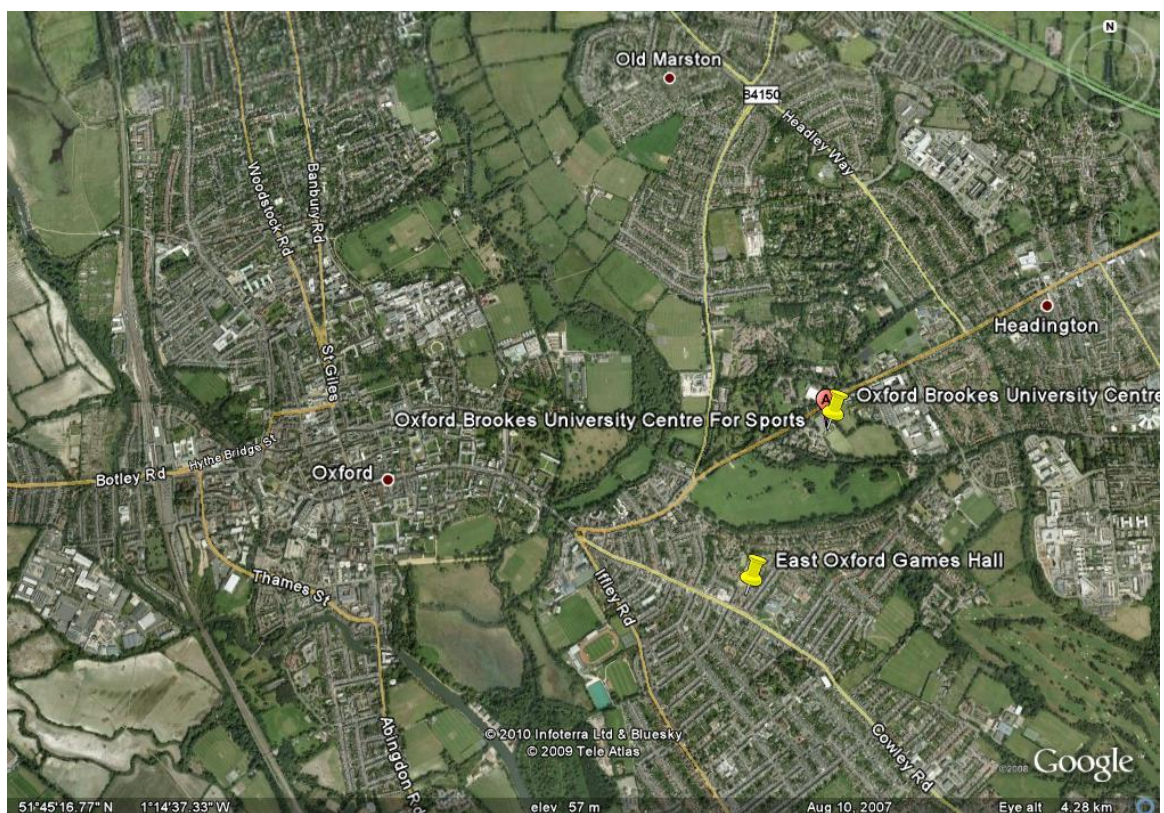


Figure 6 Google Earth image of Oxford, indicating central Oxford, roads, and the two sites where AOC offer Capoeira classes.

Prior to the fieldwork, contextual information was sought using libraries; the internet; interviews with the founders of Abolição Oxford; contact with Capoeira enthusiasts, players and teachers in the UK; as well as conversations with experts on Brazilian history and culture. On returning from Brazil, I attended several classes to have follow up conversations and make further observations, although the main body of the research took place prior to the Brazil trip due to time and financial constraints associated with collecting data from evening classes in Oxford which cost £5 per session. A clear breakdown of this methodology, as well as the names of participants are shown in Figure 7.

Date	Question addressing	Location	Method	By who?
April - end of June	How is Capoeira embodied and learned in the UK?	Abolição Oxford classes. East Oxford Games Hall, Oxford Brookes Sports centre, Cowley road carnival	Observant participation and participant observation. Photographs, field notes including diaries, informal conversations and interviews	Author and those attending Capoeira classes on Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday
June – early July	How was Abolição Oxford founded and how is it linked to charitable projects abroad and the national/international Capoeira community?	Oxford, East Oxford Games Hall	Interviews with founders and research on the internet. Participation in a workshop early July.	Author interviewed Suzette Youngs and conducted participation and internet searches.
July 4 th – 27 th	How do participants' learning experiences and embodied knowledge of Capoeira change when practising in Brazil with Brazilian practitioners?	CRA project in Itapúa, Salvador, Brazil. Other workshops in Itapúa and Salvador.	Observant participation and participation. Photographs, videos, field notes including diaries from all participants, informal conversations, and interviews.	Author and members of Abolição Oxford who chose to take part in the summer trip organized by the Abolição Trust. These include: Negao, Leão (who are organisers of the trip) and Filhote, Charlatão, Tempestade, Fumaça, Pandeiro, Abaeté and the author, Lua Branca.
August – December	How does the knowledge and practice of Capoeira change when exposed to new geographical locations and cultural backgrounds?	Oxford.	Write up and analyse all field notes and comments written by participants. Question participants on the validity of observations and analysis, and attend some Abolição classes to gain further information and contrasting experience of Capoeira since the trip to Brazil. Participation in workshop and Batizado in November.	Author and members of Abolição Oxford, especially participants who travelled to Brazil.

Figure 7 Table of Methods

CHAPTER I:

Networks and Cultural Exchange: Routes of Culture



Figure 8 Some of the members of Abolição Oxford practising for a demonstration at the Cowley Carnival 2009. Source: Author

Capoeira in Oxford: Abolição

This chapter introduces the contextual background of Abolição Oxford and outlines the group's links with local, national and international Capoeira communities.

The Abolição Oxford Capoeira group (AOC) was founded in September 1999 by Contra-Mestre Negão and his partner, Porcelena. Luis is from Itapúa in Salvador, the capital city of the Brazilian state, Bahia, and moved to the UK to join his British partner in 1998. They established AOC based on Negão's experience in Brazil and the growing interest of Capoeira around London and some other areas of the UK. Negão began practising Capoeira with his friends from the Rua Alto do Abaeté in 1985, as is common with young Brazilians (Lowell-

Lewis, 1992). Negão then trained with Mestre Orelha's group in Itapúa and, in 2005, graduated as a Contra-Mestre, practising the Capoeira Regional¹⁰.

The structure of AOC classes has altered over the study period to suit the changing needs of the fluctuating clientele of a University city.¹¹ Each class costs £5 to those who have paid a £15 annual membership fee, or £7 for occasional attendees. The cost for each class is a similar price-range to most workout classes at gyms in Oxford, if not slightly cheaper¹². There is a children's class on Saturday mornings which some of the more experienced adult players teach alongside Negão. After the children's class, depending on the time of year, there may be a *roda* where members of AOC and Capoeiristas from surrounding areas come to play in correct dress (white trousers and tops, often featuring the club logo) with Capoeira instruments and songs. Throughout AOC classes Capoeira music is played on a CD player, which is occasionally turned off during the *roda* (which will usually occur at the end of every class) and traditional instruments are used, often only one or two *berimbaus* and *pandeiros*, due to the small number players who are skilled in playing them.

AOC is linked to other Capoeira Mestres and Brazilian practitioners in the United Kingdom through workshops, where several experienced Mestres/Professors are invited to teach Capoeiristas from around the country. I attended two workshops like this, one before and one after the trip to Brazil. Despite the geographical spread of groups, I found through participation and observation in these workshops that the Capoeira community within the UK appears to have a high degree of social cohesion maintained by the friendship and communication of Brazilian Mestres across the country.

These workshops will often include a *samba* (Brazilian dance) or musical class to introduce British Capoeiristas to other traditional Brazilian cultural manifestations associated with Capoeira. *Samba* is particularly relevant as often at the end of a *roda* the rhythm of the music will change and the men and women will begin to dance *samba de roda*¹³. Workshops also link the European Capoeira community, as students from AOC have in the past arranged group excursions to a series of workshops held in Holland during the Easter period, as well as individuals making their own way to other events around Europe. The workshops are often

¹⁰ There are two distinguishable types of Capoeira practised in Brazil: Regional and Angola. There are also now variations on these and many groups practice a combination of the two. The main difference is the speed and height of play – Regional is played in a more upright position with rapid movements whereas Angola is played lower and slower. Angola is often seen as the more traditional of the two. (Lowell-Lewis, 1992; Field observations).

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for schedule of classes

¹² Based on survey of three gyms in central Oxford

¹³ Samba performed within the *roda* circle

followed by a Brazilian party in the evening, heightening the social interaction of the groups and creating an opportunity for the Capoeiristas associated with different Mestres to become a united British Capoeira community. The social and more diverse Brazilian qualities incorporated into workshops highlight a significant connection, movement and circulation of culture that may be described, in Deleuzian terms, as a 'system of routes' (1987) linking cultural practices in different geographical locations.



Figure 9 Practising movements in lines at a workshop at the East Oxford Games Hall. Source: Negão

On an international scale, AOC is linked to both South Africa and Brazil, through the aegis of charitable projects established in 2003 and 2005 respectively. Students from AOC set up a foundation for a Capoeira group in Hamburg (Eastern Cape, South Africa) whilst travelling.¹⁴ The Brazilian project, Crianças Raízes do Abaeté (CRA), was set up by Negão in his hometown, Itapúa, in Salvador.¹⁵ These projects help to maintain strong links between the trans-Atlantic 'triangle' that existed in colonial times¹⁶, which is seen as a fundamental reason for the foundation of Capoeira, as slaves taken from Africa (though from Angola rather than South Africa) to Brazil to work on British owned sugar plantations are reported to

¹⁴ Source: www.abolicao.co.uk/southafrica accessed 29/09/09

¹⁵ Source: www.abolicao.co.uk/projeto accessed 29/09/09

¹⁶ Based on information from conversation with Porcelena and from Kraay (1998)

have developed the dance/fight as a means of keeping fit in case of an uprising (Kraay, 1998). Student exchanges are made between the groups in Oxford, South Africa and Brazil, allowing members to play Capoeira in different cultural and geographical settings and thus allowing a continuous transformation and change of attitudes and ways of moving and experiencing Capoeira between the groups. It is through participation in these classes and on the annual student exchange that the investigation will take place.

Abolição Oxford in Brazil: Foundations and context

The CRA project is based in a renovated disused school near the Lagoa de Abaeté in the centre of Itapúa, Salvador, which is close to some of the poorer neighbourhoods of the area.



Figure 10 The outer wall of the Crianças Raízes do Abaeté Project. The logos of AOC and ACRA are painted here, as shown. Source: Author

The project is run by Negão's father, the retired head-teacher of a local school and respected member of the community, alongside a team of volunteers and paid music, dance and Capoeira teachers. The weekly schedule of events at the project includes daily Capoeira classes in both the morning and afternoon, a weekly percussion and Capoeira instrument session, and a lively Afro-dance class. A short video of the Afro-dance class, and the high energy it requires is available in Appendix 5, clip two. There is also a bi-weekly *roda* on Thursdays and Fridays. All these classes are free to children of the local area, as the project is supported by the Abolição Trust, a registered charity branching from AOC. The attendees of

these classes range in age, from around two or three years old, up to a couple of members in their late twenties.

Members of CRA mainly play with other Brazilians in their locality, occasionally travelling to central Salvador to play, and only really playing significantly with foreigners when attending occasional workshops and through the AOC exchange. Many of the older members are also members of other Capoeira groups (largely associated with the 'Kirubé' group based in Itapúa) so continue to play with more experienced adepts. Thus, their contact with the wider community seems relatively limited. Players in the UK and Brazil similarly reported finding information on Capoeira using the Internet, on websites such as 'YouTube', 'CapoEuropa', 'Capoeira Nation' and 'Facebook'.¹⁷



Figure 11 Some of the regular members of CRA and AOC after a class. Source: Author

Thus, practitioners from the UK are linked to Brazilian adepts through charitable and media-based networks, as well as corporeally via the presence of many Brazilian teachers and Mestres residing in the UK. The amount of face-to-face contact maintained between the players of CRA and AOC is clearly limited. However, the contact that does occur is intense, through the participation in CRA's varied daily classes during the student exchange. The

¹⁷ See references for website addresses

intensity and experiences of this contact, and how this can alter the practice of Capoeira on an individual embodied scale will be analysed throughout the rest of this dissertation.



Figure 12 As above, but in the outside space at CRA, waiting for the *roda* to begin. Source: Author

CHAPTER II:

Rules and the foundation of dispositions



Figure 13 Leão practising with a Brazilian player at the Filhos de Bimba Escola de Capoeira. Source: Author

‘Dispositions, acquired through experience, are variable according from place to place and time to time. This ‘feel for the game’...as we call it is what enables an infinite number of possible situations which no rule, however complex, can foresee’ (Bourdieu, 1987).

This chapter explores how learning Capoeira is affected by the comprehension of rules and the affects of imitation and practice, and to what extent these factors lead to Bourdieu’s concepts of *le sens jeu* and *le sens pratique*. This will be considered with reference to the acquisition of dispositions that are useful for Capoeira players, and compared between learning experiences in Brazil and the UK.

The fundamental ‘rule’, or aim, of Capoeira that can be understood through experience is the need to keep moving in the *roda*, responding to an adversary’s movements in an aesthetically pleasing way, to the rhythm of the *berimbau*. This was rarely mentioned explicitly in classes, so can be considered a concept learned largely through experience. The exception to this

generalization of learning through ‘regular behaviour’ (Bouveresse, 1990) are players that research the game independently of their embodied experience (see Essien, 2008; Capoeira, 2003; Poncianinho, 2007). For example, rules have been listed and defined in literature and institutions, but this is generally for the purpose of academic analysis or formal competition rather than to teach. These can be useful to gain a better understanding of the game, but are often open to interpretation and remain ‘*extremely fuzzy in Capoeira*’ (Lewis, 1992: 92) in its embodied practice. This emphasizes that mastering the game is achieved predominantly through experience rather than formalised rules, and learning could be convincingly considered as developing *le sens pratique* and *le sens du jeu* (Bourdieu, 1987).

Box 2¹⁸

A. Normative Rules

1. Active play is between two contestants inside the ring.
 - 1.1 Obey the conventions for entering and leaving the ring.
 - 1.2 During play, don’t move outside the ring.
 - 1.3 Shake hands with your opponent before and after the bout.
2. Try to take your opponent down.
 - 2.1 Only feet, hands, and head should touch the ground.
 - 2.2 Don’t try to injure opponent physically.
 - 2.2.1 No strikes with closed fist are permitted.
 - 2.2.2 No pushing allowed, except as part of a takedown.
 - 2.3 Emotional, psychic, and/or prestige damage are okay.
3. Always be ready to defend against an attack.
 - 3.1 Don’t turn your back on an opponent
 - 3.2 Keep your hands up for protection.
 - 3.3 Keep your eyes on your opponent at all times.
4. There is no play without music (*berimbau*).
 - 4.1 Music starts before physical play.
 - 4.2 When music stops, play stops.

B. Pragmatic Rules

5. Don’t block attacks (except before they mature, or *in extremis*).
 - 5.1 Escape, then counterattack.
 - 5.2 Be prepared to escape from most common attacks.
 - 5.3 Be prepared to attack most common escapes.
6. Keep moving (*ginga*).
 - 6.1 Try to increase your freedom of movement while decreasing that of your opponent.
 - 6.2 Never come to a complete stop.

¹⁸ Box 3: Reproduced ‘Some Capoeira Rules for Physical Play’, Table 4.1 in Lewis, 1992: 92

7. Try to deceive your opponent into becoming vulnerable.
 - 7.1 Establish patterns, only to break them.
 - 7.2 Pretend to do one thing, then do another.
-

Despite these seemingly clear ‘rules’, after attending four months of classes in the UK, I experienced very little formal education in the ‘rules’ of Capoeira. There are certain ‘strategies’ that Negão emphasized as vital or important in Capoeira. For example, the maintenance of symmetry with one’s adversary during the *ginga*: one leg is swept back behind the body while the front leg supports the body with a bent knee, somewhat like a medium level lunge, whilst the arm corresponding with the back leg is brought up, bent at the elbow, to protect the face. The back leg then comes forward to a shoulder width apart from the other leg, which immediately swings back as the other arm defends the frontal area. When facing a partner and performing the *ginga*, the back legs must be symmetrical, i.e., one person’s right leg is back, the opponents left leg will be back to match. This sequence of movements is repeated and often used as a warm up in practice, but is not often maintained for long periods by experienced players in the *roda*. The ways in which the *ginga* and more complex moves enter a person’s set of bodily dispositions (*habitus*) will be explored with reference to the different experiences of learning in Brazil and the UK.



Figure 14 An example of the bodily position and symmetry of the *ginga* in a CRA roda. Source: Negão

While observing and participating in the AOC classes, I discovered that the *ginga* was not only the basic move of Capoeira and where all other kicks stem from, but that performing the *ginga* was an easy way for the beginner to keep moving in a rhythm without exerting much effort or attempting a more complicated move. Consequently, the basic physical movements of the *ginga* become regular dispositions that beginners revert back to when nervous or caught off balance; it is easier to wait and be guided by their partner in a reciprocal defence move rather than instigating action. When in the *roda* players may be criticized for performing the *ginga* for too long, as when watching more experienced pairs it can be seen that it is rare to execute more than one or two consecutive *ginga* steps before twisting, turning and combining many more sequential moves out of the *ginga*. Negão often reminded us to ‘play’ and ‘try some things’ when we were happily *ginga*-ing to and fro, in what easily becomes an absentminded disposition.

The *ginga* is probably the first disposition of a ‘Capoeira *habitus*’ that is developed in novice¹⁹ players, as the *ginga* becomes an ‘acquired habit’ utilised in the appropriate situation of a class or *roda* which begins to be enacted almost ‘below the level of calculation’

¹⁹ In the course of this dissertation I use ‘novice’ and ‘beginner’ interchangeably. They are not distinct categories in Capoeira. Capoeira does have a hierarchical belt system based on ability and commitment, though interesting, is not seen as a vital point of discussion here.

(Bourdieu, 1987; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Equally, more experienced players, who accumulate a greater repertoire of Capoeira dispositions through increased practice and familiarity, have numerous easily accessible tools (or a more diverse Capoeira *habitus*) to create fluid movements within the *roda*. The fact that most of the Brazilian players I met attended classes every day meant their skill level reached a higher level much more quickly than most UK practitioners. This was noted by the rapid improvements of the AOC players whilst training daily in Brazil, compared to at home where most people only trained twice a week.

Following the *ginga*, players learn individual attacks and defences as well as combined movements in sequences. These can be very confusing at first, as Capoeiristas must be able to create fluid sequences of movement on different levels, using various techniques: up and down and left to right, on feet, hands and heads. When trying to mirror a better player this can be very disorienting, as one spins up and down the gym, exerting all mind and bodily concentration. However, learning sequences is the key to playing a better game of Capoeira, as adepts learn how one move can follow another in flowing motions without returning to the *ginga* in between. This is taught in AOC through demonstrations by Negão and a more experienced member, often following the practice of individual movements in lines facing the mirrors. On one occasion:

'I didn't really understand the movement and kept ending up with partners who were also slightly unsure. Once we didn't even try as we just stood looking at everyone else trying to work out what was going on and talking to each other.' June



Figure 15 Workshop at East Oxford Games Hall. This is a warm up ginga in lines, but note the differences in how individuals execute this simple move, and how some are looking to other players, perhaps to try and improve the move through imitation, or due to confusion/distractions.

This confusion occurred frequently in the beginner's classes, though Negão did circulate to help those having difficulty. However, in some ways this emphasizes ways in which CRA offered a better learning environment as a product of the language barrier combined with the higher skill level of most players. If a Brazilian adept begins a sequence and an opposing AOC member did not perform the reciprocated movement correctly, what might have become a long discussion is replaced by a quick physical demonstration. Even if this has to be repeated several times, or limbs have to physically moved around by the more experienced player, time is saved through not (inadequately) expressing an embodied movement verbally. Additionally, the aspect of imitation and demonstration necessary in learning an embodied practice is highlighted, which could result in picking up stylistic deviations from the standardised movement and subsequent hybridisation.

Brazilian practitioners from CRA were taught sequences choreographed by Mestre Bimba²⁰ to teach beginners to link movements and respond appropriately. These are not used by Negão for teaching, but were a main focus of Mestre Itapoan's workshop that AOC members

²⁰ Founder of Capoeira Regional and the first Capoeira Academy in Salvador.

attended whilst in Brazil. Every participant (including me) mentioned in written and spoken accounts that practicing these sequences would be helpful to create a more fluid game in the *roda*. The emphasis in CRA classes on these flowing movements may be the reason for the following conversation one day after the *roda*:

‘Fumaça: It’s more of a conservation here, at home it’s very much two people playing their individual games.

Leão: It’s because people in the UK are unsure of themselves. You have to be confident in yourself to play that close and often in the UK people are concentrating on themselves and trying to execute one particular kick so they don’t flow with the other person so well.

Charlatão: They’re just very technical. Fast, skilled, excellent games. They get so much more practise in.’ July

Playing an aesthetically pleasing, fluid game requires the players to have access to a large bodily repertoire of responses and attacks, through the unification of mind and body in practice. In Oxford, movements are practiced both individually facing the mirrors, in order to perfect the shapes made with the body, and in pairs to learn appropriate responses to particular moves. However, too much rigidity in this method can lead to over-thinking the movements and undesirable hesitation in the *roda*, as novices try to remember what they feel is the ‘correct’ response to particular attacks:

‘Today in the roda, they pushed me to try new moves and play so fast that I had to defend in any way I could, rather than dithering with a constant ginga, racking my brains for one of the moves that we’d practised earlier in the session.... It was just so much more fun and more free’ June

When challenged in this way self-consciousness is forgotten as the mind is preoccupied with defence mechanisms. Bodily memory seems to replace conscious thought, as the moves seem to flow from one to the other without considering where exactly that foot should go next or this arm should be during the next *esquiva*.²¹ This continuous interaction is vital to playing a good game of Capoeira (Essien, 2008) and avoids Negão’s pointed instruction: ‘*do something!*’ when one is nervously faltering in the *roda*. One particularly apt scenario occurred when Negão tried to push a particularly promising novice player to play more actively in the *roda*:

²¹ Esquiva – literal translation is ‘escape’. A defence move.

'Negao told him 'kick! kick!' in the roda and wouldn't let him leave his partner until he kicked, even though someone else was trying to buy the game.'

Creating an aesthetic and tactical game becomes easy once, through experience, bodily dispositions develop into a '*Capoeira habitus*'. Tactics, however, also require conscious thought and the unification of mind and body which will be explored further in chapter IV.

Similar to learning and repeatedly practising the *ginga*, memorising sequences (through mind and bodily memory) equips Capoeiristas with the skills, and eventually accessible dispositions, necessary to play a flowing game in the *roda*. The imitation of more experienced players may create a hybridised form of specific movements, and repetitious practice may make difficult Capoeira movements become corporeally memorised rather than requiring intense conscious thought and physical strain. This embodied knowledge may be termed a '*Capoeira habitus*'. It must be emphasized, however, that I am appropriating the term '*habitus*', as an individual rather than a collective concept that will be developed through bodily memory and repetitious training. The *habitus* may also be subject to deviation through the physical or mental limitations and embodied styles of individuals and may change through the geographical, cultural and physical context in which it is used.

CHAPTER III:

Axé: Multisensory spaces of learning



Figure 16 A colour enhanced image of a percussion session between Abolição members, Negão, Mestre Diaola and Rupi at the hotel. Source: Author

This chapter will explore the effects of music, atmosphere, affect and tradition on learning Capoeira. Comparisons will be drawn between multisensory features from experiences gathered in Brazil and the UK .

‘Axé’ is defined as ‘*the good energy that defines Capoeiristas*’ (Stephens and Delamont, 2006: 331) and is created through multisensory channels. After one particularly lively session, Tempestade exclaimed ‘*such excellent axé in training tonight*’ with a beaming smile, to describe the positive, energetic, relaxed atmosphere. Good *axé*, I have found, reiterated in conversations with other players, is a result of the general mood of the teacher and players, combined with enthusiasm with singing, physical participation, adherence to tradition and quality of music in the *roda*. These factors were experienced differently learning in Itapúa and Oxford.

Traditions

AOC classes always began with a warm up: stretches stood in an inward facing circle, and exercises to increase the heart rate, such as star jumps, and finally a ‘free run’ around the room to encourage people to be relaxed and aware of space²². These methods served the dual purpose of preparing the body physically for Capoeira, and encouraging a positive, relaxed atmosphere: a class with good *axé*.

On a few occasions in Brazil, another Afro-Brazilian martial art, *Maculele*,²³ was used to help practitioners loosen up and build a positive atmosphere before playing Capoeira:

‘Mestre Diaola gave us a very varied class with Maculele and everything. It’s very good to put us in an energetic mode (lots of axé) and to make us less shy with each other.’

Tempestade, July.

I played *Maculele* on one occasion in an AOC class aimed at more experienced players. It was a very positive experience, but was to rehearse for an upcoming show rather than as a regular part of the class. It is thus unlikely to have a large effect on individual’s experience of Capoeira in AOC, and it would be dubious to claim it was a tradition associated with Capoeira that has been fully transposed to these practitioners.

The classes in Brazil did not always follow a rigid structure. However, the beginning and end were almost always the same: everyone would line up against the wall, hands on hearts, and raise arms as we exclaimed ‘*Salve!*’²⁴. Classes always finished with a *roda* and occasionally *samba de roda*²⁵, followed by another *Salve!* exclamation. The *salve* ending each class was accompanied by each member snaking round along the line slapping the hand of every other player. I have seen similarly structured classes in other areas of Brazil outside the period of study, and its regularity suggests it is a tradition to start and end classes. This tradition is not maintained in AOC classes, although at the end of classes members often shout ‘*boa*’²⁶ with arms raised in the air, in a less organized, but similarly positive manner. It seems to bound the class both structurally and socially with a consistent positive atmosphere.

²² See passage in box 1 for description of free run.

²³ This was also practiced as a separate martial art, but is often incorporated into Capoeira classes in Brazil

²⁴ Salve – ‘Hail!’ A positive greeting used frequently in Portugal and Brazil

²⁵ A style of Samba specific to Capoeira *rodas*

²⁶ Boa - good



Figure 17 The customary hand on hearts position before 'Salve' is called to end the class. Source: Author

During the training period in Brazil, the 'total immersion' factor created a greater feeling of active involvement in the authentic Capoeira world. Charlatão commented of this 'Capoeira atmosphere': *'in Brazil you live and breathe Capoeira'*. I felt more integrated with the AOC group whilst in Brazil, through social activities and shared accommodation; combined with sharing more feelings with other members concerning Capoeira movements, tradition and practice. Charlatão gave a particularly profound description of his feelings playing Capoeira in Brazil for the first time after approximately three years training with AOC:

'I think my abilities have changed a great deal from having been to Bahia, in the same way that a priests might from having visited the holy land' Charlatão, July.

Similarly, Abaeté felt the desire to improve physically and become more involved in the multisensory aspects of the Capoeira world after his positive experiences in Itapúa:

'Playing in Brazil has given me the focus to train harder here and to push boundaries more. I have also a renewed interest in the language and a desire to learn more songs' Abaeté, July .

Agents

Correspondingly, other practitioners reported that good axé and inspiration were generated in Brazil through the exposure to contrasts in skill situated in a rich, sensual atmosphere:

'the roda is at a fast rhythm..it's mostly kicks and I really want to improve/decrease my clumsiness. I need to improve my flexibility too'.. 'I need to learn meia-lua de compasso properly' Tempestade, July.

'I feel far more at ease practicing with Brazilians and in the Brazilian roda despite them being far more skilful than me and English players generally. They push me, trick me, try to trip me, keeping me on my toes, and they don't ever speak in the roda. They play. And in turn I have to respond and don't think of anything else except the music and what they're doing and what I might do next' July.

This relaxed feeling seems to allow more creative, fluid play and is induced by aspirations, better axé and a wholly stimulating multisensory experience. In my experience this atmosphere seems to be more commonly evident in the muggy, confined, exciting Capoeira spaces of Brazil than the expansive, serious, cool dance studio of Oxford. These feelings are induced not only by the location, 'sites', but by the actor's themselves whose skill and attitude aid the creation of particular kinds of multisensory, affective Capoeira spaces. The members from AOC gave similar feedback, describing Brazilian Capoeira as '*played with more passion*', '*richer*' and '*enhanced and perfected*' (Abaeté); '*more energetic and skilful*', '*more creative*' (Tempestade); '*tough, athletic*', '*players already retain the right playful, open, relaxed attitude for the game*' (Filhote). Moreover, focussing on the way participants have responded to playing in Brazil, with Brazilians, indicates that a cultural attitude as well as greater skills in both music and play – a multifaceted, multisensory set of dispositions enacted through the culturally situated body – can alter the affective and embodied experience of British players.



Figure 18 Experienced players in the roda at the 'cool, expansive' Oxford Brookes Sports centre. Source: Negão

A relaxed body may be encouraged by good *axé*, but is impossible if players are tense and self-conscious in front of more experienced players. Disregarding inhibitions and usual social constraints has been described as a need for '*tearing out the shame*' (Downey, 2005); required not only of British players, but also Brazilian adepts. A tense body and lack of confidence becomes most clear in the *roda*. Both Negão and Rupi²⁷ frequently ensured there was a *roda* at the end of every class, so players learn to play Capoeira in its traditional form. One beginner explained her initial confidence in participating in the *roda* diminishing as she attended more classes but didn't seem to be improving very quickly; a thought I often shared:

Abelha: I feel more scared of going into the roda now, I mean the balls of the first few times have worn off....Before it was OK that I was rubbish 'cause I'd only been to a couple of classes, now I feel like I should know something more than a bit of ginga, a couple of negativas and a half arsed meia-lua de compasso...

²⁷ The Professor who taught all classes at CRA

Author: We kind of had an excuse for being incompetent before...people seemed impressed if we tried anything in the roda, but now more's expected of us. I definitely don't feel like I'm showing much improvement. June

Conversely, both Tempestade and I felt more comfortable playing with Brazilian adepts, despite their greater experience and skill. This was probably due to our relative anonymity in Brazil, combined with the relaxed nature of the Brazilian players and inability/lack of confidence to offer criticism verbally. Self-consciousness may become an issue when one is recognised by other practitioners, whereas anonymity as a newcomer offers an excuse for initial mistakes.

Sound

Traditional music is a fundamental part of Capoeira. J. Lowell Lewis has made reference to music as one of the 'normative rules' of Capoeira: '*There is no play without music*', '*music starts before physical play*', '*when music stops, play stops*' (Lewis, 1992:92). The musical element can have a great affect on the atmosphere of the class/roda, and emphasized to varying degrees between AOC and CRA.

In Brazil, 'live' music was usual, compared to the frequent reliance on a CD player in AOC classes. Comparatively, the use of traditional instruments in AOC classes had varied success depending on the members in attendance who could play them. Similarly, the songs that accompany play were often misunderstood, sang incorrectly or very quietly because most members of AOC do not speak Portuguese. The axé was largely improved in AOC's Saturday *rodas* as more experienced players and those attending from surrounding areas aided the positive energy with their voices, bodies and music.



Figure 19 Some Brazilian Capoeiristas practising playing the berimbau before the *roda*

Conversely, the majority of classes in Brazil were hugely energetic and positive: the *roda* marking the end of the lesson was always accompanied by authentic Capoeira instruments; usually two *berimbaus*, at least two *pandeiros*, and occasionally an *atabaque*²⁸ :

‘Rupi got out the atabaque and brought it next to the lead berimbau. I saw a few of the children exchange furtive glances and as Rupi began to beat away I could see why – the booming tones could be heard all the way down the street – Rupi was sweating buckets with the efforts he was putting into producing a quicker and quicker, louder and louder rhythm that made the energy in the roda go absolutely wild!’ July.

This positive and excited account of the affect of the music on the *roda* can be contrasted with my responses to a less musically engaged *roda*:

‘the CD was really quiet so I didn’t get excited about playing in the roda’ May.

‘It wasn’t a very positive atmosphere or experience due to the dwindling musical aspect and the higher profile of violence.’ July.

²⁸ Brazilian drum

The second quote was from an experience in a *roda* in Brazil. The *roda* took place at a workshop in Itapúa, led by distinguished Capoeirista, Mestre Itapoan. We were accompanied by an American group, ‘Grupo Ginga’,²⁹ and some students from another group in Itapúa, ‘Kirubé’. Compared to usual Brazilian *rodas*, the volume and enthusiasm of singing was very weak and led to considerable speculation from members of AOC. The quiet singing was largely due to the language barrier, but the general atmosphere seemed to be made more uneasy by the lack of Brazilians participating. Leão commented: *‘It was strange playing with non-Brazilians again tonight. The roda felt a bit phrrr...it’s like you need a critical mass of Brazilians.’* This negative feeling seemed to inhibit learning, or at least positivity, and was shared by all of the AOC members; probably due to the type of *roda* we had become accustomed to at CRA: friendly, fun, energetic and comfortable; through the enthusiastic song, music and social cohesion of the group which translated into positive, non-violent embodied forms.



Figure 20 Leão and Charlatão playing in the *roda*. The lack of *axé* is shown by the players making up the *roda*: there is no bustle of excitement or energy contained tightly in the *roda* by an enthusiastic group of players. Those making the *roda* should be participating as much as those playing the game, using their voices, clapping and restless bodies – without breaking the circle.

²⁹ a group that one of Itapoan’s students set up in the US



Figure 21 The musical quality of rodas in Brazil was undoubtedly aided by the weekly music classes at the project. Two Abolição members are depicted practising different rhythms on the atabaque. Source: Author



Figure 22 Mestre Olavo, a half-blind Capoeira Mestre and respected berimbau maker and player. We spent an afternoon listening to his music and attempting to play with him. He also played at one of the rodas following a workshop with Mestre Itapoan. Opportunities to play with such distinguished Mestres are much rarer when attending occasional classes in the UK. Source: Author

Buying the game

An indication of enthusiasm, confidence and energy in a *roda* is evident when players are invited to ‘buy the game’ during a *roda*. Negão is frustrated when people do not ‘buy the game’ in the *roda*: it is seen as an essential part of playing and when implemented successfully helps keep a really good, energetic sense of *axé*. To buy the game is to halt the course of play with a firm gesture that both players can clearly see, and begin playing the player you are facing who was already in the *roda*. It takes confidence to stop the course of play, especially if the two players are moving quickly or are more experienced than oneself. Furthermore, buying the game is an assertion that you would like to play, not necessarily meaning, but often feeling as if one believes oneself to be worthy of stopping a fluid game to exercise one’s own proficiency and style. I found it easier to buy the game when the

atmosphere was exciting and energetic, and when other people were also buying the game and changing partners frequently:

'It's difficult to be the player who instigates a chain of partner-swapping and game jumping. As a beginner it is worrying...but there is some confidence that it's what you're supposed to do...naive enthusiasm is good justification for jumping in on better players. I think Negão appreciates the beginners buying the game, as it shows they're keen and are beginning to understand how the game works' May.

However, Negão and other more experienced players would often emphasize that buying the game must be executed proficiently, as hesitation can reduce the fluidity and excitement of the game:

'the roda must be maintained to keep the energy...when you buy the game you mustn't dither; you should face the player you want to play and ensure both players see you so nobody gets hurt' Borboleta, May.

This is reflective of the verbal expression of some 'rules' of Capoeira. I found that experienced British players were more likely to put into words the particular traditions or appropriate techniques, whereas Negão would let people learn more by experience and imitation. This is probably related to language barriers as much as it is to teaching techniques, but shows how concepts taught by Negão are more likely to be transposed to the AOC players through embodied, experiential techniques.



Figure 23 Leão is pictured in the background, about to buy the game to play the young Capoeirista to the left of the roda. Source: Author

In Brazil, young Capoeiristas were familiar with how to ‘buy the game’ correctly. This seemed to be related to the regular structure of the *roda* at the end of each class. Towards the end of each *roda*, Rupi signalled that people may begin ‘buying the game’, which instigated a great influx of enthusiasm into the game, with many rapid changes of partner. As the group was made up largely of children aged around five to fifteen, this appeared as a flurry of childish, excited play, but often the Capoeira still demonstrated a high level of ability:

‘I saw some amazingly skilful kids play. The rhythm of the roda was quite energetic so it was dominated by kicks.’ Tempestade, July.

To buy the game successfully and play energetically, as described by Tempestade, requires confidence and an accessible set of embodied dispositions to utilise in the *roda*. This confidence and enthusiasm can be induced by a multisensory energetic and exciting atmosphere. Thus, there was generally more *axé* in classes with more experienced members as they were confident with their skills and the traditions of the game. Moreover, the concept of *axé* could be compared to the notion of ‘play’ in Capoeira, as it was when people seemed unselfconscious and free from their everyday concerns, fully immersing themselves in the Capoeira. It was in these moments that the best *axé* and thus most enjoyable Capoeira

sessions occurred. The enjoyment and learning process in Capoeira is clearly a multisensory experience. For example, Tempestade stated the escapism offered by the music and challenge of the physical game as a main reason for her commitment to learning Capoeira:

"I love the mood the music puts you in. It doesn't matter how bad your day was, when the music starts you forget about it and concentrate on the game, so it's a nice escape from routine"

Thus, 'play' as conceptualised by Huizinga may be evident in the naive beginner, which almost places the individual on a child's level in terms of bodily experience of this particular activity. However, this playful confidence may be lost through experience when repetitive, familiar movements take too much time to enter one's bodily repertoire. Even the most experienced players can become self-conscious as they desire to reaffirm their abilities and consolidate their mastery, especially when exposed to more proficient adepts (as was often the case in Brazil). This desire to improve takes many forms: physical, tactical, musical and/or traditional -undeniably multisensory - and ultimately the product of dedication to learning an alien cultural manifestation.

The different multisensory spaces generated in Capoeira are clearly variable between learning experiences undertaken in Oxford or Itapúa, due to culturally, traditionally and socially constructed norms of practice. These norms are multi-faceted: attitudes, knowledge, physical and musical abilities of the players, as well as influences from environmental factors and physical places. These factors may have different effects on various players' knowledge, understanding, and performance of Capoeira and are therefore likely to be interpreted and transposed in hybridised forms.



Figure 24 Some of the children at CRA playing and showing off their skills after class. Two playful characters on the far left constantly wrestled outside of the *roda* and tried to outwit each other in the *roda*. Source: Author

CHAPTER IV:

Developing Malicia: unifying the mind and body



Figure 25 Do Morso caught off guard by a rapid change in direction and powerful meia-lua de compasso by Filhote

‘Capoeira is more of a mental game than a physical game. The intense physical conditioning that good Capoeira requires is only necessary so that the body can keep up with the mind. The essence of Capoeira is the matching of the wits of the two players in the roda. This being the case, a Capoeirista’s thought process must be developed so he can create opportunities, recognize them when they appear, and exploit them once they are recognized’ (Essien, 2008: 39).

In this chapter the discussion will be focussed on learning tactical elements, *malicia*, and the aesthetic performance of Capoeira. The way in which these elements develop will be compared between learning experiences embodied in the UK and Brazil.

To learn Capoeira successfully, the body and mind must be taught to act as one through embodiment only possible through training. Negão often reminded players to use trickery and to play using their heads: *‘Play with your head and think about what you’re doing. Trick him!’*. This is reiterated by point 7 of Lewis’s Pragmatic rules³⁰ and refers to the concept of *malicia*, which is interpreted as one of the most important aspects of Capoeira (Essien 2008;

³⁰ See Box 4, page 21-22

Downey, 2005). Again, *malicia* is a largely mind-bound concept which requires the player to match quick embodied movements with a quickness of mind; something that is much more easily acquired through experience. Experience and practice can help make the movements almost bodily reflexes (or part of a *habitus*), which makes the art of *malicia* much easier to exercise. I often felt ‘*my brain and body can’t keep up*’ and even after around four months of training didn’t feel I had a grasp on the art of *malicia*.



Figure 26 Filhote and Do Morso always seemed to enjoy playing each other. Keeping their eyes firmly on each other will help them to predict what the next move may be and how to defend or counteract it. Unless Do Morso (right) executes his kick very quickly, Filhote could easily unbalance him from this position.

The concept of *malicia* is unlikely to be fully understood unless a player has actually experienced it. This is because in the majority of footage in Capoeira films or on the Internet, *malicia* is difficult to detect or excluded completely.³¹ Books can explain the concept of *malicia* and other more philosophical aspects of Capoeira, but it is not until the movements and tactics are combined physically that they can be utilised in a game. For example, Abaeté claimed playing a particular video game made him look for a local class:

“Tekken 3 was the name of the Video game, a character named Eddie Gordo...I was amazed on how this guy was able to move and inspired to find out what he did, I thought it was break dance and some kung fu or something, I was not aware of Capoeira. First real

³¹ See references for websites with footage and Capoeira films

knowledgeable encounter was a Karate class when a friend was using it with Karate to fight me. I thought it was about flashy fake fighting with no practical application and purely for effect.'

This indicates how the Brazilian art has already infiltrated many different countries and mediums, and is often portrayed in ways which contradict its' traditional (or contemporary) practice, such as the use of Capoeira to fight in *Tekken 3*.

More experienced and dedicated players often demonstrated a growing unification of mind-bound tactics which complemented their physical ability. This was highlighted particularly with their greater *malicia*, often trying to trick Negão in the *roda*. Negão played with far more *malicia* than any other member of the Abolição group, often barely executing any full kicks or movements at all, as he indulged in a sequence of embodied trickery and deception through gestures and bodily suggestion.

'Once Negao joined the roda he seemed happier, and when tricking one of the more experienced players, Samurai, his serious face cracked into a smile.'

'After a long period of Kasiki trying to fool Negão and Negão reacting only with superior trickery; he made his move to put this student in his place: Negão made a half turn into a meia-lua do compasso, promptly span back the other way into a rasteira, swiftly taking Kasiki out, who fell hard onto his back...He got up smiling, exaggerating dusting himself off. They slapped hands and Negão's smug grin emphasized who was boss'.

This kind of scenario and display of *malicia* is not mistaken for disrespect, as it is one of the fundamental elements of Capoeira. The way to distinguish violent play from *malicia* is rooted in the attitude of the players and the maintenance of the *jôgo bonito*, the beautiful game.

The experienced Capoeiristas I witnessed playing in Brazil – both very young and much older practitioners – were a testament to the *jôgo bonito*. Equally, some skilled Capoeiristas from AOC often played very fluidly in classes, workshops, and in Brazil. The main difference between experienced players and novices in their demonstration of the *jôgo bonito* is the maintenance of a continuous reciprocal choreography of seemingly spontaneous movement. This requires an extremely well tuned mind and body working as one, as movements must rapidly change in response to the rhythm of the music and the adversary's counterattacks. A video clip of reciprocal play and some subtle trickery between two young members of CRA is available (Appendix 5, clip 3) to highlight the quick thinking necessary to exercise *malicia*

in the *roda*. Most of this skill is developed through experience and a well established '*Capoeira habitus*' which makes movements quickly accessible for new and rapidly altering situations.

Mind and body cooperation and *malícia* was embedded so firmly in some of the younger Brazilian players that it must be acquired in ways other than numerous years of experience. Nonetheless, many of the Brazilian adepts played far more frequently than most of the British players, so gained more experience more quickly. Moreover, it seemed that it was the 'need' for this skill that made the Brazilians better players than the British: the Brazilian novices had to kick harder, faster and with more *malícia*, or they would end up on the floor. The young Brazilian's exposure to, and experience alongside greater skill thus informs them with *le sens de jeu* and *le sens pratique*, as one 'does what he or she "has to do"' (Bourdieu, 1987). The more experienced Brazilians did play more gently with the younger and less skilful players, but would frequently make a playful gesture or execute a cheeky *rasteira* to humiliate the lesser player and affirm their own ability. Thus, the less experienced Brazilian players seem to have greater aspirations imbued by 'friendly' falls and everyday exposure to the *jôgo bonito*. Comparatively, beginners in Oxford may only attend the classes aimed at beginners and therefore have limited exposure to the fluid games of more experienced players. British players may also have to negotiate their polite cultural stereotype in the *roda* to develop a proficiently tactical game, which will undoubtedly take time to achieve.



Figure 27 Do Morso (left) executing a perfectly timed *rasteira* on Filhote in the *roda* at the Crianças Raizes do Abaeté.
Source: Author



Figure 28 Two experienced Capoeiristas playfully 'taking down' a younger, less experienced friend. Source: Author

Trying to execute convincing feints with other English players, especially novices, often ended in confusion rather than a playful interaction. Many players therefore attempted more ambitious displays of *malicia* when playing with Negão, which seemed to be a response to his tricky game.

'I was about to try a martelo when Leão motioned an esquiva lateral to the left..he changed directions at the last minute into a quick double meia-lua de compasso. I didn't react quickly enough to get down into an esquiva or cocorinha, so I just stepped backwards. Very embarrassing. Leão did not look impressed: 'You just have to keep moving'..then reverted back to a slower ginga to allow me to get my composure back.'

June

'I tried to be unpredictable in the roda with someone quite new. it just didn't work! She smiled nervously and tried to regain the rhythm as our gingas went out of symmetry, making the game fractured and awkward. A better player would have responded with a move out of the ginga to counteract the change in direction'

May

The awkward interaction between novices is undesirable and may be a reason for the greater displays of *malicia* between more experienced players, especially with Negão. Negão's *malicia* seemed more natural than even the most experienced members of AOC, probably due to his greater experience playing Capoeira, and because most players will have learnt the art

of *malicia* as an imitation of Negão, which may appear less authentic to an observer. This highlights the reciprocal nature of the game and the imitation necessary in learning a new embodied practice. Successful imitation of particular movements and stylistic differences could thus be attributed major reasons for the successful transposition of cultural practices.

The difference in Negão's game and his lead role in demonstrations which may subtly alter the embodiment of Capoeira by the British players is clearly more than an influence of a particular cultural attitude, belief or opinion expressed through verbal communication. Negão's (and other Mestres observed in workshops and Brazil) limited English and the '*irreducibly practical knowledge*' (Bouveresse, 1990: 52) Capoeira requires, suggests there are constraints on expressing 'rules' or particular movements verbally. Thus, it is the influence of the way leading adversaries control and move their bodies that influences other impressionable players to pick up specific styled dispositions; an individual 'Capoeira *habitus*'.

The subtle differences in the way Negão and other Brazilian adepts move, sway, gesture and express particular movements is what truly causes the embodied knowledge of a Brazilian form of Capoeira to be passed on to the players from AOC during the exchange. Evidently, there are other factors that affect the precise way in which British players embody Capoeira movements: restrictions in flexibility, fitness, perhaps certain inhibitions which require individual's to negotiate their normal dispositions; and alternately, creativity and invention of new moves. These result in an imperfect imitation of other Capoeira bodies and can create hybridised forms of the cultural manifestation. Connections and meetings between Capoeira bodies can thus create hybridised, fluid forms of Capoeira, as movements are '*reinterpreted, contradicted and altered on multiple scales*', showing cultural manifestations to be '*neither static nor unanimous*' as they are transposed through space and time (Bayart, 2005). The proficiency of Capoeira movements through repetition is a clear example of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* as a 'set of regular dispositions' (1990: 60), and the way style is impressed upon dispositions occurs through the particularity of the individual's bodily repertoire of skills and limitations (e.g., flexibility, acrobatic ability, height, fitness *etcetera*).

CONCLUSIONS:

Lessons Learned in the Roda



Figure 29 Two young Capoeiristas waiting to go into the roda. Photo taken in Cairu, an island off the coast of Bahia where I first encountered Capoeira in Brazil (2007). Source: Author

The connections between Abolição Oxford and the Crianças Raízes do Abaeté project in Brazil, maintained through the annual student trip, opens up the possibility for connections, transformations and reciprocal links to be forged between Capoeiristas in very different cultural and geographical realities. This can lead to a subtly hybridised form of Capoeira, as teaching methods, imitation, traditional customs, and attitudes of players will ultimately lead to '*reinterpretation and deviation*' (Bayart, 2005). Mestres and practitioners alike have begun to take seriously the idea of a 'European Style' of Capoeira³², highlighting the acknowledgment of a hybridised form, developed largely through media representation, tourism, migration of Brazilians and the growth of several Brazilian groups into international franchises.

Two main conclusions may be drawn using Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* in the context of cultural transposition and in particular, the mobility of Capoeira practices. Firstly, the

³² See www.capoeuropa.com/about-capoeuropa (accessed 7/01/10)

individual's *habitus* will have an effect on the movement of hybridised forms of cultural manifestations, as particular styles and ways of moving may be imitated and stylized through play. Secondly, cross-cultural encounters and the repetition of particular movements and traditions can cause the development of a Capoeira *habitus* within individuals: an individual's set of regular dispositions specific to Capoeira are '*variable...from place to place and time to time*' (Bourdieu, 1987) '*below the level of calculation*', and are strategies of what one 'has to do' rather than to achieve formulated goals (Bourdieu, 1987; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Plainly, Capoeira movements will, through experience, become part of the individual's *habitus*, thus making dispositions appropriate to Capoeira easily accessible for use during a game.

Stylised embodied knowledge can thus be seen to be translated, reinterpreted, assembled and reassembled through the exposure of the body, rather than through verbal explanation or written rules. However, to become proficient in what most Brazilian Mestres (and many international adepts) would consider Capoeira, is to be more than physically able. Tactical play (*malicia*), musical skill, knowledge of songs and adherence to tradition are required of true Capoeiristas. If these factors are undervalued a diluted form will undoubtedly become prevalent. Conversely, if the Capoeira *habitus* is coupled with the unification of tradition, mind-bound tactics and *malicia*: a knowledge of the game grounded in experience, it may appear a more authentic transposition of this cultural manifestation.

The investigation of this largely embodied practice was made more accessible through the use of participatory methods. My own experience and changing knowledge (both embodied and mental), helped me to understand the learning processes in Capoeira and gain more informal and in-depth insights from other practitioners. Participation gave me a greater appreciation of the affective, multisensory spaces that are created and become influential in the learning of a diverse and embodied practice. The use of photography, description, and supplementary video clips, is an attempt to convey these sensual spaces.

Due to space limitations considerable information which influenced, but is not included, in this dissertation might provide further insights into the transposition of cultural practices. However, the discussion does follow the main themes that repeatedly arose in the fieldwork. Consequently, I have not listed every specific difference between the practice of Capoeira in Brazil and the UK, nor attempted to define a 'European Style' of Capoeira. Instead, I have used examples from the changing perception of Capoeiristas whose multisensory, embodied

and affective experiences are in a state of flux, affected, possibly only in the short term, by their encounters with Capoeira played in different cultural, geographical and affective spaces. These changing embodiments and practices in turn can alter the original form of Capoeira over space and time, in a continually evolving hybridisation, through a multiplicit 'system of routes' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).



Figure 30 Junior. Source: Author

Glossary

Definitions from Lewis's glossary in *Ring of Liberation* (1992: 222, 235-237), Essien's glossary in *Capoeira Beyond Brazil* (2008: 115-117), and <http://www.capoeiranation.com/>.

abolição: abolition

apelido: Capoeira nickname, usually reflecting something distinctive about the person's game or often their appearance. E.g. – Mestre Orelha got his name because of his big ears!

bateria: the collective name for the group of instruments used in the Capoeira *roda*.

berimbau: lead instrument of the ensemble of Capoeira instruments. Bowed, stringed instrument played with a stone, a stick and a rattle.

borboleta: butterfly

Capoeirista: a person who plays Capoeira.

cabeçada: a head butting movement used on an opponent when their torso is unprotected.

cocorinha: squatting position. Refers to the defecation position.

comprar o jogo: to 'buy the game' – entering a game in the *roda* by cutting in on another player.

esquiva: 'escape'. Generic name for a defensive escape from an attack.

esquiva lateral: sideways escape. A simple defensive move.

gancho: snapping heel kick.

ginga: the basic Capoeira movement; can take different forms, also referring to fancy footwork, and swaying.

jogo bonito: the beautiful game

leão: lion

Lua Branca: White moon

macaco: monkey. A flight movement started in a squatting position then powerfully leaping backwards onto the hands, legs are brought over the head into standing position.

martelo: 'hammer kick'. One leg, bent at the knee is lifted, and then a powerful kick is executed when the leg is straightened.

meia-lua de compasso: 'half moon in a compass', a spinning kick.

pandeiro: tambourine, part of the ensemble of instruments specific to Capoeira.

pantera: panther

ponteira: point strike executed with one leg.

rasteira: ‘sweeps’. Used to trip someone up with a sweeping leg movement. A basic takedown.

roda: The traditional and formal circle where games of Capoeira take place. Players and musicians with Berimbaus, Pandeiros and other traditional instruments form a circle, enclosing two players that have a game in the middle. New players enter the circle at the foot of the Berimbau when one game is finished or ‘buy’ the game by stepping in and stopping play momentarily, then beginning a new game with the person the new player is facing.

tempestade: storm

vingativa: ‘vengeful’. A counterattack ‘take down’. One leg is bent, the other is swept out directly forward, whilst the arms are used to support the upper body which is lowered over the straightened leg, with the head sideways very close to the ground.

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Music

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Mestre Itapoan and Grupo Ginga (2009) CD, *Vem Camará!*

*Appendices**Appendix 1*

Day	Time	Type of class/level	Venue (see below)
Tuesday	8.00-9.30pm	All levels welcome	East Oxford Games Hall
Wednesday	8.00-9.30pm	Beginners	Oxford Brookes Sports Centre
Thursday	8.00-9.30pm	All levels welcome	East Oxford Games Hall
Saturday	10.00-11.00am	Kids Class ages 5-8	*NEW VENUE*
	11.00-12.00am	Older Kids ages 9-14	East Oxford Games Hall

Taken from <http://www.abolicao.co.uk/classes> accessed 13/01/10

Appendix 2: Tempestade's account of Capoeira

The capitalised headings in the diary entries are the author's initial note on this account

Capoeira: The movement of a cultural manifestation

The answers to these questions will form part of the data collection for my undergraduate dissertation in Geography at the University of Oxford. A pseudonym will be used to refer to your comments. I am very grateful for your time and responses.

Name: CONFIDENTIAL

Capoeira Name (and meaning in English): Tempestade (storm)

Gender: Female

Age: 24 years

Occupation: PhD Student in Astronomy

Nationality: Portuguese

Home Address: Jesus College, New Inn Hall Street, OX1 2DL

Name of Mestre: Luis Negao

How long have you been playing Capoeira?

8 months

Where did you first encounter Capoeira and what did you think it was about?

In my hometown in Portugal when I was little. People do it around the city quite often there. I thought it was a fight disguised as a dance (but I think that's what people told me at the time).

How often do you play Capoeira?

I usually play once or twice a week

Have you been to Brazil?

The Abolicao trip 2009 is my first time in Brazil.

If yes, what differences (if any) have you recognised between the way it is played in the UK and Brazil?

I think the Capoeira played in Brazil is generally more energetic and skilful than that in the UK. I think Brazilians tend to be more 'malandros' (tricky) than people in the UK in their game. They seem more creative.

What are your reasons for continuing to play Capoeira?

It's a fun game. I always wanted to be able to do those acrobatic movements and never seriously tried before and now Capoeira is a way of activating that. I love the mood that the music puts you in. It doesn't matter how bad your day was, when the music starts you forget about it and concentrate on the game, so it's also a nice escape from routine.

Please give an account of how your opinions/abilities are changing about Capoeira whilst in Brazil and since coming back:

Possible areas to include:

- *New moves*
- *New influences*
- *Other players*
- *Where you are playing and the effect this has on your game and perception of Capoeira*
- *What you want to improve because of particular experiences etc.*

Tuesday, 14th July

CONFINEMENT AND CONTROL

We played Capoeira at the project during the day and with Mestre Diaola in the evening. In both places I was impressed by how small space they have available for their practices and realised it is a very good way of improving the control of space. It made me understand why sometimes Negao only lets us use half of the space of the gym.

I remember I was very impressed with how good the little kids were.

SHAME AND ENERGY

Mestre Diaola gave us a very varied class with Maculele and everything. It's very good to put us in an energetic mode (lots of Axe) and to make us less shy with each other.

His class was very good and he taught us some good defense/attack moves that were new-ish to me.

Wednesday, 15th July

SELF REFLECTION...

We practiced in the project with Mestre Rupi mostly kicks and some small sequences. I realised I don't know how to do the meia lua de compasso very well and I want to improve that on this trip.

DIFFERENCES RECOGNISED...

Also, Brazilians do the same movements in a different rhythm from us (that have been learning in England) and I find it hard to follow their rhythm when I try to do it at the same time as them. But playing with them is very easy though.

Thursday, 16th July

SKILL AND FLUIDITY

Today's practice was roda. I saw some amazingly skilful kids play. The rhythm of the roda was quite energetic so it was dominated by kicks. Watching the kids play I realised that they are very good at putting together a big sequence of kicks and I want to try to do that more.

PERSONAL AMBITION

I also want to be able to stretch my legs more when I kick because that makes the movements look a lot better. I noticed it doesn't take a big variety of kicks to look good, but doing them really well makes a big difference in the way Capoeira looks.

AWARENESS OF OTHERS

- I noticed some other players that I particularly like their style: Nathalie (Fumaca) – even with an immobilised arm her game is really good to watch. She does all the movements really well and she is very fast.
- Abelha (the little girl with big eyes). I also like her style of playing a lot. Again she does all the kicks really well.
- The Brazilian boys (the teenagers, I don't know their names yet). All of them are incredible. I really like it that they play soft for beginners but are capable of a really tough game. I find it incredible that they already have such good control at such a young age.

Friday, 17th July

AMBITIONS DEVELOP

Today we had roda in the Project with Mestre Rupí (*incorrect, he is not a Mestre*). We saw two of the kids doing 8 sequences from Mestre Bimba and they look really useful. I would like to learn them while I'm here.

Again roda is at a fast rhythm so it's mostly kicks and I really want to improve/decrease my clumsiness. I need to improve my flexibility too.

OVERCOMING FEAR

I think I'm getting less scared of going in the roda.

Monday, 20th July

TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Today we had practice with Rupí again. We worked on our kicks and in some counter-attack movements like vingativa, martelo and rasteira.

In the beginning of the class he made us separate into lines and take it in turns attacking everyone in the same row. This is a great way of learning because we exchange partners very often and also get to do the same movements repeatedly to different people so that we perfect them a bit by the end.

PERSONAL GOALS

I need to learn Meia lua de compassa properly. I also don't have much balance when I have to do a movement in the ginga. It might be OK in practice when I'm just doing the same move over and over again, but when I have to do it with ginga in roda it always comes out very clumsy.

Appendix 3: Excerpt from author's account of experiences in Brazil

An example of notes from author's diary written in Brazil – with thematic annotations in capitals

13th July

STYLE: INITIAL REACTIONS

Leão, Filhote, Abaeté and Fumaça commented on how fast Rupi moved when he played and how he waited between moves to see what you would do next, ready to respond accordingly or to trick you. They said they liked his distinct style and that a lot of them had similar postures to Negao – in particular Rupi who apparently trained with the same group (Kirubé) as Negao with Mestre Orelha (Big ears).

STYLE: BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Negao spoke of the different evolutions and generations of Capoeira. After Capoeira Regional (founded by Bimba) comes Capoeira Contemporaria – his area and generation of Capoeira.

14th July

CAPOEIRA 'POLITICS'

Negao warns Pandeiro not to get involved in Capoeira politics when speaking of different Mestres and opinions of his Mestre in Birmingham. Negao says he fell out with his Mestre (Orelha) and they hadn't spoken for 4 years.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS OF CLASS AT PROJECT

VENUE AND PARTICIPANTS: Inside a small dark room, a mixed group of about ten people were training using a punchbag hung from rafters in the ceiling, cones and sticks about four to five foot high held in place by cement in a small bucket. The group consisted of:

1 young girl

3 young boys

2 teenage boys

2 teenage girls

1 adult man

They put the training props away when we arrived and begin to ginga in pairs. Then train for about half an hour – 2 by 2 down the middle of the room practicing four to five sequences of an au followed by a negativa. Cd player with Capoeira music in background. I kept getting it wrong. Then we had a roda (instruments were used for this instead of CD player) and a little samba at the end.

FIRST RODA

Roda was energetic and fun. – I only went in once or twice though.

Negao seemed to feel the need to test the young Brazilians – trying to take down one of the teenage boys (Finzinho, 23 years old) in a determined manner.

Rupi was very good – extremely quick to get back to Parallel position after executing a move and waiting in this safe and sturdy position from which any new move would be easy; waiting for your next move and planning his. Tricking and faking all the time.

SAMBA

The Brazilians were surprisingly shy with the samba – except the teenage girls who were very good. Us English made more effort but obviously were quite rubbish

AFTER TRAINING

Rupi instructed us to take a break for twenty minutes to chat to each other. Confident Brazilians (Finzinho) were not bothered about chatting away in Portuguese even if I clearly didn't understand the majority. Also very comfortable with casual tactile behaviour, one hand on my shoulder while talking, always at a slightly closer distance than would seem normal to two English people talking.

MUSIC

Sidney – music teacher at project. Did a little singing workshop with us for ten minutes.

TRAINING WITH MESTRE DIAOLA AND JEQUITIBA

VENUE AND MESTRE: Diaola –40 years old, went to school with Negao. Class was just under 1.5 hours.

Class held in front of Diaola's house on swept and painted floor aside from the car parking spot. Had to walk through fairly rough, dark neighbourhood to get there.

Family sat watching, one guy with leg in cast lay with shutters open half watching, half watching TV. One child – 1-2years old (approx.) toddled about and did kicks when her mum told her to.

Music was played on a CD through a TV that was in the porch of the house.

Only 3-4 Brazilian guys (all looked in early twenties) were in the class alongside us. Small woman (in late 20s) joined in the roda at the end.

CUSTOM

On way there passed a woman in green Capoeira trousers and Negao said she had been turned away from the class for not wearing whites. Leao was made to remove his shoes despite asking to keep them on as he had an injured toe.

VARIATION AND ENERGY

To loosen up and get people energised we did some Maculele. Lots of energy from other players and this was really enjoyable.

Did proper stretches to warm up. Did two by two sequence exercises to train – very useful and helpful. Swapped partner after every few minutes.

Brazilian players were very energetic, good, helpful players with a good sense of humour.

RODA

The players were excellent and very fast moving. Singing was really loud and kept a brilliant energy in the roda.

PERSONAL AFFECT OF THE BRAZILIAN CAPOEIRA

‘ I feel far more at ease practicing with Brazilians and in the Brazilian roda despite them being far more skilful than English players generally. They push me, trick me, try to trip me keeping me on my toes, and they don’t ever speak in the roda. They play. And in turn I have to respond and don’t think of anything else except the music and what they’re doing and what I might do next’

Charlatao and Pandeiro get mugged in the evening.

15th July

MUSIC

Pandeiro workshop in morning in a cultural centre next to the Lagoa de Abaete. Mix of people in attendance – some children, adults, some Capoeiristas from Kirube. Sat in a circle to learn. Learnt the beats for Angola and Regional as well as Samba.

Good atmosphere to learn, teachers efficient and clear. End of session – cool atmosphere split into three groups playing different beats combined and changing. Made me feel like I could actually make a good sound from an instrument for once.

CASUAL PRACTICE

Went to beach with Berimbau, Pandeiro and with intention of learning Capoeira songs. However, soon realised our knowledge was very poor of songs, as Abaete tried to teach Fumaca, but Tempestade pointed out most of it made no sense and weren’t actual Portuguese words. The session fizzled out and we went to walk/sun bathe instead!

TRAINING

Very good class. Stretches at beginning – made me sweat immediately. Followed by two by two, facing forwards, repeating kicks down centre of room, so moving forward whilst executing moves. Each move done about 4 times each then swapped to another. My partner was very fast (Enrique) but good as it pushed me.

PERSONAL: find sideways on very hard and when do repeat as or mortelo as I get very dizzy.

After long period of training in this way, we have a roda.

RODA

PERSONAL: I'm the second pair in, playing with approx. 11 year old girl (Flavia) who wears me out completely, but has a really fun game. She constantly keeps moving and kicking and avoiding kicks all the time.

Very atmospheric and sweaty roda. Negao walked in towards the end and finally looked pleased with us. Towards the end, Rupi plays the Atabaque vigorously, engaging really high energy in the roda at a fast pace. Capoeira players mixed between English and Brazilian all the time.

SPEECHES – end of roda and Ben makes a speech of thanks and appreciation of the children's skill. Then Rupi makes a speech. Then he asks everyone in the group if they want to say something. Self deprecation always works on my part. When Rupi asks my name, Negao says I don't have one, so Rupi declares me 'Lua Branca' (white moon), he gives no explanation but solved a communication issue.

POST TRAINING PLAY – talking to kids and many of them continue to practice Capoeira moves, sometimes falling into playful wrestling. Others practice more acrobatic moves on the hard concrete. As I struggle to hold a Berimba, Junior comes over and teaches me a little – he was very patient and helpful. Everyone was buzzing after the energy of the roda and we stay talking until after dark.

EUROPEAN STYLE?

Leao asks Negao if he thinks if it is possible for a European style of Capoeira to emerge? Negao replies that we can't play Capoeira like Brazilians because they're born into it, surrounded by its sounds and movements etc. He avoids the style question, saying kick boxing is very similar, and says about the first English Mestre (NAME?) and Capoeira has been strong in the US for nearly 15 years so there are many Mestres there. Problem with growth is that people like competition and in Brasil Capoeira isn't considered wholly a 'sport'...Insurance would be massive.

Other guys (Filhote, Abaete, Pandeiro, Charlatao) comment that footage of competitions they'd seen was not like real Capoeira anyway.

GENDER

Leao mentioned that he thinks Brazilian girls feel they have to try 60% harder to prove themselves in the roda as all the men have such a macho image and that Capoeira used to be a solely male activity. 'You end up with these really tough feisty couple of female Capoeiristas in each group'.

PERSONAL: 'I can still hear the Berimbau now if I close my eyes'

16th July

Went to central Salvador with Tempestade in the morning.

2/3pm – Training at Projeto – Tempestade and I there earlier than the rest of the group. Begin to ginga with the group.

RODA

Today is one of the official roda days so after a little ginga-ing we went straight into roda.

PERSONAL GAMES

Was second in the roda again which made me a little nervous as we'd had no warm up etc. Played with Flavia again, then Finzinho. Really enjoyed his game as he wore his cheeky smile the whole time and challenged me, and we tricked each other a lot; he looked shocked when I blocked kicks, tried to do rasteiras and grab his ankles from escivas. I felt much better with my negativas – much smoother and more flowing and I was taking more control of the game. I even jumped in the roda voluntarily towards the end to play Flavia which I haven't done for ages. I also played the Pandeiro during the roda which I enjoyed taking a new role in the game.

Rupi and Abaete had a particularly tough game – think Rupí was proving a point and pulled Abaete's shirt over his head to really drive it home! I have seen Negao do this to younger more proficient players in the past. Almost a very primitive way of showing up the younger players and reconsolidating the older players authority.

SINGING

I felt the songs were led (The Ladainha?) by members of the Oxford group too much today – we don't know the words well enough to make it exciting, varied or loud enough. I keep finding myself singing while I'm actually playing in the roda, then having to bite my tongue and try to focus on the game!

STRUCTURE

To create the shape of the roda everybody holds hands around the Berimbau. It seems their rodas always begin with the first player crouching at the Berimbau leading the Ladainha after the Berimbau and Pandeiros have been playing for a while. They sing for a few minutes before starting to play when the chorus part is allowed to join in and the clapping begins. There is not as much buying of the game usually until the end when Rupí says this is ok, there is more a circulation of players according to position standing in the roda.

SAMBA

Followed roda immediately with no break. Lots of energy and turned into a conga of crazy dancing around the room. Everyone let go and really enjoyed themselves.

DISCIPLINE

Negao told us off for not all wearing white and insisted in future that on roda days we must do this even though Rupí was too nice to say anything. Said red is too violent a colour – gives the wrong vibes.

PERSONAL

I am craving total immersion into the culture, as we seem to have a tourist group thing going on as we are such a big group always going round together visiting places and going out to eat.

17th July

RODA

In morning. No warm p, straight into roda. First two kids (Abaete's fave, 'black as tar') perform sequences of Bimba very proficiently and looked like something very useful to learn.

SING!

Halfway through roda, Rupi stopped the play and music to give long speech, which included telling us to make a noise even if we didn't know the words to the songs as it would still keep the roda going.

PERSONAL GAME: Played a young boy who looked very serious and knew the songs very well, but then cracked a big smile halfway through the game and seemed much more relaxed and cheerful.

SAMBA

Again followed the roda.

SALVE

Now always put hands on hearts after roda while Rupi and sometimes Negao make speeches/ say something about the roda and give advice. Rupi then does a Berimbau solo, followed by a hearty SALVE as we raise the hands that were on our chest to the sky. Then the front of the line doubles back on the rest of the line giving everyone five in the group.

MUSIC WORKSHOP/ STORY



2.30pm – Lots of instruments, Sidney. Kids arrived in dribs and drabs as we set up drums and seats in a circle. Began with a story that a lady involved in the project read out by Mestre Didi in Portuguese (Tempestade translated). They said they asked the children at the end what they understood from the story as they all had a meaning/moral. This one was about preservation. It described a man who

went to the woods and couldn't catch anything, but when he did he killed it all and then couldn't get any more etc.

CLASS STRUCTURE

Outside in a circle. Learn basic beats and different parts of the hand to use. There weren't enough instruments/drums mainly to go around everybody so I let Flavia have the drum I was playing. Our playing and learning was interspersed with Sidney and his son (big smile boy, about 6 years old, incredible) and teenage guy (helper?) doing solo/fast/improvised pieces to demonstrate what could be done with percussion with enough expertise. I didn't actually learn much but that kid's joy of playing made my day!

AFRO-DANCE

Teacher was the most energetic Brazilian I've ever come across! Most of the guys continued to play Berimbaus with Sidney outside while we jumped around from side to side in the small room where we train Capoeira. It was really uplifting – quite hard work too as we were jumping up and down all over the place! A couple of younger boys joined in but the majority were girls. Loved this class which I would normally think I would hate.

PURCHASES

Sidney was selling Berimbaus, that small namesless beaded instrument and Pandeiros. They were made by him and the children. I bought a Pandeiro (as did Charlatao and Fumaca) and Pandeiro bought a berimbau, for which he was very grateful.

POLITICS?

Leao comments that 'it's not politico de Capoeira' it's money or it's women. But perhaps that is politics.

WEEKEND – SPENT AWAY FROM PROJECT, ON SATURDAY LATE AFTERNOON/EVENING PLAYED PERCUSSION WITH RUPI AND MESTRE DIAOLA BY HOTEL SWIMMING POOL. DIDN'T LEARN MUCH BUT QUITE ATMOSPHERIC. THEN WENT ON A LITTLE TOO LONG AND THE BRAZILIANS SANG JOVIAL CAPOEIRA SONGS, BUT WE DIDN'T KNOW THE WORDS SO WAS A LITTLE TIRING AND POINTLESS FOR US. WENT OUT WITH THE CAP. TEACHERS. STRANGE TO SEE THEM IN SOCIAL SITUATION AS THEY COMMAND SO MUCH RESPECT IN CLASSES, BUT JUST HAVE FUN AND GET QUITE DRUNK AND FLIRTY OUTSIDE!

20th July

TRAINING

Began in line with 'Salve' and then ten minutes of ginga-ing in pairs occasionally swapping partners. Then got into three lines with one person delivering kicks to the whole line then swapping. Quite good to get started. In my group: Pinguine, Fumaca, big eyes with attitude girl and two plaits at front girl. Then lined up along walls doing four pairs at a time in the middle practicing different kicks and defences – firstly one person does armada de frente and the other person does vingativa ('revenge').

Another move: melua de compasa with an esciva and leg grab so the offender ends up in a position to start a negativa.

PERSONAL

Felt intimidated by Fumaca's superior skills as she plays quite seriously. For the pair work in the middle, my partner was Junior which was great as he is good humoured, but also a good, tricky Capoeirista, but not intimidating. While waiting spoke to Flavia, Junior and 2 plaits girl (plus Pinguine) which was cool. Fave move was defending the melua de compasa with an esciva and leg grab so the offender ends up in a position to start a negativa. Flowed well and looks good as well as being effective. In mini roda I had some good games but felt I got bought out too quickly (grr Charlatao) and I didn't buy in quickly enough as I was being fussy as to who I wanted to play (Brazilians preferably, but not the smallest ones as 'their low sweeping kicks make my back creak!)

Appendix 3: The ginga

Insert either photo or video footage of the ginga



Appendix 4: Translation of song lyrics from front cover

Chorus:

I am moving with the rocking of the waves,

I am moving with the rocking of the ocean,

I am going, I am moving with the rocking of the ocean

I am going and playing Capoeira

Following my aspiration,

I am going with the energy of the roda,

On the swing of the Berimbau

Chorus

Listening to the story's of the Mestre,

I imagine where I could possible get to.

Give wings to my imagination

I am light to fly

Chorus

The wind that blows at the beach,

In the sand swings the palm tree

On the sound of the Berimbau in the roda

Swings the first Capoeira game

Chorus

Learning what the Mestre how to play,

Artist, painting on the canvas

Today on the ocean I am playing

Tomorrow it is at the canvas

Appendix 5: Video clips of Capoeira on attached CD. Source: Author

Clip 1: Example of reciprocal movement of Capoeira by experienced players

Clip 2: Afro-dance class at CRA

Clip 3: Demonstration of energetic roda and malicia by experienced players