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# Introduction

## A Professional Pilgrimage and the Origins of This Book

I was a little nervous as I packed my bag on the first day that I would officially start my work studying capoeira in Brazil. Camera? Check. Notebook? Check. Uniform? I had that too, though I hoped not to need it. I was hoping to do more observing than participating at this first encounter. I was told to meet Mestre Iuri Santos<sup>1</sup> and two members from the Estrela do Norte group, the group I trained with back in the United States, outside of the FICA academy at 9:30 am. I arrived on time, but no one from my home group was there. I was on my own, negotiating my first interactions with the students of FICA Bahia. Was there a single Brazilian among this group? I really was not sure. Everyone was chatting in Portuguese, but most of them looked like foreigners. Was that Japanese guy from São Paulo or Tokyo? I talked to the highest ranking person I could find, hoping to explain my predicament and find a quiet corner to hide in until my group arrived and I could be properly introduced. No such luck.

“Do you have clothes?”

“I do, yes.”

“You can change clothes over there. Make yourself at home.”<sup>2</sup>

Well that settled it, I had clothes and I was expected to get dressed and join the group. Okay, this might be all right I thought. Sure the uniforms are different, the people are sure different, but it is the same martial art. Right? Same instruments, same songs, same movements. Well, maybe not exactly. This was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I knew they would be good but had no idea

how different their style of capoeira would be from mine. What am I doing here? I thought about trying to slip out unnoticed, but by this point my group from Indiana had arrived. The fact that our teacher, Mestre Iuri, joined the circle while his two other students, Camille and Jerome, remained outside observing in their street clothes did little to calm my nerves, but I saw no way out. I was going to have to go through with it.

I sighed inwardly with relief when I saw who my partner would be. It was one of Mestre Iuri's friends who I had met a few nights earlier. He had already seen me play and knew what to expect. In the back of my mind, I wondered if it was just luck that had us lined up so that we would play, or if he had purposely put himself in the right spot to help me save face. I was nervous. After all, just a few minutes beforehand, I had been yelled at by the *mestre* (master) in charge of the event because I was not singing. How, I wondered, do I sing when I cannot understand a word you are saying? I moved my mouth like a fish, hoping he would not notice that I was not actually making a sound. When I began to play, I was shaking from head to toe. I fell a few times and got caught in every trap that my partner set, but we laughed our way through it and he gave me a great big hug at the end.

Afterward, I thought, that was not really so bad. Sure, I was horribly out-matched, but I survived my first FICA *roda*, escaping without a mark. Wait, what is this? Why is everyone looking at me? Why is the *mestre* headed this way? A kiss on the hand, and I am being led back into the *roda*. *Que droga* (damn), I thought, this is not going to be good. A short song praising my *mestre*; was this sincere or sarcastic, the art of *malícia*? No time to analyze, time to focus on the kick coming at my head. Judging from the smirk on his face, that was not the right defense. Why am I lying on the floor? How did this happen? Every time he knocks me down, he looms over me and holds up his fingers, counting how many times I have fallen. This lump in my throat is a familiar feeling; I know what comes next. Please take mercy on me before the tears come spilling out. Martial artists do not cry. He runs out of fingers and finally the game is over, and I exit as gracefully as possible thinking, "You have got to be kidding me. This is the group I am going to be working with? The study I am hoping will launch my career?" At the moment, I was nearly paralyzed with fear, and the thought of abandoning my research agenda crossed my mind more times than I would like to admit. However, when the first sting of humiliation wore off, I realized I had at least made a memorable entrance into this community. It was time to get to work.

As Bira Almeida, author and capoeira *mestre* says:

To live the Capoeira philosophy requires sweat, mental discipline, sometimes pain, and always the magical experience of kneeling under the berimbau ... One must feel the philosophy from inside out because only his or her personal participation will make it real. (Almeida 1986: 7)

I can speak of this phenomenon because I have experienced it personally “from the inside out.” I can offer a robust view of capoeira because of my own engagement as an observing participant. I have used this phrasing, rather than the more commonly used “participant-observation,” to indicate that my *primary* role as a participant in this community and the majority of my time in class was spent training alongside the other students, but I also recorded my observations of these sessions as soon as possible after leaving the academy each day. Increasingly, reflexive ethnographers teach us that “learning through practice involves not simply mimicking other’s but creating one’s own emplaced skill and knowing in ways that are acceptable to others” (Pink 2009: 36). An important component of learning, either as a student or as an ethnographer, is coming to embody practice in a culturally sanctioned way.

Merleau-Ponty (1989) laid the groundwork for much of this work through his focus on the body in the act of perception. This perspective encourages us to *see* beyond the visual, pun intended. The notion that people perceive the world through five distinct senses is not a universal truth, but one “folk model” among others (Pink 2009: 51). Nearly five years of being an observing participant in both Brazil and the United States afforded me an entrance into this community that might otherwise have been difficult to access and inducted me into a bodily understanding of *capoeiristas*’ practice. Embodied dimensions of behavior are often obscured in conversations but displayed and experienced in practice (Pink 2009: 84), which is why interviews or mere observations would not have sufficed to give me an insider’s view of this performance art.

Because participant-observation fieldwork has become the hallmark of anthropology, it would be easy for me to gloss over the messiness of this technique with disciplinary jargon. However, my engagement as a participating observer was not as simple as taking classes and writing notes. I was actually engaged in apprenticeship, becoming more like my study subjects with each subsequent class as the *mestre* attempted to break my body of its old habits. I had to bring a level of self-consciousness to this learning process (Pink 2009: 72), not just learning the movements, but thinking in a very abstract way about *how* my fellow students and I were learning the movements. Doing this while gasping for air or suspended upside down in a headstand was not an easy task. At times, I wondered why I could not have been one of those anthropologists that sits on the sidelines quietly taking notes, but in the end, this study would have been largely impossible without such vividly lived experiences.

In a project such as mine that involves direct and intensive participation in the very activity that I study, the necessity of using the body as a research tool gives tangible reality to theory. Throughout the long process of learning capoeira, my physical and theoretical orientations to the world have changed. In fact, my body taught me things about capoeira that my mind was not ready to grasp. Maintaining a superficial Cartesian division between mind and body impoverishes

our overall learning experience; “embodiment is what makes the knowledge experientially real” (Strathern 1996: 164). As Nick Crossley (2006) points out, all body work is undertaken within the context of a network of social relations. One neither passively replicates societal norms nor acts with complete free will, but negotiates an embodied identity in the space between these two extremes. Therefore, one of my goals in writing this book is to convey the sensuality of experience that is central to learning a practice like capoeira.

For a performance anthropologist, capoeira is like a dream come true. It combines music, dance, sparring, and acrobatics into one ritual that can be used for resistance or celebration, for politics or play. Capoeira is a metagenre (see MacAloon 1984; see also Marion 2008), meaning that while composed of these individual performance elements, taken together they constitute something greater than the sum of the individual parts. What intrigued me the most, however, about my initial introduction to capoeira was the intense dedication of its non-Brazilian practitioners. Capoeira was much more than a pastime to them; it was a way of life. I have seen practitioners uproot their lives, quit their jobs, and leave their partners all in service of becoming better *capoeiristas*. This is particularly striking when I consider that capoeira originated with Afro-Brazilian slaves, and authentic capoeira continues to be associated with being black and Brazilian. Most of the individuals in my study do not fit these parameters.

I first encountered capoeira as an undergraduate student with the Austin, Texas branch of the Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola (FICA). FICA is one of the largest and most well-known *Capoeira Angola* franchises. The term “franchise” is not widely used in the capoeira community but is one I find useful when referring to capoeira organizations with one flagship group, normally located in Brazil, and several satellite groups located throughout Brazil or the rest of the world. Both discourse and dress in the satellite groups celebrate their relationship to the franchise. By wearing the group’s logo and frequently invoking the standards and expectations of the primary *mestre*, students are inducted into the franchise’s imagined community (see de Campos Rosario, Stephens, and Delamont 2010: 109). These satellite groups sometimes, but not always, pay dues or royalties to the flagship group, periodically visit the flagship group, or fundraise on behalf of the flagship group, which is often economically disadvantaged relative to the satellite groups in the case of international franchises. Sometimes, social dramas (Turner 1987) erupt between the satellite groups and the flagship group, which will lead to either attempts at repairing the relationship or to the splintering of the satellite group into its own organization. Both of the groups with which I have trained originated out of a schism between their founder and subordinate teachers.

The FICA franchise was established by Mestre Cobra Mansa and his two close colleagues Mestre Valmir, who oversees the FICA Bahia chapter, and Mestre Jurandir, who oversees FICA Seattle. All three of these gentlemen emerged from the tutelage of Mestre Moraes of the Grupo Capoeira Angola de Pelourinho

(GCAP). Mestre Cobra Mansa is Brazilian and also holds American citizenship because of his status as an international cultural figure. He is officially based out of Washington, D.C., but spends a large percentage of his time traveling around the world teaching workshops. He also spends several months of the year in Brazil overseeing his charitable institution, Kilombo Tenonde, through which he teaches urban youth (and international volunteers) about native ecology and permaculture. The official headquarters of FICA may be in Washington, D.C., but the symbolic heart of FICA is located in Salvador da Bahia under the direction of Mestre Valmir. There are also satellite groups located throughout South America, North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

The international chapters of FICA generally defer to Cobra Mansa's authority, yet he encourages each group to develop according to their own spirit, respecting cultural differences that are deeply rooted among his diverse body of students. Capoeira historian Gerard Taylor said that FICA "provides a model for a democratically run group, and manages to maintain a balance between being open (that is, listening to what participants think is important), and at the same time being traditional in the sense of holding to *Capoeira Angola* rituals and that Cobra Mansa is clearly the mestre of the group" (2007: 213). Mestre Cobra Mansa gives each branch of the organization considerable latitude to determine their own direction, but no one questions his position at the helm of the organization. Throughout this work, I indicate which branch of the FICA organization I am discussing by following the FICA abbreviation with a city name (i.e., FICA Stockholm). However, because FICA Bahia is my primary referent for this work, it is often simply referred to as FICA.

In 2002, after initially approaching my undergraduate mentor at Texas A&M University with a half-baked plan to study anthropology and dance, I was "gently" redirected toward the study of capoeira. My research methods were rather loosely constructed and essentially involved visiting FICA Austin for several training sessions. I was eager to try the "deep hanging out" that I had read about in my anthropology classes, but was not entirely sure of what that meant. Coming from a rather sheltered, middle-class suburban upbringing, I was not prepared for what I would encounter. My first session was prosaic enough. The training session took place at a local recreation center not terribly different from the dance studios I had known as an adolescent. The second observation, however, took place in a commune where people of roughly my age, sometimes with children, grew their own food and practiced a variety of arts including capoeira. This was the first indication I had that I would be studying a subculture with an alternative value system rather than just a fitness club.

The timing of my involvement with this group was less than ideal, but ultimately quite fitting given the line of inquiry I would follow in my later work. After a single introductory session, I was encouraged to attend a series of workshops being taught by a visiting capoeira instructor from Rio de Janeiro. At the time, I

did not realize the significance of this event. Right out of the gate, I was encountering evidence of an international network of teachers and students, which confers legitimacy upon both parties as international invitations add to a teacher's prestige and training with a Brazilian ensures that foreigners understand how things really work. The workshop had been designed for people who had been practicing capoeira for at least a year. As a complete novice, I was barred from the partner exercises everyone else was doing and forced to practice my attack moves with a chair. My attacks were evidently less intimidating than I would like to think; a stray kitten eventually jumped in the chair and lazily swatted at my legs while I poured sweat and wondered if I was really cut out for this kind of work.

When I moved to pursue my graduate studies in Bloomington, Indiana, I was pleased to learn that there was a local capoeira group where I could continue both my physical training and my academic study of capoeira. This group, however, had a different affiliation than the first chapter with which I had trained. This group was originally established as a satellite chapter of Grupo Acupe. The latter is based in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, and is headed by Mestre Marrom who is a former student of Mestre João Pequeno. In October of 2006, this group became independent of Mestre Marrom and adopted its new name Estrela do Norte.

The leader of Estrela do Norte is Mestre Iuri Santos, who moved from Brazil to Bloomington in 1998. While the present work deals only tangentially with Estrela do Norte, my entrance into the capoeira community was profoundly shaped by members of this group, Mestre Iuri in particular. My performance style bears the mark of his instruction. From January of 2005 through July of 2008, when I officially began my research in Brazil, I trained with this group two or three times per week and participated in many performances with them in Bloomington and around the greater Indianapolis area. The members of this group are hungry for information about capoeira and eagerly engaged me in academic discourse about my research. My ideas have been profoundly colored by my experiences with them, and I am continually grateful for their support.

Like both Jensen (1998) and Grazian (2004), my domestic research site was a welcome respite from the demands of academic life. Jensen took refuge at the Rose Bowl, a honky-tonk in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, and Grazian felt himself drawn to the local jazz clubs surrounding the University of Chicago. They were both seeking genuine intimacy that seemed lacking in the ivory tower. Capoeira groups across the United States attract university students and other intellectuals, so I cannot say I felt the same break between town and gown as I moved to and from our rehearsal space. However, because practices took place at a local charter school, our group attracted students of all ages, and it was refreshing to encounter more demographic diversity than was the norm on campus.

Clearly, the domestic portion of my field research was meaningful both personally and professionally, but knowing how important traveling to Brazil was for members of the capoeira community, I was committed to undertaking fieldwork

abroad as well. That I would be working in Brazil was a given, and narrowing this down to a particular city was not much harder. Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, commonly referred to as either Salvador or just Bahia, is popularly regarded as the cradle of capoeira. In reality, there is evidence that historical developments took place in Rio de Janeiro and Recife among other places, but Bahia nonetheless remains the center of most *capoeiristas'* fantasies. The city stars in the dreams of foreign *capoeiristas* who desire immersion in the world of capoeira. These individuals romanticize the city, imagining that capoeira permeates every aspect of social life. One foreign *capoeirista* told me he thought it would be like Hollywood with capoeira celebrities on every corner. In reality, however, this city of nearly three million inhabitants is much like any other city in which most of the residents have jobs, families, and social lives that do not revolve around capoeira.

This realization can be hard for some *capoeiristas* who prefer the staged authenticity (MacCannell 1976) of the Pelourinho district, where UNESCO has restored the quaint pastel-colored colonial buildings. Here the forlorn twang of the *berimbau* (a percussive, single-stringed instrument) really does ring out from every corner and every trinket shop. In an area that comprises just a few city blocks, there are numerous capoeira academies and at least two well-regarded instrument fabrication shops. Pelourinho, however, is also populated by the poor, hungry, and criminal elements of society, throwing the haves and have-nots into stark contrast with one another. Thus, Bahia, and particularly Pelourinho, is an ideal site for investigating the negotiations between foreigners and Brazilians who together comprise the imagined community of capoeira.

On a preliminary research visit to Bahia in July of 2005, I attended training sessions with Grupo Acupe under the leadership of Mestre Marrom. This academy is well off the beaten path, and most tourists would only visit this academy if they had a personal connection to the group. My taxi driver even had trouble finding the street and eventually dropped me off and told me to walk the rest of the way. As I was a student of his own protégé, Mestre Marrom welcomed me graciously into his group for my brief visit, even refusing payment because I was already a paying member of the Indiana branch. I was to find that this graciousness was actually quite remarkable, and most *mestres* expect foreigners to pay a fee for attending class regardless of their affiliation.

Despite being able to train for no cost, I was not free from other obligations that come with being a relatively wealthy visitor. For example, he asked me to take photos of the academy highlighting the deterioration of the building: fallen rafters, exposed wiring, and out-of-date plumbing. He hoped I would use them in grant applications to help him create an office space and a library for his students. Unfortunately, the aforementioned schism between Mestre Marrom and Mestre Iuri prevented us from collaborating on any such applications. What this experience did lend to my research, however, was the dual sense of camaraderie and obligation extended by members of the local group to visiting members from

abroad. It also instilled in me a sense of respect for what these *mestres* are trying to do for their students. Whereas many of the foreign *capoeiristas* who I write about here tend to see learning capoeira as an end in and of itself, many *mestres* see capoeira as a tool for mentoring at-risk youth in their communities.

During the following summer, 2006, I returned to Salvador da Bahia for a two-month long feasibility study. During the time that I was in Bahia, Mestre Iuri and his family were also in town. Mestre Iuri and I attended a class at Mestre Curio's academy in the Pelourinho district. Mestre Iuri was charged a lower rate than was I because he was from Salvador, but I was barely left with enough cash to pay for my taxi home that evening. In contrast to my experience with Mestre Marrom during the previous summer, I was treated as an outsider and was charged an exorbitant amount for taking class with the well-known teacher. I also took classes with lesser-known instructors in town and found that teaching such classes for foreign tourists is a mainstay of their economic stability. In comparing these two field trips, I concluded that there is a great difference between visiting Bahia as a member of a satellite group and as a free agent that lacks the proper credentials of group membership, a topic that I explore more fully in chapter 4.

In 2008, I undertook a more extended period of fieldwork. My arrival coincided with another of Mestre Iuri's visits to Bahia; this time he brought two students from our group with him. Mestre Iuri has led a number of such trips for his students since his arrival in Indiana. Past trips have involved training with Mestre Marrom, visiting other academies, and going on various touristic excursions.

The trip in 2008 was the first official trip under the group's new title, which gave students the freedom to train at a number of different locations. We spent several evenings training and attending events at the Pierre Verger Foundation, an organization that introduces local children to a variety of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, including capoeira. The building also houses a fairly extensive library on Afro-Brazilian culture. However, the bulk of the Indiana students' two-week trip was spent touring the city and taking a weekend excursion to the countryside. Mestre Iuri had been planning this group trip for a year, but it was a surprisingly small group that ultimately decided to go. Financial concerns as the U.S. dollar hit an all-time low, combined with tightened visa requirements, may be to blame more than a lack of interest among the Indiana students. Though steeped in the history and lore of capoeira, the two students who did accompany Mestre Iuri did not know what to expect from their visit to Brazil.

## Methods

After two weeks of touring and training with members of the Bloomington group, I began my official affiliation with FICA Bahia. I chose to conduct my research at this particular academy because it attracts a large number of foreign students, and during my time in Bahia, there were students from more than twenty-five different countries who participated in classes and *rodas* (weekly performance events). The



FICA Bahia academy is located on the fifth floor of a commercial building on Rua Carlos Gomez, a main street connecting the historic Pelourinho area to the more affluent neighborhoods of Campo Grande, Vitoria, and Barra. This is the area known as the *centro*, which has unfortunately been described by some Salvador residents as “a crack den,” and this street in particular is known for muggings and petty theft. It is adjacent to the area known as Dois de Julio, which boasts one other capoeira academy, the Associação de Capoeira Angola Navio Negroiro (ACANNE), as well as fruit and flower stands, butcher shops, and kiosks selling traditional herbs and religious paraphernalia. On most days, *capoeiristas* can take an elevator up to the academy; however, a bit too frequently, the broken elevator sign means a hefty climb and a good cardiovascular warm-up before class.

The personality of this group is instantly evident upon stepping out of the elevator. The bright yellow columns and colorful murals scream for attention. The four yellow columns have been painted with black patterns: serpents on one, perhaps a nod to Mestre Cobra Mansa’s namesake, and zebra stripes on another, the zebra being a legendary animal in the origin myths of capoeira and a nod to the group’s Africanist orientation. This color combination signifies that the group belongs to the lineage of Mestre Pastinha, whose favorite soccer team wore black and yellow.

At the far end of the room, a wall of glass windows provides a wonderful vista onto the high-rises and palm trees of the city but also creates a greenhouse effect making spring and summertime workouts at noon a particular test of stoicism. At the front of the room is a storage area for benches and instruments. Beside the door, both on the floor and on a shelf more than six feet off the ground, are altars containing candles and other offerings associated with *Candomblé*, the local Afro-Brazilian religion whose deities have long standing ties to capoeira. To the right and the left of the entryway are dressing rooms, segregated by sex. By the women’s dressing room is a small business area with a desk, computer, telephone, a few chairs, and a bookcase with many texts on Afro-Brazilian culture. There is also a kitchenette with a water filtration unit and sink for washing dishes. The left wall has been nearly covered in a giant mural of the *orixás*, *Candomblé* deities, surrounding a waterfall. In the far right corner of the room is a large framed chart that traces the lineage of selected capoeira *mestres*. All other open spaces have been covered with framed photographs of current capoeira *mestres* and players, as well as historical photographs and documents.

The bulk of my fieldwork took place at this academy, though conversations with *capoeiristas* at other academies and observations at *rodas* throughout the city convince me that the general patterns I found at FICA apply to many other academies as well. However, it bears mentioning at the outset of this work that FICA is steered by a capoeira scholar, which may explain why they were so welcoming of my research agenda. Mestre Cobra Mansa has been actively involved in researching both the historical aspects of capoeira and the contemporary manifestations

of similar traditions in Western Africa, and he has given several presentations and coauthored articles on his research. Also, because FICA is an international organization, members of FICA Bahia are accustomed to the presence of foreigners and are perhaps more able to see both the benefits and drawbacks to this type of tourism than are individuals at groups that receive fewer guests.

According to Mestre Valmir, the leader of the FICA Bahia group, it is “on the account of this globalization of capoeira thing, and on account of our group’s profile that we receive many foreigners.” Therefore, interacting with foreigners is a daily affair for him. Almost everyday, he says, he is in contact with someone from abroad that has come in search of capoeira. In addition to having a scholarly orientation and emphasizing its status as an international organization, the group is located in a business district rather than a *favela* (slum) and counts many students and professionals among its members. One member was even running for political office during my time there. This too may help explain why international students felt more comfortable training at FICA than with some of the other groups in the city.

It should not be assumed that FICA Bahia is representative of all capoeira academies. One female *capoeirista* from London said that training at FICA was a great experience, especially in comparison to a group in Fortaleza where “they made [her] feel stupid.” Like any organization, FICA is multifaceted and complex, but generally speaking, people who trained there were content with the workings of the group. Many *capoeiristas* admitted that there was racism and marginalization of foreigners at some academies, but not at FICA. This is likely one of the reasons that FICA is so popular among foreign *capoeiristas*. FICA also has a larger international network than do most capoeira academies. With many satellite groups located worldwide, the three *mestres* and the assistant instructors within the organization are in near-constant circulation, leading workshops abroad and often encouraging attendees to come and train with the group in Bahia. So while the general phenomenon I discuss in this book, apprenticeship pilgrimage, is applicable to other academies, the relative ease with which non-Brazilians were accepted at FICA is not necessarily the norm in all academies.

FICA Bahia maintains an intense training schedule relative to other groups in the area. Movement classes are offered from 12 pm–2 pm *and* from 7 pm–9 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Although the majority of local students choose to attend either the midday or the evening sessions, many foreign students attend both sessions. In addition, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, there is a one-hour music class from 7 pm–8 pm immediately followed by a two-hour movement class from 8 pm–10 pm. The academy hosts weekly *rodas* on Saturdays from 9:30 am until roughly 1 pm, which is attended by FICA students as well as individuals from other academies and the very occasional spectator (either Brazilian or foreign).

I spent approximately fourteen hours per week at the academy between the beginning of August and the end of December 2008 as a full participant in the

academy's activities. My preparation with Estrela do Norte had given me a solid foundation for participating in these classes, neither as an expert nor as a novice, but somewhere in between. Because I wanted to develop a kinesthetic understanding of what the students were experiencing, and because I preferred to be seen primarily as a fellow *capoeirista* and not as a researcher, I did not take any notes during these sessions. I completed my field notes as soon as possible after returning to my apartment after training sessions while my memories were still fresh in my mind. The one exception was when I had stopped by the academy one evening just to interview someone. When he did not show up for our interview, I stayed in my street clothes and observed the lesson.

At the end of class, it was not uncommon for a group of students to go to a nearby café and have a meal or just fruit juices together. While one American female who had made previous trips to Brazil assured me that in the past these outings tended to be integrated, during 2008 most of the outings I attended were comprised almost exclusively of non-Brazilians. Because of the size of the city in which I was working and the nature of our community, which comes together for brief periods of training and then disperses, it was difficult to keep tabs on members of the capoeira group outside of class. But as the months progressed, the foreigners, especially those who were in Brazil for more than just a few weeks, began to spend more and more of their leisure time together. Most of these outings revolved around going to the beach or visiting other capoeira academies. The conversations at these informal events almost always revolved around capoeira and thus became part of my data as well. I also complimented my participation at the academy with archival research at the local library and interviews.

The Biblioteca Central maintains a collection of news articles that have been written on capoeira, which their staff was gracious enough to share with me. The bulk of these articles were written in the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2000s. Although there were some articles that provided general information about capoeira, including coloring pages and activities for children, the majority of these articles focused on the growing international interest in capoeira. Articles written before this date typically present capoeira as a form of folklore rather than a living tradition, discussing the quaint performances that take place at local folk festivals or lamenting that the older *mestres* who once enjoyed such esteem as fighters are now living in poverty. I treated this archival material as supplementary to my primary methods, providing context for how capoeira was viewed within Brazilian society at large.

I conducted formal interviews with ten local *capoeiristas* and fourteen foreign *capoeiristas*. The roughly hour-long interviews followed a standardized format; I asked for general demographic information, then inquired about their attitudes toward the globalization of capoeira, and finally asked them to rank the importance of eleven different characteristics for a *capoeirista* using a five-point Likert scale. This sample was very diverse in terms of how much time they had spent

training capoeira. Whereas some had trained for many years (one of the *mestres* has more than three decades of experience to his credit), others had only been training for a year or less. While seven individuals identified as black and seven identified as white, four claimed mixed heritage (using either the term *pardo* or *mestizo*), and the remaining six either cited other ethnicities or declined to answer this question. However, the surface level diversity of the interviewees' ethnicity can be deceiving as only one individual in the foreign sample was of African descent. The gender distribution was likewise skewed. Although I interviewed a total of eight females, only one of them was Brazilian. The issue of gender equity within capoeira is taken up in chapter 5.

The four years of fieldwork I had conducted with Estrela do Norte in Bloomington, Indiana, prior to my engagement with FICA had allowed me to build a grounded theory about how one goes about claiming legitimacy within capoeira. The eleven most important themes that emerged during this inductive phase became the eleven qualities I explored in my international fieldwork. These themes became the primary codes I used in analyzing my field notes and interview data from 2008, paying particular attention to the relationships between these codes and markers of an individual's legitimacy within the academy and within the capoeira community at large.

### **Autoethnography and Reflexivity**

While acknowledging that her remarks will be controversial, Sara Delamont (2007), anthropologist and capoeira scholar, characterizes autoethnography as "lazy" and fraught with ethical dilemmas. She also claims that it puts us on the wrong side of power—aligning with our own interests (class, nationality, etc.) rather than those of the marginalized individuals who many if not most anthropologists have come to champion since the latter part of the twentieth century (Delamont 2007). This text is not meant to be an autoethnography; however, I cannot escape the fact that as an observing participant, my actions influenced those of the other students and teachers with whom I interacted and are therefore frequently used as illustrative examples. I also unapologetically use the first-person throughout the book. Making use of my standpoint as an observing participant without losing sight of my core research objectives, however, requires a healthy dose of reflexivity.

Anthropologist Jennifer Robertson defines reflexivity as "the capacity of any system of signification, including a human being—an anthropologist—to turn back upon or mirror itself" (2002: 785). Anthropologist Philip Salzman adds that it is "the constant awareness, assessment and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution/influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings" (2002: 806). The reflexive turn in ethnography was originally intended as a critical corrective to the omniscient tone taken in early ethnographies, in which authors failed to consider how their presence

and methods of data collected influenced the behaviors of those around them and shaped their findings (Robertson 2002). Unfortunately, as Delamont (2007) points out, in many cases it devolves into an obsessive concern with the self. At its best, reflexively examining our own reactions to various scenarios in the field provides researchers with new avenues of inquiry that we can explore with our consultants; at its worst, it implies that we can never understand another human being if his or her identities are different from our own.

My own embodied experiences in the field prompted me to ask many questions about learning capoeira that I might not have been attuned to had I sat on the sidelines. On the other hand, had I been a more detached observer, I might have seen other things that were invisible to me as a participant. Either way it is largely a moot point because from the very beginning of my engagement with capoeira, no teacher ever allowed me to just observe the lesson without participating. Similarly, in her study of the transnational practice of yoga, Sarah Strauss found that “participation in yoga classes was absolutely essential, not only to gaining credibility in the eyes of the community, but also to the personal bodily understanding of the transformations these practices make possible” (2005: 60). She found that practitioners were reluctant to discuss their experiences with individuals who could not empathize as fellow yogis (Strauss 2005). Although *capoeiristas* have certainly shared their experiences with nonpractitioners, my membership in this community gave us a shared basis of understanding that was integral to my study.

While any individual’s engagement with her community will be more complex than a simple accounting of her social identities can explain, I nonetheless feel compelled to disclose how my various positionalities as a white, Western woman influenced my ability to record the data that is of central importance to this study. I consider myself a pseudonative ethnographer because while demographically I was very similar to many of the foreign *capoeiristas* I was studying (mid-twenties, well-educated, and middle class), I began practicing capoeira in order to undertake academic research, rather than the other way around. At times, I found it challenging to study individuals whose social identities were so similar to my own, and it was often difficult for me to define myself in relation to them. I am not alone in this confusion. E Patrick Johnson found that his multiple identities influenced his performance as a fieldworker to the point where he could hardly separate himself from the activities occurring around him. He writes:

The multiple identities I performed—black, middle class, southern, gay, male, professor—influenced my ethnographic experience as/of the Other. Therefore, I construe my ethnographic practice as an “impure” process—as a performance. Moreover, rather than fix my informants as static objects, naively claim ideological innocence, or engage in the false positivist “me/them” binary, I foreground my “coauthorship,” as

it were, of the ethnographic texts produced in this volume, for I was as integral to the performance/text-making process as were my informants. (Johnson 2003: 10)

As a white North American anthropologist and *capoeirista*, I was constantly slipping between insider and outsider status. Playing the part of a detached observer would have been nearly impossible given the fact that most local Brazilians saw me as no different from the other foreigners that came to train at their academy.

Perhaps, as Charles Lindholm has suggested, the conflicting identities of an anthropologist predisposes us to ask questions about authenticity (2008: 141). Never was this more relevant to me than when one of the *mestres* I was interviewing told me it was good for *capoeiristas* to be involved in this kind of academic research because otherwise the academy would not be interested in capoeira. Although I was generally upfront that my academic interest in capoeira predated my actual participation, many people seemed to forget this. Given these circumstances, I embraced my role in the coconstruction of discourse about the capoeira experience.

Although discourse within the capoeira community focuses on equality and inclusivity, the reality often falls short of this stated goal. Women in particular represent a class of individuals who have struggled for recognition within the field. As such, I would be remiss in not discussing my own positionality as a woman and how this affected my fieldwork. As Sprague and Zimmerman write, “the standpoints of those who have historically been intellectual outsiders are particularly valuable in revealing the distortions of mainstream white upper-class male frameworks” (2004: 42). This logic can be extended to any social field in which one group has maintained control. In this case, being a woman allows me to understand the gendered dynamics of capoeira in a way that is slightly different from that of a man, an important contribution given that this is the first book-length scholarly monograph on the embodied experience of studying capoeira from an American woman’s perspective. At the same time, however, I would not go so far as to suggest that a female perspective is superior to a male one; rather, the more diversity of perspectives available on a topic, the more complete our collective understanding of that phenomenon will be.

There were both benefits and drawbacks to my identity as a woman in the capoeira academy. On the one hand, I was not seen as a threat to the other students at the academy. Rather, given the predominant attitude of machismo, I was part of a group that needed to be protected. Though impossible to quantify, I felt that the majority of the men at the academy were gentler with me in the *roda* than they might have been with another male. On the other hand, however, I was subjected to the same predatory advances, both within the academy and outside of it, that all of the foreign females I talked to had experienced. Most of this romantic attention was assumed to be harmless, and I cannot recall a single woman who explicitly discussed this as part of a larger pattern of female oppres-

sion, but it nonetheless indexed a significant difference in terms of how males and females were perceived within capoeira.

My gender also had implications for my mobility. As a relatively young woman, I did not feel that I could walk through certain parts of town by myself or at certain times of day. This fear for my own safety grew over time, as I not only became the victim of a crime, but was repeatedly warned (by men) that I should not be out by myself. On more than one occasion, this advice was given to me by passing motorists who slowed down to offer me a ride home, which in and of itself can be a threatening proposition. Other women did not feel this same inhibition, and one of my consultants regularly rode her bicycle at night to travel between the academy and her apartment, passing unharmed through an area known for muggings. I return to these gendered dynamics in chapter 5, but mention them here so the reader can understand how my various identities influenced my data collection.

## Plan for the Book

This book contributes significantly to scholarly discussions of pilgrimage and acquisition of embodied knowledge. Since at least the 1970s, social scientists have found a high degree of overlap between tourism and pilgrimage (see Turner and Turner 1978; see also Cohen 1979). Believing that humans have a deep need for sacred, or at least significant, experiences that stand apart from their quotidian lives, recent scholars suggest that in today's more sacred society, tourism fills a similar role as does religious pilgrimage (see Badone and Roseman 2004; see also Digance and Cusack 2001). However, much of the research that follows this line of reasoning focuses on the significance of journeys to places that have a unique meaning for individuals rather than groups. The phenomenon I explore here, however, focuses on the sense of obligation an individual feels to visit Brazil because of the norms in the capoeira community.

This sense of obligation is ultimately related to globalization, a topic that I address in chapter 2. Prior to capoeira being taken abroad, there was little reason to ask whether or not non-Brazilians would be seen as legitimate tradition bearers. However, now that capoeira is practiced worldwide, Brazilians and others have begun to question who has the credentials to be called a *capoeirista*. This is not a trivial matter. The *capoeiristas* I am writing about do not just practice capoeira as a form of athletic conditioning or as a way to make friends. It has become a core part of their identity. Their extreme commitment and their need to be seen as legitimate in the eyes of practitioners from the art's homeland is what motivates their travel to Brazil, making it qualitatively different than an individual's idiosyncratic pilgrimage to a pop star's final resting place or a particularly notable baseball stadium. Chapter 2 addresses the questions of legitimacy that have arisen as Brazilian teachers have traveled abroad and begun teaching students who vary dramatically in terms of demographics from the original tradition bearers.

A desire for transformation is a core component of all pilgrimage, whether religious or secular, but the form of pilgrimage I am describing here focuses on a particular type of transformation. Apprenticeship pilgrimage, which I explore more fully in chapter 3 can be understood as travel to the birthplace or other communally ratified hub of practice with the explicit goal of studying that art or sport under the tutelage of a local master. Some foreign *capoeiristas* will go to Brazil just to see the sights and, perhaps, watch a few capoeira games. These are not pilgrims. Others will make a more concerted effort to join a local capoeira group and become an apprentice to local *mestres*. But just as one would not go and knock on the door of the Shaolin temple and expect immediate entrance, these individuals must prepare themselves by taking stock of their identities and adopting the right attitude. Upon entering the local capoeira scene in Brazil, they must negotiate their own legitimacy as members of this tradition vis-à-vis the standards established by the local capoeira community. In chapter 4 I discuss the preparations one makes before going to Brazil, as well as how one's lineage will influence his or her reception upon arrival in Brazil. In chapter 5 I discuss the body's role in authenticity and how having traditional markers of authenticity can facilitate one's acceptance into the local community. However, it is not impossible for those without these markers to gain legitimacy, which is an issue I address in chapter 6.

A *capoeirista* will be judged according to different criteria at different levels of the community. At the level of the academy, where individuals spend hours training together and getting to know one another, personal characteristics like one's dedication and attitude will be important. Beyond the academy, however, a *capoeirista* will have to prove his or her worth by executing the form properly. The form of capoeira is difficult to learn, largely because it demands a balance of adhering to tradition and cultivating an individual style within the context of improvisational play. Chapter 7 addresses the importance of form in capoeira as well as how one learns to balance tradition and innovation in the *roda*. In chapter 8, I distinguish form from skill and ask whether or not being skilled is an important aspect of being seen as legitimate. In chapter 9, I argue that having gained both skills and credibility during their pilgrimage, the *capoeirista* ideally returns home even more committed to his or her identity as a *capoeirista*.

Throughout the book, I have chosen to retain the actual names of the *mestres* and other teachers with whom I worked. They all granted their consent to be named during our interviews, and furthermore, I believe they should get public recognition for the wonderful mentors and artists that they are. However, the names of my fellow students have been masked to protect their privacy. As an observing participant, it is hard to draw a clear line between when I was acting as "researcher" and when I was just being myself. I think it would be unfair to hold people accountable, years after the fact, for offhand comments they may have made to a fellow capoeira student rather than an academic researcher. In developing pseudonyms, I thought of the characteristics I admired the most in each individual



and found a name that reflected that meaning. Wherever possible, I tried to choose a name that had the same ethnic connotations as an individual's actual name. I hope my esteemed capoeira colleagues will see these new names as a sincere attempt to respect their privacy and honor their contributions to this book.

## Notes

1. Throughout this book, I follow the convention adopted by de Campos Rosario, Stephens, and Delamont (2010) in using the names of recognized capoeira teachers, whose identities would be hard to conceal, and use pseudonyms for students.
2. Tem roupa? Tenho, sim. Pode trocar a roupa lá. Fica á vontade.

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