

# **CAPOEIRISTAS: DANCING BETWEEN IDENTITIES**

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

LAUREN E. MILLER

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs  
& Academic Scholarships  
Texas A&M University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE  
RESEARCH FELLOWS

April 2003

Group: Cultural Studies 1

# CAPOEIRISTAS: DANCING BETWEEN IDENTITIES

A Senior Honors Thesis

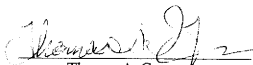
by

LAUREN E. MILLER

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs  
& Academic Scholarships  
Texas A&M University  
In partial fulfillment for the designation of

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE  
RESEARCH FELLOW

Approved as to style and content by:



Thomas A. Green



Edward A. Funkhouser

April 2003

Group: Cultural Studies 1

## ABSTRACT

Capoeiristas: Dancing Between Identities. (April 2003)

Lauren E. Miller  
Department of Anthropology  
Texas A&M University

Fellows Advisor: Dr. Thomas A. Green  
Department of Anthropology

Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that is believed to have developed as a method of resistance for slaves in Brazil. Out of fear of their slaves' defensive abilities, this street fighting was outlawed. As a result, the slaves played music to accompany their fights disguising it as dance and thus, capoeira was born.

True to the field of anthropology, I conducted an ethnographic study on two capoeirista groups in Austin. Capoeira is divided into two styles, regional and Angola; my study will focus primarily on capoeira Angola. Library research on capoeira revealed a strong connection between the art's practitioners and its African heritage. Therefore, I was surprised to find the classes I attended to be comprised of predominately white middle-class students. I also observed that the two groups I was interacting with exhibited very different characteristics and theoretical orientations in relation to training procedures.

Consequently, I began to examine the process of identity formation. First, I defined identity as the psychological packages of qualities exhibited, endorsed and valued by the subject. My next task was to postulate hypotheses to explain the attraction of non-Africans to such an ethnic art. I formulated five different hypotheses including identification with a romantically un-rooted lifestyle, a rejection of Western society's superficial dichotomies, a quest for a new culture to rally around due to a sense of nonconformity with general "American" culture, a search for a community network, and finally, a search for something new and exotic. I found the emic, native, point of view to best support the search for a community network hypothesis. However, my etic view, the outsider's opinion, has discerned something deeper that holds these people together. My empirical evidence best supports the ideas that one of my contact groups falls into the search for something new and exotic hypothesis, but the other group falls into the quest for an alternative culture category. This research has also had a profound effect on me personally, especially due to my experiences as a dancer. This study, I hope, will be expanded in order to test the applicability of my hypotheses to the capoeira culture at large.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I Introduction.....	1
What is Capoeira?.....	1
Problem.....	8
Research Methods.....	10
II Experiences in the Field.....	12
Immersion in a New Culture.....	12
Classes & Workshops.....	14
III Identity in Capoeira.....	20
Identity Defined.....	20
General Identities of the Two Groups.....	23
IV The Application of Ethnicity & Identity.....	27
The Role of Ethnicity in Capoeira.....	27
Emic View.....	32
Etic View.....	32
V Conclusion.....	35
Research Conclusions.....	35
Further Research.....	36
Personal Impacts of My Research.....	37
REFERENCES.....	39
VITA.....	42

# Heckman Bindery

Account Number/Name

64175-000  
TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY

Hor V J F Slot Title 11/13/03 KKH

V	LLA	27/1	DESAI
V	LLA	8/1	2003 FELLOWS THESIS D42
H	FC1	25	SELECTIVE ANISOTROPIC OF ZEOLITE CRYSTALS
H	FC1	23	-----
		22	DESAI

TitleID Foil Color Notes Fastening  
632579 WHI 563

Internal ID ISSN

Permanent Instructions:

V=27 AUTHOR'S LAST NAME, V=1 UP YEAR  
FELLOWS ID #/FTC H=25 TITLE HYPHENS  
AUTHOR'S LAST NAME/

One Time Only Instructions:

LUO: THERE ARE 2 BOOKS BUT ONLY 1 BAR  
CODE. ONLY 1 BOOK WILL GET A BAR CODE

Type Lot	Item	Copies	SPECIAL PREP:
17 H04-057	5	1	
87002			

BKS

2225-C  
8

## Chapter I- Introduction

*"More than a dance, a fighting technique, a game, a parsimony of Brazilian culture, capoeira is a form of 'seeing' and living life" (Capoeira roots... xv).*

As I approached the third year of my undergraduate career, I hardly expected my worldview to be turned on its head. My long term training in the dance genres of jazz, modern and ballet did little to prepare me for the physical, mental and emotional challenges that the study of capoeira would soon present to me. Never before had I experienced such a complete philosophy integrating the mind, body and spirit. Capoeira has an almost magnetic quality responsible for drawing a diverse subset of the population deep into the heart of this unique art.

### **What is Capoeira?**

Capoeira is a type of Afro-Brazilian game or form of play that uniquely intertwines martial arts and dance. Perhaps its most striking feature is its ability to at once capture polar opposite qualities. Capoeira manages to maintain the strict discipline of a martial art while also preserving individual artistic expression and improvisation which according to historians Marshall and Jean Stearns constitute two of African dance's most essential aesthetics (PBS 2000).

While the exact origins of capoeira continue to be debated, historians generally accept that West Africans brought it to Brazil during that country's long lived slave trade.

---

*This thesis follows the style and formatting of the American Ethnologist.*

The slave trade in Brazil reportedly began in 1441 when Antao Gonzalves brought the first captives from Africa at the request of D. Henrique (Tigges 1990). Brazil served as a strategic location for the Portuguese (who at that time controlled Brazil) because it completed a triangular trade route between Portugal, Brazil and Africa, particularly the nation of Angola. This makes for a logical connection between the appearance of new movement forms in Brazil and older dance forms in Angola. According to some traditional practitioners such as Benedito who instructed Vicente Joaquim Ferreira, better known as Mestre Pasthina, capoeira began with the N'golo dance in Western Africa (Tigges 1990). Many tales equate the N'golo (zebra) dance with a competition among young males during female initiation rites that led to the waiving of the obligatory bride price for the winner of the contest. Others claim that capoeira is mainly Brazilian because all the African elements found in Yoruba religions such as Candomblé are not found in capoeira (Rodrigues and Svinth 2000). According to some accounts (Tigges 1990), capoeira's growth in popularity occurred when the Brazilian government in 1697 sought to destroy a settlement of escaped Angolan slaves called Quilombo dos Palmares. Capoeira served as their vehicle of defense and consisted of kicks, leg swipes and head butts. After their recapture, this fighting style diffused into the general slave population. This fighting style suffered discrimination because of its association with slaves until their emancipation in 1888. Even after this date capoeira had difficulty in receiving recognition as a worthy practice, because capoeiristas were often involved in shady activities such as extortion and ballot stuffing. In fact, "[p]oliticians employed these same thugs to persuade people to vote for them" (Rodrigues and Svinth 2000:3). The situation reached such a low that when Brazil became a republic in 1889, punishments up

to six months or a full year in prison were instituted in the Brazilian Penal Code, decree # 487, October 11, 1890 (Tigges 1990:39).

Regardless of the actualities, legend says that when slaves went into town for Mass or for shopping on market days, they would gather together in the streets and practice their fighting. As their hands were bound together, the legend claims that the slaves utilized their legs for various kicks and blows. In fact, to this day players emphasize legs much more than arms in capoeira. Players also maintain a low center of gravity in play that would have been important if one could not use his arms to maintain balance. Although slaves in Brazil did receive encouragement to perpetuate their original African cultures in the New World (Bahia: Africa In the Americas 1988), not all cultural practices gained acceptance. Much as they were in the North American states, upper-class whites in Brazil felt threatened by the power their slaves acquired through physical movement and group unity. In the southern United States the government employed the

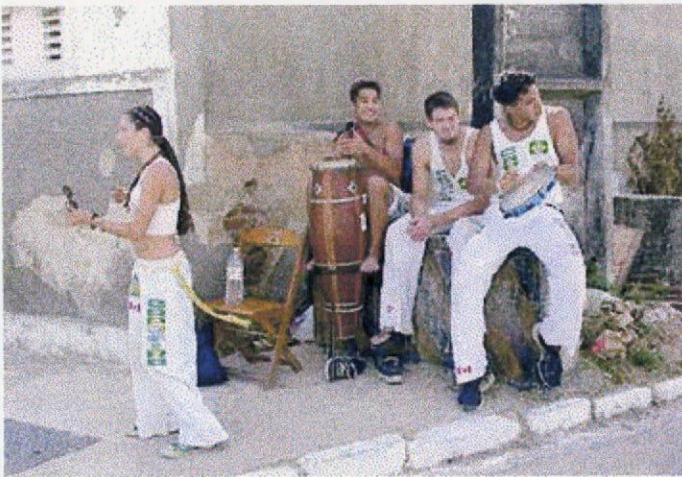
Slave Act of 1740 to prohibit all dancing and drumming (Jonas 1992). In Brazil this fear resulted in state authorities outlawing the practice of capoeira in 1810 A.D. At that point, slaves supposedly added music to the fight as a way of disguising it as dance.



The musical ensemble remains relatively unchanged since those original days in Bahia and consists of a *pandiero* (tambourine), *agogo* (double ended clapperless cow bell), *reco-reco* (wooden scraping instrument), *atabaque* (drum), and most importantly the *berimbau*. Most



the *berimbau* the most important component of the ensemble elevating it to the level of a sacred artifact. It basically controls the game by calling players to the *roda* (circle where the game is played), mandating the speed and intensity of play, ending the game and even becoming a weapon if the game gets out of control. The instrument itself consists of a *vêrga* (stout wooden bow), *arame* (wire), and a *cabaca* (gourd resonator). It is played by holding a *dobrão* (rock, coin or washer) against the *arame* to produce one of three possible notes by striking the *arame* with a *vaqueta* (stick) while holding a *caxixi* (basket rattle) in the same hand. *Berimbaus* can be divided into three groups based on the size of their *cabacas*. *Gunga berimbaus* have the largest *cabacas* and play the deepest pitch. Along with the *gungas*, *medios*, which play the middle pitches and have a medium sized *cabaca*, keep the basic rhythm. While generally receiving less recognition than the *berimbau*, the other instruments “are very essential to the regulation of the *roda* and the pacing of the *ginga*” (FICA 2000: 46).



The entire group of capoeiristas assembled at the *roda* take part in singing the Portuguese songs associated with capoeira. The game opens with one person singing the *ladainha* (a story or

prayer) which instructs the younger generations of capoeiristas in the history and traditions of the art. The players must kneel at the foot of the center *berimbau* during the *ladainha*. They often take this opportunity to produce a *corpo fechado* (supernaturally

protected, “closed” body) by making various signs on the ground or across their chest that stem from Candomblé mythology. “*Bahia, Minha Bahia*” which Mestre Pastinha wrote in the 1960’s is not only an excellent example of a *ladainha* but also captures the spirit of my research experiences (FICA 2000: 2).

***Bahia, Minha Bahia***

*Iê!*  
*Bahia minha Bahia*  
*Capital è Salvador*  
*Quen não conhece a Capoeira*  
*Não lhe dá o seu valor*  
*Capoeira veio da Africa*  
*Africano è que inventou*  
*Mas todos poden aprender*  
*General e também Doutor*  
*Quen desejar aprender*  
*Venha aqui em Salvador*  
*Procure Mestre Pastinha*  
*Ele è o professor,*  
*Camará*

***Bahia, My Bahia***

(Attention!)  
 Bahia, my Bahia  
 Capital is Salvador  
 If you don't know Capoeira  
 You can not give its value  
 Capoeira came from Africa  
 Africans invented it  
 But everyone can learn  
 General and Doctor too  
 If you wish to learn  
 Come here to Salvador  
 Look for Mestre Pastinha  
 He is the teacher,  
 Comrade

You can see how this song is instructive in the sense that it tells the art’s origin and also intimates at capoeira Angola’s evangelistic nature when it says “everyone can learn, general and doctor too.”

At the conclusion of the *ladainha*, the *chorrido* (call and response song) begins. At this point the players may enter the *roda* and start the *jogo* (game). The *chorrido* may have any number of purposes such as praise, ridicule, warning etc. The *chorrido* “*Meleque è Tú*” typifies what a song leader would start singing if he saw the two players using a good deal of *malícia* (FICA 2000: 28). *Malícia* roughly translates as trickery through deceit and is the idea that you can defeat your opponent without throwing a single kick simply by outwitting him.

**Moleque è Tú**

*Olha, è tú que è moleque  
Moleque è tú*

*Eu tambèm sou moleque  
Moleque è tú*

*Todo mundo è moleque  
Moleque è tú*

\* Bold denotes song leader-  
unbolded denotes group  
response

**Mischievous (urchin) Is You**

See, it is you that is  
mischievous

I am also mischievous  
It is you that is mischievous

Everybody is mischievous  
It is you that is mischievous

\*Moleque- small boy, street  
urchin

Other *chorridos* poke fun at players. One in particular that I witnessed made fun of a player who kept falling down and compared him to a felled palm tree.

The importance of rhythm and music in capoeira leads many players to ask whether it qualifies as a martial art or a dance. While it does include elements such as swing, suspension, contraction and freedom of expression that make it attractive to formally trained dancers like myself, its format clearly defines it as a martial art. Players must constantly consider their opponent's moves and think of ways to counterattack those moves.

Over the course of its evolution, capoeira fissioned into the two main styles of regional and Angola, though many variations on these styles certainly exist. At first glance, regional seems like more of an aggressive fighting style and Angola more of a playful style. Further study reveals that these differences, while sometimes causing conflict across the genres, do not change the chief aim of capoeira but rather arose from how two early *mestres* (teachers or "masters") related to their protégés. Capoeira

regional developed as an attempt to make this street art palatable for upper-class Brazilians. Capoeiristas have always carried a stigma with them based first on the unsavory nature of their political associations and second on their reputation of being *malandros* or people who “bum around.” Of course this stereotype certainly held true for some capoeiristas who made their livings as con-artists, thugs and gangsters. To combat this negative attitude Mestre Bimba, whose real name was Manoel dos Reis Machado, took capoeira from the streets and gave it specific training drills. Previously individuals learned capoeira by watching others or petitioning well-established players for instruction. Bimba was born on November 23, 1899 in Salvador. He reportedly learned capoeira from a maritime company captain names Bentinao at age twelve but did not open his formal academy until the 1930’s (Capoeira 1995). His style, regional, incorporates many components of capoeira Angola and Bataque (a form of stick fighting) as well as elements from Jiu-Jitsu, boxing, catch-as-catch-can wrestling, and other martial arts (Tigges 1990). Many people consider this the “whitened” form of capoeira that developed in a time when “negrophilia” was beginning to influence Brazil. Today capoeira and other cultural traits have become an “expression of a popular yearning for the exotic and sensual— associated with black people—in a society on the periphery of the West wanting to be increasingly rational” (Sansone 1999: 17). For middle and upper-class Brazilians who experienced these pulls during Bimba’s lifetime, his version of capoeira became the perfect intermediary between traditional black culture and dignified, practical martial training. Bimba taught capoeira up until the last day of his life on February 5, 1974 when he felt ill at a demonstration and later died of a stroke.

Mestre Pastinha, who was born in 1889, receives a great deal of respect for fostering the “blacker” style of capoeira known as Angola. Pastinha reportedly became inducted into the art after his mentor Benedito witnessed him suffer repeated beatings by an older boy (Capoeira 1995). Many consider this form “blacker” because it stresses the game’s African roots. Aesthetically this style can be described as a three dimensional puzzle. Players play very close to one another and low to the ground. The object is to never make actual physical contact with your opponent. Rather, you demonstrate your superiority by showing that you *could* score hits on your opponent. Players intertwine their bodies creating a kaleidoscope of movement that draws the observer in with its visual interest. Pastinha opened a capoeira academy that was contemporary with Bimba’s. Underscoring the stigma the Angola style continues to suffer under, the Brazilian government deceived Pastinha and stole his studio space thus ending his teaching career (Capoeira 1995). Though he died in 1981 at the age of ninety-two, his legend lives on through the work of his students.

**Problem:**

My research period has spanned the dates of March 2002 to April 2003. The objective of my investigations changed dramatically over the first two months of my studies. I had originally intended to focus on dance-like aesthetics and gender issues in capoeira, but preliminary visits to my fieldwork groups in May 2002 inspired queries into the motivations behind individual alignments with a particular group. I was to be working with two capoeira Angola groups in Austin, Texas. Both groups are associated

with the *Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola* (FICA) which is a group unifying capoeiristas in Brazil, the United States and France.

The first group I worked with was led by Jon White who uses a very straightforward, hands on approach to teaching. This group meets regularly at the Austin Recreation Center, a student's home, the University of Texas Student Union, and now at Zen's Dance Studio. Most of the students in this group also study at the University of Texas (UT) and belong to the UT Capoeirista Club. All but two of the regular students are white; and, all are middle to upper-class individuals in their late teens or early twenties. One of the non-white individuals hails from Brazil and speaks fluent Portuguese. Class attendance often revolved around the university calendar in this group. This group is fairly well-organized and seems to become more so every month. Over the course of my participation, they developed a list serve and a more sophisticated record keeping/ payment system. All of the members in this group have at least some college education.

Scott Head led the second group that I worked with. At the time he happened to be doing his anthropology dissertation on capoeira. I assumed Scott would serve as my main contact because of his anthropology experience, but he turned out to be much more covert in his teaching. This group met at the Austin Recreation Center and at a place called "the Allen Street Warehouse," which is a communally owned warehouse where several of the members live. These students were also predominately white with one black male who is a regular student named Moongoo and one black female student who I only saw at one class. These students all seemed to be slightly older, mid to late twenties, and based on my observations, of a lower economic background than those individuals in

Jon's group. This group's organization is fairly loose and informal; however, the members' affiliations have remained remarkably constant over my year of fieldwork. I am unsure of their educational backgrounds, but none of them are presently receiving any formal education.

Owing to capoeira Angola's strong African influences, which were pointed out to me in all the capoeira literature I read, it surprised me to see the groups' ethnic compositions. I expected to encounter an all African descended group who maintained a connection with the role of the *malandro*, the questionable character popularized in capoeira legend and described in chapter two. Though some groups such as that led by Dennis Newsome in Dallas do exhibit this identity, this contrast with what I had expected to find prompted me, in my second or third month of study, to redirect my studies and focus on the concepts of identity, ethnicity, and how these components contribute to group identity formation. At this point, after changing my objectives, my general hypothesis was that there exists some common thread among these individuals who, out of their own volition, chose to practice a relatively unknown art associated with an ethnic group that has traditionally been marginalized in the United States.

### **Research Methods:**

My main research strategy was participant-observation with the two FICA groups in Austin. I spent slightly more time working with Jon's group than I did with Scott's group due to scheduling conflicts. During my year of fieldwork I attended approximately fifteen capoeira Angola classes. I participated in movement classes, music classes, practice *rodas*, and two workshops. Jon served as my main contact for basic information,

but I also interacted with a few key informants in both groups. My goal in talking with my informants was to understand their reasons for joining the group in relation to other aspects of their lives. I also engaged in library research on topics such as identity, ethnicity, art in anthropology, and capoeira history and philosophy.



## Chapter II- Experiences in the Field

### Immersion in a New Culture:

When most people think about anthropology fieldwork, they normally picture graduate students living with small bands of hunters and gatherers in South America or Africa. Because my fieldwork took place only an hour and a half from my home, it was both comfortable and disarmingly strange. It was nice because I already had friends in the city, and English was the predominate language spoken. What I wasn't prepared for were the very liberal and open-minded views held by these students. I found that this duality I felt would soon manifest itself in other ways through my experiences with capoeira. I came to understand the key to excelling at this game is to fight but remain friends, to work hard but keep a smile, to learn specific skills but be able to improvise, and to be wary but look unafraid. I feel that the constant push and pull of these opposites is a very important part of a capoeirista's identity. I believe this is central to the much talked about but never elucidated concept of malícia which means roughly trickery through deceit. These opposites are somewhat deceitful because in each case, though many more certainly exist, a second action is evoked to mask a first. Malícia, as I define it, sets these individuals apart from the rest of mainstream American society because through capoeira "[w]e also see how the duality of opposites so dear to the Western culture- right-wrong, good-bad, black-white- is undone, while the possibility of a circular dynamic is possible..." (Capoeira 2002: 83).

These may seem like simplistic conclusions, but a long chain of events preceded any epiphanies. When I made my first trip to Austin in May I was extremely upbeat and excited about the people I would be meeting, the new ideas I would be exposed to, and

from a dancer's perspective, the new movements I would be learning. However, my enthusiasm soon faded into dread at the thought of taking another class. I tried to blame my disillusionment on the time-consuming drive or the exhaustive nature of the workouts, but in reality I was experiencing a phenomenon called culture-shock. This is something that many researchers face when they have not been able to make a solid connection with any of the members of the community they are studying. At this point in my research, approximately July 2002 to September or October 2002, I had made few friendships, and those I had made were ended when the other individuals moved or stopped coming to class for one reason or another. There were several familiar faces in the group but none I felt comfortable enough with to just talk about their feelings on capoeira. There were two pivotal moments that helped me overcome this culture-shock. The first was Jurandir's workshop in late September. The workshop actually started on my birthday, and there were a hundred places that I would rather have been. The workshop, which I will describe in the next section, was physically and emotionally exhausting. Because of our shared frustration, a girl named Wendy and I actually had an opportunity to bond. Knowing that there would be someone, especially another female, to talk with made going to class much less intimidating. The second event that helped reshape my attitude was in late November or early December. After one of Jon's Saturday classes, Moongoo, one other female and I decided to grab dinner and hang out before attending a *batizado* or belt graduation ceremony for capoeira regional. Never before had any of the students reached out to me outside of class. We had a chance to discuss my research, their reasons for practicing capoeira, and the differences between the Angola and regional styles. Their outgoing personalities really made me feel like I

had been accepted. When I worked my way through this emotional phase, I was able to approach my work unfettered by insecurities. At this time I was able to evaluate my hypotheses and progress to the writing stage.

### **Classes and Workshops:**

There are a variety of capoeira classes offered on a weekly basis by these two teachers in Austin. When I began my training in May 2002, even though I am in good shape physically, I could hardly make it through a single class. There were even a few classes that left me doubting my ability to complete this research project. However, as I became more accustomed to the movements and the new muscles I was finding, class left me feeling exhilarated. While I sampled each different class, Jon's Saturday class fit into my schedule most conveniently. His classes generally consisted of movement drills at the beginning and practice *rodas* at the end. Whenever possible, the *rodas* were done to live music. However, this required a sufficiently large attendance which did not always happen on Saturdays owing to the students' busy schedules. The longer I attended class, the more Jon pushed me into playing the *berimbau*. That seems to be one of the distinguishing marks of a true capoeirista. It seemed that over my year of fieldwork Jon and some of his students started to take the ideology part of capoeira more seriously. They began to work intensively on different songs and the meanings of those songs. However, it was a smaller subset of the class that really seemed enthusiastic about delving into this area of theory and history, the majority of them still concentrated on the movements. The few classes I attended with Scott were more physically demanding because his students had more years of training than did Jon's. They were also more

mind-bending in terms of musical complexity. He split his class into two groups during training and had half of them move while the other half played the music. In Jon's class we all trained at the same time to pre-recorded music.

From the outset of my work I could sense incredible differences between the groups even though they are practicing the same style of the same art. Jon and his students seem to practice capoeira, but Scott and his students live it. One factor that I find exerts a strong influence over this discrepancy is the presence of live music in Scott's class. I have found that the live music used in Scott's class is quite an affective structure. When training to live music, I personally feel more inspired and eager to try the moves I am working on in a *jogo* situation. This correlates the "perform like you practice" theory that we have in the dance world. It basically says that if you put energy into your training you will perform well, but if you are lax in rehearsals your body will not be able to make up the difference in energy requirements when you reach the stage. I also try harder to learn the words to the songs when they are sung by my peers than when they I hear them on a compact disc, and they become little more than background noise.

In addition to the classes I attended, I also participated in two workshops by highly respected teachers. The first workshop was taught by a teacher named Urubu (which means vulture and is a comment on his singing talents) who, although he has not officially received the title of mestre, is well known the world over. This workshop was a source of great frustration for me because I had only had one week of training prior to its commencement. Three of the four classes I attended were intended for students with approximately one year or more of capoeira experience, and now I can testify to what a difference a year can make. Communication with Urubu was difficult due to his very

limited English and my even more limited Portuguese. He seemed to have a much closer bond with Scott than he did with Jon and seemed to know a few of Scott's students personally. One of them had studied intensively with Urubu in Brazil. During the training sessions, Urubu was very demanding and came across more like a drill sergeant than a *malandro*: the con-artist "street-people" capoeiristas in Brazil are often associated with. However, when the physical training was over, the mental training began. Our sessions generally ran an hour or more past the scheduled time because we would sit around and listen to Urubu share his ideas on capoeira Angola philosophy. He was so passionate that his words, or at least what I could understand from Spanish cognates, flowed like poetry. It was very inspiring to hear someone speak about his art with such intensity. One point he seemed to feel strongly about was the importance of African-descended people learning capoeira. Urubu said although it is important for all people to learn and appreciate this art, it is especially important for black people to learn this part of their heritage. Austin is a fairly large and diverse city, yet the workshop was comprised of mostly young white students. There were a few Asian students and maybe three or four black students attending. Urubu could not explain these demographics. All he could say was different people come to capoeira for different reasons. Some like the game aspect of it, some like the fighting aspect and still others start going to the *roda* simply because their friends are there. In that way he compares capoeira to a tree or plant; someone plants the seed of it, and it starts to grow. Only a few mestres from Brazil brought it to America, but its appeal has caught on and there are now groups all over the country. In fact, the mestre of a group in Seattle, Washington is the next teacher under whom I studied.

Mestre Jurandir is a well known capoeira Angola mestre born and raised in Brazil now residing primarily in Seattle. He travels the country and the world giving workshops. This otherwise kind, jovial man who becomes a militant in the training hall has affectionately been called "a teddy bear who can kill you." Jurandir seemed to be friendlier with Jon than with Scott. He broke each class into two sections, the first for music and the last for movement. At the end of each section he encouraged us to ask questions pertaining to that section only. He asked us if we knew why music was used in capoeira but not in any other martial art. I knew the answer but sat back quietly, not wanting to stand out from the group. I also wanted to see how in depth the other students had gone into the study of capoeira's history. When no one answered, we were assigned the investigation of that question for homework. Movement class with Jurandir was intense, and we were reprimanded if we tried to get a quick sip of water. There were many older black students attending this workshop. Whether this difference in racial composition was due to date availability, the prominence of Jurandir's name or a real difference in the mestre's methods could be debated. The only real commentary on capoeira theory given by Jurandir was when a girl from Jon's class asked why he was teaching us some very mean spirited, violent moves. Jurandir replied that when you train to play capoeira, you are learning so you can play with anyone anywhere, not just with your friends in your group. Some people play rough and you might need to know how to counter-attack in the same fashion. His point was, "Capoeira is capoeira and people [are] people." Even though two people are playing the same game, human nature does not change and you cannot trust everyone. During this session he also made brief references to the importance of a teacher instructing his students in music, movement and

history/ideology in order to have capoeira grow and to the idea that life is capoeira. However, he did little to expand on these points. Although I feel like I learned a great deal as far as music and movement go, I do not feel like Jurandir taught me much about capoeira ideology. Jurandir was certainly easier to communicate with than Urubu, but I feel Urubu, who is also much younger, had a greater fervor for sharing his ideas on philosophy than did Jurandir.

The workshops themselves are an interesting topic for study. Not only do they provide exceptional learning opportunities but they also strengthen the bonds between members of the group. Before this past workshop there was another girl whom I avoided at all costs. I might have been oversensitive in being the "new girl," but she seemed to take pleasure in pointing out when I executed a step incorrectly. Just as always happens, she and I were stuck together all weekend. Rather than tearing each other apart, we became pretty good friends. We even played each other in the last *jogo* of the workshop. Although I was horribly outplayed, I had a great time and scored one kick on her that really made me proud. We actually hugged after our game. This workshop situation could be dissected into the three stages of ritual identified by British anthropologist Victor Turner. When students arrive for class they can be identified by their yellow shirts, black pants and possibly their *berimbau*. These are visible qualities marking them as different from the rest of society. This is their separation. The next stage, liminality, is characterized by chaos. This is the workshop itself where people are likely to say and do things out of character for them. A white American, English speaking boy sings in Portuguese and plays an African-derived instrument. A meek, submissive girl takes cheap shots at a weaker male opponent in the *roda*. Little is how one would expect it to

be in the "real world." Then the workshop is over, the students change out of their clothes, and they return to their daily routines. They have just undergone the final stage, reincorporation. It is interesting to witness how individuals gradually open up to one another during these experiences. My observations lead me to conclude that workshops help create the family atmosphere many people talk about in capoeira. I have also found that each workshop functions to strengthen group identity.



### Chapter III- Identity in Capoeira

#### Identity Defined:

The meaning of the term identity undergoes valuable alterations as social scientists take it from a standard dictionary and mold it to fit their purposes. My study of the capoeirista identity necessitates defining this often misunderstood concept of identity for clarity's sake. Many psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have struggled to generate a concrete definition of this intangible subject, often substituting the terms self and person for identity. For the purpose of clearly outlining identity in respect to my research objectives, here I only use the term identity, as self and person could refer to other aspects of the human psyche.

Generally speaking, how a person views himself using internal as well as external pressures as a reference point for this perception constitutes one's identity. University of Kent Psychologist Rupert Brown narrows this definition for social scientists and calls identity "a self-definition in terms of one's membership of various social groups" (Brown 2000: 780). Based on this statement, it can be concluded that a person forms his self-perceptions from the standards of the people with whom he associates. This is not a difficult concept to understand. For example, my role as a student comprises part of my identity. Not only does this stem from my experiences as an anthropology student, but also from the liminal experiences I share with other students who make up my social class. Likewise, a person is not a capoeirista because he knows how to give a *cabecada* (head butt) but rather because he shares the experience of the *roda* with other

capoeiristas. Thus shared experiences seem to serve as an integral part of one's identity and sense of belonging.

At this point it is necessary to distinguish between the so-called subjective and objective aspects of identity. Broadly speaking, any quality exhibited by the subject which he consciously values as a part of his persona establishes part of his subjective identity. A person identifies (subjectively) with a characteristic or trait when he values it and "[endorses his] valuing of that characteristic" (Bilgrami 2000). Some qualities such as nationality or ethnicity get endorsed naturally. A person born of Italian parents always has an Italian identity even if he does not particularly value that trait. At the same time, other traits such as a fondness for classical music can change. Bilgrami claims "that the endorsement of the value must be so that it makes the value concerned more unrevisable (rather than more intense) relative to other values one holds" (Bilgrami 2000: 7150). This would mean that no matter how strongly the aforementioned man loves classical music, first and foremost he is Italian. According to this theory, any given person should logically identify with his race before identifying with an elective activity, like capoeira, where membership possesses the ability to change. This aspect of the subjective identity adds interesting depth to the research on capoeiristas as the love of the *jogo* (game) seems to transcend the boundaries of skin color in some groups, yet in others this very issue of race builds walls between potential *camaras* (comrades).

When considering the objective aspects of identity, the subject does not necessarily need to claim the particular value in question to consider it a part of his identity (i.e. race and other biological factors). This would be an etic view, that of an outsider drawing conclusions about the subject of his study. As the current move in the

social sciences allows the subjects to describe themselves from their own point of view and focus on the subjective aspects, we will not develop this concept of identity any further (for more see Bilgrami).

Now, after establishing a working idea of identity, we return to the concepts of self and person. A self could be defined as a suite of related identities. Psychoanalyst Roy Schafer asserts that one individual may be comprised as many selves such as “the self who is confident, assertive, and effective and the one who is weak, embarrassed, and reactive” (Lurhmann 2000: 7155). This concept increases in importance through the development of my thesis as we see capoeiristas dancing between seemingly contrasting identities. These identities often change based on with whom the capoeirista interacts. Urubu stated this outright during his workshop. He instructed us to beware of overstepping our boundaries but never act like a doormat and allow ourselves to be taken advantage of. In other words, possess an awareness of who you are playing with. Do not try to “show off” when playing your mestre because he may seize the opportunity to remind you of who really plays the game better. Conversely, do not succumb to intimidation and allow another player to take advantage of your hesitancy. The term person encompasses a collection of these selves, but this “Person... is an others centered term” (Lurhmann 2000: 7156). This more collective idiom describes other individuals the subject views as having similar identities and selves as he himself owns than it is the subject commenting upon his own identity.

Clearly such a widely debated topic will not find resolution overnight in one thesis; however, it does seem possible to draw a few conclusions. Fundamentally, identity refers to the psychological packages of qualities exhibited, valued and endorsed

by the subject. Several such packages or identities build each self. Person refers to a member of a loosely defined group sharing similar selves as the subject. As a result of defining these terms, we may now better analyze the actions and affiliations of capoeiristas.

### **General Identities of the Two Groups:**

In the previous chapters I alluded to some of the qualities that differentiate Jon's and Scott's students. In this section I hope to outline the general identities of these groups for a clear application of my hypotheses that I delineate in chapter four. I found that within the Angola discipline, there seem to be some basic tenets that practitioners share. The Angola style tends to stress the African roots of the game which contrasts to the regional style stressing the importance of Brazilian influences. Practitioners of Angola also share a profound respect for Mestre Pasthina who developed that particular style. They also share some more basic similarities such as playing to the Angola rhythm at a slow controlled pace and following a dress code of black or blue pants and a yellow tee-shirt. However, I did notice that within this discipline a division between capoeiristas and angolieros exists. Urubu touched heavily upon this subject in his workshop. As there are two main forms of capoeira, it would seem to make sense that angoliero refers to a player of capoeira Angola, but there are more stipulations to this title. During the workshop, Urubu devoted quite a bit of time to the importance of knowing your capoeira lineage. He said capoeiristas learn to play the game but do not know their lineage. In order to earn the title of angoliero, you must know this lineage. For example, Urubu studied under Mestre Cobra Mansa so therefore Cobra's teacher would be Urubu's

“capoeira grandfather” and so on. Many of the capoeiristas that traveled to Austin for workshops and *rodas* take this lineage very seriously. Some even go so far as to wear their mestre’s name on their shirts or pants. Of the two groups I have studied with in Austin, Scott’s students seem to take this lineage more gravely than do Jon’s students. For this reason I consider Jon’s students capoeiristas and Scott’s students angolieros.

It became evident at Jurandir’s workshop that other people also noticed these differences. A girl from Scott’s group actually approached me after the first set of classes and asked me what differences I noticed between the two groups. She seemed to think that Jon’s students did not know many of the songs. I admit that Scott’s students played the *berimbau* and sang the songs, all of which use Portuguese lyrics, much more proficiently than did Jon’s students. In fact, many of Scott’s students speak Portuguese and lead the songs on occasion rather than just singing the *choridos* (choruses). The students from Scott’s group also seem to play a more seamless game. They all have their own style of play and never look pressed to think of new moves in their *jogo* (capoeira match). They embody the very important quality of “calmness” that Urubu made all too clear I do not understand. Some of them even traveled to Brazil in order to study capoeira in its native land. Jon’s students on the other hand come across as using training sessions as a form of exercise rather than a philosophy to live by. In general, Jon’s students practice capoeira, and Scott’s students truly live it.

Scott’s students look at life much differently than do Jon’s students. It took me a while longer to relate to them because I already shared so much with Jon’s students in terms of similar backgrounds. Their decision to live in a communally-owned warehouse intrigued me more than anything else about their lifestyle. They share household

responsibilities in much the same way that a family would. For all practical purposes their relationships do constitute a family. They even devised a general reciprocity system where you take items from the communal storeroom when you need them and give items to the storeroom when you do not need them anymore. Developing a garden for their small community of approximately fifteen people became the next step this summer for becoming as self-sufficient as possible while still living in the shadow of a large city like Austin. This system brings to mind similar images of the hippie movement in the 1960's and seems to serve as a quiet resistance to a mainstream culture of which they are not a part. While not all of them live in this home, several of the events I attended occurred there, so it is safe to conclude that they all tie into this social organization in one way or another.

For the sake of simplicity I developed below a chart to compare certain aspects of these groups' identities that I find applicable to this study. Keep in mind that modal traits expressed in each group form the basis of the chart below (Figure 1). These comparisons should prove useful in understanding why I propose different intentions behind members of each group choosing capoeira over some other activity. Furthermore, these group identities I describe here belong to the two FICA groups in Austin. Each group across the country and the world likely reacts to the basic capoeira fundamentals in their own unique way. Drawing concrete conclusions about the capoeira Angola identity necessitates a much more comprehensive study.

General Identity Comparisons Fig. 1

	<b>Jon's Students</b>	<b>Scott's students</b>
<b>TRAITS:</b>		
style of play	capoeira Angola	capoeira Angola
	capoeinistas	angoleros
<b>naturally endorsed traits</b>		
age	late teens- early twenties	mid-late twenties
race	white + 2 South Americans	white + 1 black
socio-economic background	upper middle class	lower middle class
<b>elective activities</b>		
characteristics of jogo	rely less on malicia	understand and use malicia
	rely more on physical moves	use a balance of physical moves
group membership	more transient	more stable
	higher cost	lower cost/ free
other activities	"extreme sports" i.e. rock climbing	complementary arts i.e. music and sketching

## Chapter IV- The Application of Ethnicity and Identity

### The Role of Ethnicity in Capoeira:

Although a difficult concept to establish, capoeira's strong African roots necessitate the discussion of ethnicity. We must discern why members of a majority ethnic group would voluntarily involve themselves in an activity associated with a minority ethnic group. Here I propose five possible hypotheses for this problem. Perhaps white capoeiristas identify with a romantically un-rooted lifestyle rather than the sedentary one proposed by their own culture. Maybe they dislike the Western/Christian philosophy of good versus evil, right versus wrong. They could have a feeling of purloined identity or culture or they may be searching for a community network. Finally, they may simply be looking for something new and exotic that has not yet become mainstream.

Where does the capoeira identity originate? We know that capoeira itself developed as an Afro-Brazilian innovation, but various social pressures also impacted the development of the different capoeira identities that we see today. Nestor Capoeira has described capoeira in its original form as "nomadic" (Capoeira 2002); it moves from place to place, reportedly traveling through free spirits who lack ties to a particular locale because of work or family obligations. This is the idea of *vadição*, a Portuguese term meaning to have fun or "bum" around.

Many of the early capoeiristas did just that. They were con-men who spent their free time in the *rodas*. The police persecuted these "lowest of the low," and that led to the outlawing of capoeira. When capoeira regained legal status, the style taught by



Mestre Bimba, regional, nearly eclipsed Angola completely, but the latter's unique style survived and slowly made its way around the globe, attracting those who cherish a culture that needs seeking out. The *angoliero*, white or black, must possess the drive and courage to follow the game wherever it leads. This could be in a place as familiar as a gymnasium or as foreign as a Rio slum. In fact, several of the students I became acquainted with trained in places as far away as Washington D.C., Seattle, Hawaii and Bahia, Brazil. This is not a game for people afraid to leave their comfort zone but one for those who wish to be nomadic in a metaphorical sense and allow the game to take them to a new place, sampling all that life has to offer.

Western European society classically segregates each component of the human experience into neat dichotomies. Nobility was separated from peasants, and Christianity split the secular from the sacred. Their philosophy rested upon the theory of opposites. If good exists so must evil; if there is right there must be wrong as well. Even science states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Western African culture, from where capoeira originates, shows no such segregation. Everything in the universe may exist simultaneously and side by side. Where Christianity moved to separate dance from their religious ceremonies, Western African religions have traditionally encouraged them to coexist. For example, dancing the samba forms an integral part of Candomblé, the Yoruba based religion associated with capoeira that evolved in Brazil. Within the circle of capoeira scholars, a debate rages on whether or not Candomblé correlates with capoeira. Some (Capoeira 2002) would argue that although they both originate from Afro-Brazilian innovation, they have nothing to do with each other. I propose the opposite, that capoeira and Candomblé developed together

in the New World due to shared philosophies that African slaves brought with them. In Candomblé we see this philosophy expressed through the creation of gods and goddesses that possess characteristics of real people but also have extraordinary power. Their pantheon is neither all good nor all evil. Each god displays his or her own attitude, moods, and even favorite foods. In fact, Candomblé rejects the concept of good and evil as well as heaven and hell. Their gods exist in a more of a human form in contrast to the Judeo-Christian tradition in which one God embodies purity and omnipotency, and Satan represents all evil. In capoeira, *malícia* chiefly expresses this philosophy. When *malícia* tricks your opponent into becoming vulnerable to your attacks, it is neither mean nor kind. It only serves as an instrument used by the player to deal with the forces that exist in his or her life. It seems natural for anyone of any race who rejects the theory of opposites perpetuated by Western society to be drawn to an art with such a free, natural philosophy.

Perhaps some whites gravitate to capoeira because they share a common feeling of a stolen identity or culture on a personal level. Since their forced migration to the Americas, Africans have had their culture absorbed by the white upper-class. There is a long history of whites borrowing and modifying black music and dances. For example, the banjo was developed by African Americans but it evolved into a symbol for white southerners (Ferris). Popular dances like the Lindy Hop were also taken from their creators in Harlem and associated with whites; in this case The Lindy Hop became known as swing and jitterbug when performed to Big Band style music (Jonas 1992). Many blacks use capoeira as a way to reconnect with their African heritage. For people who feel they have experienced a cultural loss, capoeira could serve as a valuable model

and inspiration for finding a way to preserve their own traditions. Closely related to this idea is the possibility that those individuals who feel estranged by mainstream American culture will be more likely to associate with an art from an ethnic group that also encountered resistance in being accepted into white American society. In this context, capoeira serves as a counter-cultural identity.

A third possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that the students are searching for a sense of community. White households in the United States tend to be nuclear, consisting of one or two parents and their children. The nuclear units that make up one extended family may be dispersed widely across the country or even the world. However, black families tend to include more extended family under one roof and in one town. Anthropologist Carol Stack conducted research in the Chicago area during the 1960's and hypothesized, "that domestic functions are carried out for urban Blacks by clusters of kin who do not necessarily live together," (Stacks 1974: 9). Not only do more people live together in one home, but blacks seem to utilize more of an extended network of exchange and support than do whites. Capoeira typifies this support system. It took a relatively short time for me to gain acceptance from the other students, and once that happened they were more than willing to invite me places, offer me a place to stay, and offer to put me in touch with their friends in other towns and states.

In comparison to my experiences in ballet, jazz, and modern dance classes, capoeira projects a much more nurturing atmosphere. In dance, working around dancers with more training than you is intimidating, but in capoeira the students with more experience willingly help the more novice players and encourage them. Although structured as a fighting system, capoeiristas seem to have less inter-group competition

than do most of the dancers I know. According to Moongoo, this supportive system may be unique to the Angola style. During one of my trips to Austin I had the opportunity of observing a regional *bartzizo*, or graduation *roda* where students receive their next belt. At this *bartzizo*, Moongoo shared with me that he originally intended to train Angola for three years and then switch to regional. However, his spiritual connection with Angola and his dislike for the competitive nature of regional's belt ranking system convinced him to stay with the Angola style.

It could also be the case that some students come to capoeira to find something new and exotic. Exercise regimes that draw from a particular philosophy like Yoga or an occupational group like Pilates have become extremely popular in recent years. Asian martial arts such as Karate or Tae Kwan Do also enjoy extreme popularity worldwide, but traditional African forms of expression are less often explored by members of other ethnic groups. The recent explosion of capoeira groups in Austin, mostly of the more physical, machismo regional style, could indicate people searching for the next new workout alternative. I spoke with one woman who attended Scott's class after a hiatus of several years from capoeira. She took a kinesiology class in capoeira during her time at the University of Ohio. I asked her why she chose capoeira as a class, and she told me she saw a demonstration of it and "it looked challenging but fun." She expressed a basic vocabulary of the movement but seemed deficient in the philosophy. Interestingly, she never returned to the class. This suggests that while some people are drawn to capoeira for its exotic value, without understanding the art's history and ideology it is little more than an exercise program.

**Emic View:**

When evaluating my hypotheses according to the data retrieved during my fieldwork I found it necessary and useful to differentiate between emic and etic perspectives. Emic refers to the point of view taken by the subjects of the study. Etic refers to the researcher's perspective. The information I gleaned from casual conversations with many practitioners in both groups most supports my search for community network hypothesis. Some of the comments made by Urubu during his workshop also supported this idea. At the workshop I asked him how he explains white students being attracted to an art with such a strong African history. He told me that some people come to the *roda* simply because that is where their friends are. I thought maybe his words lost their efficacy in translation or he wanted to sidestep my question. In actuality, many of the students I spoke with say that their friends who practiced capoeira or at least knew about it drew them into the art. Even Jon, my primary teacher, attended his first class because a friend invited him. Actually, out of all the individuals I got to know through my research, this was the only reason reported for trying capoeira. Certainly close friendships do form as a result of practicing capoeira with a close-knit group like those in Austin, but it appears that these individuals are unaware of the more covert functions that group membership serves.

**Etic View:**

I know from personal experience that there exist much easier ways to make friends than engaging in these absolutely exhausting workouts. Therefore, I claim that the pull of capoeira for non-Africans has more to do with the individual's deepest,

strongest self than it does with a search for community and friendship. Several of my informants cited a spiritual connection that they feel with capoeira. Mestre Jurandir's spiritual connection with capoeira correlates with his belief in Candomblé and therefore is easily understood. However, the connection felt by those other individuals who do not practice Candomblé necessitates further study. This supports my belief that something else must connect these capoeiristas as you do not expect to find a spiritual element in groups that are only interested in developing friendships.


My own acceptance into the group further evidences my proposition. There were many individuals who attended one or two classes during my fieldwork but never became part of the group. Whether it was my persistence, eagerness, or my willingness to suffer humiliation in the *roda* time and time again, the other students must have seen a part of me that they could identify with. Thus I gained acceptance into their group.

In the case of Jon's students, I feel my "new and exotic" hypothesis best fits with my experiences in the field. These individuals all mentioned experiences with other "extreme" activities such as rock climbing, mountain biking or Asian martial arts. Rather I should say former extreme activities as those I just mentioned become more and more mainstream each season. In this case perhaps capoeira is their way of setting themselves aside from other fitness oriented "weekend warriors." They also tend to rely more on physical moves than *malícia* in their *jogo*. You expect more philosophical students to practice deception like the original Brazilian *malandros*, but these individuals do not. I think Hong, my key informant for the first three months of my research period, best typifies these attitudes. He moved to Arizona at the end of August 2002 when he found a job there. When he failed to find a new capoeira Angola group he attended a few

regional classes instead. In early January 2003 he informed me that he felt no connection with the regional group there so he wanted to begin training for a triathlon. This underscores my idea that one of the main reasons Jon's students practice capoeira revolves around its physical benefits.

I think capoeira serves as a counter-cultural identity for Scott's students.

Although all but one of his students belong to the majority ethnic group, their behaviors and attitudes are incongruent with what mainstream American culture mandates. Our society expects individuals of their age group, mid to late twenties, to be setting the stage for the rest of their adult lives by finishing their formal education and/or procuring a steady job and living either alone, with a roommate or in a nuclear household. These individuals do not seem to have concrete ties to one particular local because the majority of them have had the opportunities to travel for extended periods of time- mainly in Brazil. Many of them also intend to spend more time traveling the country and the world in the near future. While some of Scott's students certainly do live in individual homes, the warehouse I previously mentioned further evidences that these individual maintain a different lifestyle from most Americans. It only makes sense for these students to rally around an art that mirrors their rejection of mainstream white American culture. Not only have blacks in the United States been marginalized because of their race, capoeira itself originated and developed with outcast classes of slaves, mulattos and lower-class whites in Brazil. Because these students logically identify with other groups of people, past or present, that underwent similar marginalization, capoeira serves as the perfect vehicle for expressing the counter-cultural identity they wish to assume.



## Chapter V- Conclusion

### Research Conclusions:

It is my hope that this research effectively demonstrates the linkage between identity and group formation. Understanding identity as the psychological packages of qualities exhibited, valued and endorsed by the subject can help us to classify individuals based on the modal traits they exhibit. In the case of my research, individuals aligned themselves naturally with other individuals possessing similar identities. When seeking general similarities in capoeira group identities I found that huge disparities exist between the Angola and regional styles. Regional tends to stress the Brazilian influences on capoeira where Angola focuses on the African roots of the game. Regional also emphasizes the acrobatic and militant aspects where Angola pays more attention to the development of rhythm and control in the *jogo*. Angola groups do tend to share some other fundamental elements of identity such as a profound respect for Mestre Pastinha, a reliance on the Angola rhythm, and the basic dress code of black or blue pants and a yellow t-shirt. I also discovered that individual Angola groups differ in their focus. Jon and Scott's groups perfectly exemplify this concept. Jon's students tended to focus on the physical aspects of the game where Scott's students were more inclined to delve into the philosophical aspects of capoeira. One can largely attribute these differences to the differences in the individuals' backgrounds and personalities. The economic and educational status of Jon's students afforded them the opportunity of being exposed to different ideas and activities that a common, less educated person might be able to access. For the majority of these individuals, a long list of other extreme activities precede



2003 Fellow Thesis MSZ

Miller, Lauren E.

Exact Title

Academic Search

Plus

ix

out Access

Docs

2:___	
3:___	
3:___	
4:00-5:10	ENGL 104
4:___	
5:___	
5:___	
6:___	
6:___	
7:___	
7:___	
8:___	
8:___	

s:\ref\bl\tours\trsched1.wpd 6/17/99

capoeira in their résumés. Scott's students come from a different background and philosophical standpoint that encourages them to experiment with elements from other cultures to customize their own identity.

**Further Research:**

My study has given us great insight into how identity influences group identity formation; however, much remains to be learned about this subject. The sample size I used was quite small and may not be representative of the general capoeira identity. To increase the validity of this investigation, the identities of more capoeirista groups nationwide and worldwide should be examined. To better understand the counter-cultural identity expressed by Scott's students it would be interesting to compare their traits to those found in all-black or Brazilian groups. To understand the physical fitness motivated students in Jon's group, it could be interesting and informative to compare their interests to those of students in the more aggressive, regional style. In a broader sense it may be useful to compare the identities and membership motivations present in capoeira to those active in other movement forms. Eventually this will lead to a better understanding of how dance and other forms of spectacle serve to integrate individuals and provide a group identity. I intend to combine this theoretical perspective with my extensive background in dance and drama during graduate studies and my future research career because I feel that all art expresses a deep, almost intangible part of the human experience. Understanding that component of our symbolic behavior can help anthropologists and other social scientists to understand how humans relate to one another and to their environment.



### **Personal Impacts of My**

#### **Research:**

My experiences with capoeira have affected me in my work as an anthropologist, my skills as a dancer, and as a human being. Prior to my fieldwork, the

participant observation method meant little more to me than an answer on a standardized exam. I knew its definition but had no idea how it could be done or what its implications were. This research opportunity made it a tangible reality rather than a frightening obstacle that loomed in my future. I feel that becoming accustomed to this method will allow me to be more successful in graduate school.

This research has also impacted me as a dancer and choreographer. The physical nature of capoeira has improved my endurance, upper body strength, agility and control. The ability to think on one's feet necessary for capoeira improved my improvisational; skills, which I always struggled with, and increased my speed and accuracy of learning. As a dance minor student I had the unique opportunity of abstracting my research into a choreographic work set on five dancers. *Enculturation*, my work in progress, mirrors my progression in capoeira. On a literal level one dancer represents myself and gradually learns the style of capoeira by interacting with four already established capoeiristas. At the conclusion of the piece she has gained enough confidence to enter the *roda* and share what she has learned. This equates with my presentation of this thesis. On a deeper and

more abstract level the initiate gains wisdom and protection as she plays with the four capoeiristas who are positioned in a cross pattern on the stage. The four capoeiristas represent the four corners of the earth from which practitioners of Candomblé and capoeiristas receive supernatural protection. Her entrance into the *roda* at the end of the dance represents her philosophical maturity and ability to use the power of capoeira in her everyday life.

As a human being, my research has reshaped my attitudes toward life. When I thanked Urubu for his workshop he sat me down and said, “When you are done doing this for a class, research or whatever, continue doing it for yourself because it isn’t about the movements or the people, it’s about something inside of you.” At the time I did not understand this but lately I have been trying to take his advice to heart. Capoeira is about letting your innermost self emerge and take over your reason and rationality. Sometimes I am surprised at the side of me that comes out of hiding when I play. I’ve learned that it is okay for my brain to be out of control occasionally, even if this only means letting other people hear me sing or admitting that I can be defeated. I am learning from capoeira that maybe life is not so serious after all; maybe life, like capoeira, is just a game.

## References

Berimbau drawing.

1 April 2003. <http://www.users.bigpond.com/SS.Jeronimo/berimbau.html>.

Bilgrami, A.

2000 "Identity and Identification: Philosophical Aspects." *In* International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Smelser, Neil J. and Baltes, Paul B., eds. Pp. 7149-7154. New York: Elsevier.

Brown, Rupert.

2000 "Social Identity." *In* International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Smelser, Neil J. and Baltes, Paul B., eds. Pp. 789-790. New York: Elsevier.

Capoeira, Nestor.

2002 Capoeira: roots of the dance-fight-game. Berkley, California: North Atlantic Books.

---

1995 The Little Capoeira Book. Trans. Alex Ladd. Berkley, California: North Atlantic Books.

Capoeira Songbook

2000 Capoeira Songbook for Estrangeiros. Washington, DC: The International Capoeira Angola Foundation, 2000.

Ferris, William.

Local Color: a sense of place in folk art. New York: Anchor Books Double Day.

Geovanni Brewer dir.

1988 Bahia: Africa In the Americas. Berkley, California: California Estension Media Center.

Jonas, Gerald.

1992 Dancing: the pleasure, power and art of movement. New York: Harry N Abrams.

Jogo Photograph

4 April 2003. <http://www.capoeira.com/planetcapoeira/.com>.

Luhrmann, T. M.

- 2000 "Identity in Anthropology." *In International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Smelser, Neil J. and Baltes, Paul B., eds. Pp. 7154-7158. New York: Elsevier.

Music ensemble photo.

- 4 April 2003. <http://www.capoeira.com/planetcapoeira/.com>.

Public Broadcast Station

- 2000 "Free to Dance" Electronic document,  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/about/index.html>.

Rodrigues, Antonio and Svinth, Joseph.

- 2000 Many Things at Once: An Introduction to Capoeira." *In Journal of Combative Sport*, Electronic document,  
[http://ejmas.com/jcs\\_rodrigues\\_0800.htm](http://ejmas.com/jcs_rodrigues_0800.htm), accessed 5 March 2002.

Sansone, Livio.

- 1999 From Africa to Afro: Use and Abuse of Africa in Brazil. Malaysia: SEPHIS, CODESRIA.

Stack, Carol.

- 1974 *All Our Kin*. New York: Basic Books.

Tigges, Gabriela.

- 1990 The History of Capoeira in Brazil. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Brigham Young University.

### Supplemental Sources Consulted

Bauman, Richard and Abrahams, Roger D., eds.

- 1981 "And Other Neighborly Names" *Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Clements, Bill

- 1997a "Cantometrics." *In Folklore An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music & Art*. Green, Thomas A, ed. Pp. 302-306. Santa Barbara, California: ABC- CLIO.
- 1997b "Choreometrics." *In Folklore An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music & Art*. Green, Thomas A, ed. Pp. 302-306. Santa Barbara, California: ABC- CLIO.

Desch-obi, M Thomas J.

- 2000 Engolo: Combat Traditions in African and African Diaspora History. Ph.D. dissertation. University of California Los Angeles.

Green, Thomas A.

- 2001 "Capoeira." *In Martial Arts of the World An Encyclopedia*. Green, Thomas A., ed. Pp. 61-65. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.
- 1997 "Dance, Folk." *In Folklore An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music & Art*. Green, Thomas A, ed. Pp. 302-306. Santa Barbara, California: ABC- CLIO.

Green, Thomas A. and Tausk, Gene

- 2001 "Africa and African America." *In Martial Arts of the World An Encyclopedia*. Green, Thomas A.,ed. Pp. 61-65. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.

Jackson, Bruce

- 1997 "Fieldwork." *In Folklore An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music & Art*. Green, Thomas A, ed. Pp. 302-306. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.

Lingo, Kaira.

- 1996 "The Politics of Race and Power in Capoeira A cultural Thermostat or Thermometer?" Paper presented as a senior honors thesis, Stanford University, 1996

McCormick, Charlie

- 1997 "Participant-observation Method." *In Folklore An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music & Art*. Green, Thomas A, ed. Pp. 302-306. Santa Barbara, California: ABC- CLIO.

Ortiz

- 1985 *Los Bailes y el Teatro de Los Negros en el Folklore de Cuba*. La Habana. Cuba: Editorial Letres Cubanas.

Thompson, Robert Farris.

- 2001 "Tough Guys Do Dance." *In Journal of Combative Sport*, Electronic document, [http://ejimas.com/jcs/jcsart\\_thompson\\_1001.htm](http://ejimas.com/jcs/jcsart_thompson_1001.htm)., accessed 5 March 2002.



**Vita**

Lauren E. Miller

10511 Torrey Pines dr.

Willis, TX 77318

Lauren E. Miller is currently an anthropology student at Texas A&M University with a minor in dance. Honors include being a Student Research Week winner for her presentation *Capoeiristas, Dancing Between Identities* in March of 2003 and being a founding member of Nu Delta Alpha, the first nationally recognized collegiate dance honor society. Other honors include being a part of Tau Kappa junior honor society and Golden Key honor society.