4. MAKING MEANING AT CAPOEIRA WORLD:
RACIALIZING CAPOEIRA WITH COSMOPOLITAN TOURISTS

In an influential book addressing the meaning of tourism in modern society, MacCannell (1999) asserts that tourism is a search for meaning, specifically authenticity; through ritual worship of social difference, tourists acquire symbols they need to give meaning to modern life. MacCannell may have overstated the centrality of authenticity to giving life meaning, but his book does show that some consumers from advanced capitalist societies value authenticity and cultural difference. Consumption of racialized culture is becoming valuable as cultural capital among cosmopolitan omnivorous consumers that value social and cultural otherness (Cheyne and Binder 2010; Grazian 2003; Johnston and Baumann 2007). How do these cosmopolitan consumers and Brazilians construct cultural difference and authenticity as a tourist experience in the case of capoeira? How do the racial and tourism contexts described previously influence meaning making as it occurs in interaction in concrete situations?

Capoeira practice and racial construction are both embodied phenomenon that demand a methodology sensitive to how people enact and perceive subtle bodily cues and casual comments. In Schudson’s words, “the viewer is also actor, the audience is participant, and the distinction between the producer and consumer of culture is blurred if it exists at all. Culture is simultaneously attended to, institutionalized, resolved in action.” (1989: 173). Consumption is similarly interactive (Peñaloza 2001; Thompson and Tambyah 1999).
To understand how people construct meanings in concrete situations, I empirically examined, through long-term participant observation, the process through which meanings emerge in interactions (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). I observed interactions between tourists and Brazilians at Capoeira World – a studio outside of the tourist center of Salvador, but also popular with tourists. I observed as meanings emerged and became attached to the bodies of capoeira practitioners. This studio also brought together lower and middle class Brazilians, providing an opportunity to observe RCC in the context of inter-class face-to-face interaction. My analysis brings practice in by explaining how consumers construct and acquire omnivorous cultural capital in interaction with particular contexts (in our case, with the producers of cultural objects). As my unit of analysis, I used actors’ embodiment of capoeira as it related to the interactional environment of tourism at the studio and the cultural knowledge available in the larger tourism market.

At Capoeira World, generic frames from the tourism market, as well as tourists’ cultural knowledge, became concrete during interaction. Here, capoeira knowledge, objects, and practices connected to a synthesis of two sets of cultural symbols. The first was a set of symbols recognizable to Westerners as signifying blackness within the global market for cultural difference – specifically Africa, slavery, and the black male body. The second was a set of dispositions of Western middle class omnivorous consumption – specifically non-commercial, authentic, and experiential consumption. Cultural performance was as important as black bodies. Interactions ascribed this synthesis of meanings to dark skin toned Brazilian bodies, and tourists embodied these cultural distinctions by physically interacting with these bodies.
Capoeira World: High Economic Capital

The neighborhood sat at a distance from the Pelourinho Tourist Center, but was easily accessible, by bus and foot, to tourists. The area was dotted with a combination of tall apartment buildings, secondary schools, and businesses ranging from small copy offices to convenience stores. Small open-air bars offered a limited selection of beer, liquor, and soft drinks and a few plastic tables along crumbling front sidewalks. Farther into the neighborhood, condominium buildings gave way to small non-gated apartments and older private homes.

Capoeira World’s building was one of the largest I have seen. The main lobby housed a reception desk, usually manned by a young female employee from the neighborhood, a wooden bench, drinking fountain and several framed black and white photos of capoeira practitioners from the early twentieth century. The ground level also contained an office where the master and advanced student gather to discuss the group’s business, a small workout room, and a larger room with seven computers connected to the internet.

A staircase ascended to the main training area: a large room with a large blue circle painted on the floor and a smaller back room used for spillover training and male and female dressing rooms to the sides. The walls of the main room have several framed black and white photos of Africans in traditional tribal clothing and numerous berimbau (four to five foot long bowed instruments) hang on the walls. In front, a floor to ceiling sheet displayed the studio's name and logo. Shelves in the back of the room held numerous hallowed out gourds of various sizes, bells, tambourines, and the other instruments used in capoeira music. A few tall hand drums and a wooden bench sat on
the floor in back and a small boom box sat to the side. In the back room, a single framed photo of a famous practitioner – Mestre Bimba – hung high on the wall.

Descending from the lobby, the building had a set of rooms used to house visiting practitioners and long-term tourists, another workout room, an outdoor workout area, and a large shed where students manufacture berimbau.

Capoeira World’s master\(^1\), Angel, was a light-skinned, thirty-seven-year-old high school graduate, generously tattooed with various capoeira symbols. His parents were lawyers. After training throughout childhood with a well-known master in Salvador, followed by two years in Europe working as an instructor, he returned to Salvador and opened his own group. He became a well-known mestrandor (person in the process of becoming a master) in the capoeira community. His alumni ran studios in other Brazilian cities and in the US, Spain, and Holland. Through invitations to capoeira events around the world, Angel visited dozens of countries, and made regular visits to his alumni’s studios to lead classes and attend batizados.\(^2\) Several of his advanced students also traveled abroad with him and on their own to capoeira events. His studio also had a branch in the neighboring town that catered to local children.

\(^1\) A master or mestre is a practitioner that has reached the end of the training period, which includes a lengthy period teaching capoeira students.

\(^2\) A batizado is an initiation and testing ceremony in which students are baptized into capoeira and given an apelido and continuing students demonstrate their skill to advance in cord color (similar to belt systems in Asian martial arts).
The studio’s funding came from revenue from nightly classes, a monthly instrument making workshop (both attended mainly by tourists), presentations for local Portuguese language schools catering to foreigners, and government-sponsored grants for children’s classes. Few paying Brazilian students attended regularly. Angel saw capoeira and Capoeira World as a way to offer young Brazilians a feasible career. The majority of his advanced instructors and alumni rose through the studio’s social service program that provided free capoeira classes to children and teens.

Most of the studio’s Brazilian students lived in the surrounding middle-class neighborhood. The studio’s advanced Brazilian practitioners also lived in the neighborhood, but these students grew up in nearby lower class neighborhoods and joined the studio through free classes offered to low-income school children. They were young dark-skinned males. Most have been friends for years and spend time together socializing at local bars and events, and several live in shared apartments in the neighborhood. Advanced students held jobs as instructors at Capoeira World or in one of its social service programs in local primary and secondary schools. During my time with the group, only two advanced females trained. One, married, had trained for many years but attended class irregularly due to family duties. Intermediate and novice students were a mixture of light and dark-skin toned men and women from the neighborhood; however, intermediate students had far less direct contact with tourists than did advanced practitioners.

Tourism at the studio included short-term tourists that attended one or two classes and others that attended for several weeks or months. Tourists were almost all light skin-toned, twenty-something, middle class college students or recent graduates from the
United States and Europe. They were well-traveled individuals interested in a variety of cultural genres. Portuguese language skill varied among tourists from no language ability to intermediate, but most were at the intermediate level. None had advanced Portuguese comprehension skills.\(^3\)

**From Capoeira Practice to Authentic Difference**

*Enacting Experiential Consumption*

At Capoeira World, extensive interactions between Brazilian practitioners and tourists transformed embodied knowledge into an interactive consumption experience that aligned with the cultural expectations of tourists. Performance and interaction consumption are central to cultural tourism (Bruner 2005; Desmond 1999; Tucker 1997). American consumers also value *experiences* more broadly (Hines 2010). Further, active consumption – rather than taste alone – is central to omnivorous cultural capital (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Holt 1998; López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro 2005).

Interaction and experience provide cultural authenticity (Peñaloza 2001; Wherry 2008), a central cultural meaning to tourists (MacCannell 1999). Authenticity is a socially constructed meaning rather than a property inherent to objects (Peterson 1997), and what

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\(^3\) The visual and embodied symbols described in the analysis were the primary cultural objects available to tourists. Much of the nuance of capoeira skill, conversations among Brazilians, and internal struggles at Capoeira World were beyond tourists’ understanding. This reinforced the perception that the studio’s culture was complex and authentic.
constitutes authenticity varies across audiences. It depends on the naturalization of symbolic boundaries that separate authentic from inauthentic (Bourdieu 1991; Peterson 1997). Subtle enactment of cultural knowledge are vital to establishing authenticity of artistic producers (Bourdieu 1984).

In nightly classes, a fairly standardized and basic workout routine structured the three-hour training, and most tourists whispered, through gasps for air, that the class was difficult. At the end of each class, a short thirty-minute roda allowed visitors and Brazilians to play in the roda environment. The master orchestrated these rodas, allowing each tourist to take a quick turn playing in the roda with a Brazilian. Brazilians performed basic kicks and defense movements and encouraged tourists to practice the movements taught in class. Brazilian practitioners also policed the rodas, chapping loudly and encouraging the foreigners to keep the circle of bodies in form, clap to the rhythm, and sing the response chorus to the various songs. After each tourist had a turn in the roda, Brazilian practitioners played amongst themselves. Tourists looked on, mouthing song lyrics, clapping, taking photographs and filming with digital cameras, or looking confused about the process unfolding before them.

During recruitment sessions every few months, the master and advanced students demonstrated instruments and capoeira play for groups of foreign Portuguese language-

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4 Songs all draw on a call-and-response format in which one practitioner sings the lengthy call lyrics and the roda members then sing back a short repetitive response. There is a well-established repertoire of songs used across groups, though groups can invent new songs.
program students. These interactive presentations introduced tourists to the embodied practice of capoeira and the racialized bodies of its practitioners:

The master told the group of at least forty North Americans to form a circle in the main workout room. He stood in the middle of the crowded circle of foreigners smiling broadly and holding a *berimbau*. He explained in rapid Portuguese that the instrument was fundamental to capoeira music. There were three sizes of *berimbaus* which produced differing sounds, and a lead *berimbau* could play various rhythms on the strung bow in order to control the speed of the capoeira game. He told them that capoeira is about improvisation and unpredictability – you have to have a feel for the game. He described other instruments used in capoeira, asking a Brazilian student to hand him each instrument as he discussed it.

Next, the master told the group they would do a quick workout and had them spread out across the room. The North Americans timidly lingered in the back. He smiled and motioned for them to come forward with his arms several times, and finally got them in formation. He had them crawling around the room on all fours quickly. Eight Brazilian advanced practitioners, all dark skin toned males, barefoot and dressed in white pants and white t-shirt bearing the studio’s logo, stood together in a corner of the room, watching and chuckling at the sight. Next, the master demonstrated a basic kick and enthusiastically motioned for the visitors to try the movements while Brazilians practitioners wandered the room helping flailing North Americans control their arms and
legs. The master appeared to be having a great time watching the embarrassed North Americans attempt unfamiliar movements.

After ten or so minutes, he had the group form a circle, and explained that this formation was the *roda* where practitioners played a game of capoeira. An advanced Brazilian student placed a bench at the front of the circle and four more sat down with instruments while another student brought a tall hand drum to the end of the bench. They began to play instruments and after an introductory song sung solo by one of the Brazilian practitioners, the master played in the *roda* with several Brazilian students as five Brazilians sang and played instruments simultaneously. The North Americans crowded around the small circle vying for a position to see the show. Other Brazilians clapped loudly, circling the *roda* and encouraging the North Americans to clap by clapping loudly in front of those not participating. The speed of the rhythm increased and the Brazilians’ movements sped up as well. High kicks began to fly between the practitioners in the *roda* as the North Americans clapped and looked on wide-eyed. The rhythm increased further and several sweat-soaked Brazilians, having removed their t-shirts, practiced flips and acrobatic moves in the *roda*. The human circle enlarged as the North Americans backed away from the flying legs, but Brazilian practitioners encouraged them to move forward. A North American ran to his bag to retrieve a digital camera and began photographing the show, which led to a flood of visitors retrieving their cameras. Soon several were standing on chairs in order to get a good view of the show in the *roda*. Several North American females began to whisper and
point towards the dark, muscle-bound young Brazilian males now wearing only white pants and their colored belt. Finally, the *roda* climaxed and the musicians began playing a slower rhythm.

Panting Brazilian practitioners stood to the sides and the master motioned for the Brazilians to take the visitors into the *roda*. A Brazilian walked into the *roda* and took the arm of a pale blond woman, who looked horrified and shook her head no. He motioned for her to come forward into the center of the circle. She timidly shuffled forward looking around, confused. He took her to the front to the *roda* and squatted with her. Slowly doing a cartwheel into the circle and motioning for her to do the same, he got her into the *roda* with him and began to *ginga*\(^5\) slowly. She stood awkwardly staring at him and swaying from foot to foot. He squatted and motioned for her to kick over his head, which she did, laughing from embarrassment. Then he shook her hand and she quickly went back to the outskirts of the circle. Brazilians repeated this with two additional North American visitors before the more outgoing tourists went forward on their own after asking a friend to photograph them in the *roda*.

When they finished the show, everyone was sweating in the stifling room.

(Field notes)

To complement this experience, Capoeira World framed its activities as not touristic. Several studies find that consumers interpret non-commercial and hand-made cultural products as authentic (Aldrich 1990; Bendix 1997; Grazian 2003).

\(^{5}\) The *ginga* is a wide sweeping step.
Brazilian students rarely attended some activities popular among tourists. However, Brazilian practitioners drew on distinctions between tourism and group practices, framing their activities as natural aspects of capoeira culture. They offered a berimbau-making class that seven tourists and no Brazilians took during my time with the group. Flexível, the resident berimbau-maker and an advanced practitioner, told me that the berimbaus he constructed are now all over the world:

During a berimbau-making workshop, Flexível, the instructor, showed us the proper way to put holes in the gourd. He demonstrated on the gourd he had cleaned and dried the previous day, placing two fingers on the back of the gourd and drawing a small mark on either side of his fingers. Then, he began to slowly poke out a hole over each mark with a knife. He stopped after a second, laughed and said, “but now that we have technology so we can just drill the holes!” We all laughed. He grabbed the drill and put the two holes in each participant’s gourd.

Brent, an enthusiastic light skin-toned 19-year-old North American, attending an elite US university, asked Flexível where people buy berimbaus. Flexível replied that people buy from the studio. He told Brent that the pretty painted berimbaus at the Mercado Modelo, the local tourist craft market, looked nice and may sound good, but were not made to last. “They won’t hold the good sound over years like a professional berimbau will,” said Flexível, referring to his berimbaus as professional. He explained that it was important to put the instrument together well, taking time and using the right parts. Brent said, “Yeah those are more for tourists” and Flexível agreed, saying they were
good for decorating your walls. He said there were *berimbaus* in the building that had been there for twenty years, though twelve years was average. A North American girl asked why there were so many *berimbaus* around if they lasted that long and Flexível replied “this is a *berimbau* factory.” Brent asked where the wood and gourds came from and Flexível said from the *Mata Atlantica* forest, that the gourd was a type of fruit that grew in the coastal forest. (Field notes, quotes my translation from Portuguese)

Claim-making regarding authenticity was explicit only when tourists asked these direct questions. Instead, items subtly cued the non-tourism nature of Capoeira World. Many capoeira-related items were available in the tourist center – tambourines, drums, *berimbaus*, other instruments, pants and t-shirts in many bright colors, and silver necklaces with miniature *berimbau* charms. Brightly painted *berimbaus* in a variety of sizes, from one to over five feet in length, were one of the most visible. Capoeira World avoided these items, instead displaying and using only non-painted natural wood *berimbaus* and instruments. Several North American participants in the *berimbau* workshops told me that painting or decorating their hand-made *berimbau* would ruin it.
Figure 4.1.

Painted *berimbau*

Photograph by Danielle Hedegard
Figure 4.2

*Berimbaus for sale in tourist market*

Photograph by Danielle Hedegard
Figure 4.3

Non-painted *berimbau*

Photograph by Danielle Hedegard
Tourists interpreted the taken-for-granted way that practitioners played instruments, sang, and played in the roda as strong evidence of the studio’s non-tourism nature. When tourists arrived, they would find Brazilian practitioners practicing berimbau rhythms or kicks alone in the workout room, find the berimbau-maker cleaning gourds to construct new instruments, and find Brazilians gathered to socialize. The majority of
foreign visitors saw these Brazilians as legitimate practitioners rather than tour operators. Jack, a North American tourist, told me:

They're native Portuguese speakers... and all of the songs are in Portuguese, they really get the songs... partially because we're in Brazil and it's the Brazilian spirit... a lot more experienced people... I like seeing Ouro sing because he fuckin’ really gets into it. His eyes role back into his head... A lot of people here are like that. (Field notes)

Brazilians never expressed feeling that they were anything but practitioners. For them, capoeira practice involved teaching others, whether foreign tourists or novice Brazilian students. As one advance practitioner told me: “One wants to train to become a good capoeirista,⁶ other to lose weight, other because he likes the berimbau, other because he likes the energy... and I have to make everyone happy.” (My translation from Portuguese.)

The group also aligned capoeira with consumer tastes for understated commercialism. Tourists valued this and many complained that street vendors constantly asked them to purchase things, especially in the city’s tourist center. Capoeira World charged roughly $35 per month for unlimited classes. Though the fee was more than that at other nearby studios, it was comparable to the fees charged in the Tourist Center and was a relatively small amount for tourists. There was no price list posted anywhere in the building. At their recruitment events, the Master made a quick remark that they offered classes “if anyone is interested.” The receptionist informed inquiring tourists of the price

⁶ Capoeirista translates as someone that practices capoeira seriously.
and received their money. She gave them a quick reminder when their month had expired, asking if they planned to train for another month rather than asking for money.

While the receptionist subtly reminded tourists of the monthly fee, Brazilian practitioners rarely mentioned money to tourists. They would, every other month or whenever there was a fresh group of tourists, announce a *berimbau*-making workshop in which individuals could make the large bowed instrument from raw materials over several weekends. When tourists inquired individually about the class, Brazilian practitioners would tell them the price. The Master told his advanced students, in private, not to ask the tourists for money and to treat them how they would treat a friend.

Capoeira World also sold capoeira workout pants with the group’s logo stitched on one leg, as well as logo t-shirts in a variety of designs and colors. A single rack displaying one of each of the items sat in the reception area at night. They listed no prices on the clothing. Many did not notice the rack until a tourist appeared in class with the new clothing. The receptionist gave them prices when they inquired and allowed them to try on the clothes. Again, the price was reasonable to the tourists – roughly $17, and less than in the tourist center.

*Synthesizing Experiential Consumption with Authentic Blackness*

The interactive consumption described above provided important experiences with cultural otherness and authentic producers of that otherness (Peñaloza 2001; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). For cosmopolitan consumers, otherness and authenticity are central meanings (Johnston and Baumann 2007), but they must come in recognizable
form (Howes 1996; MacCannell 1989; Wilk 1995). Common symbols connected to blackness and available to consumers include Africa and slavery (Bruner 1996; Bruner 2005)(Pieterse 1995; Soar 2001, music such as hip-hop and reggae (Rodriquez 2006; Rose 1994) and low socioeconomic status. They also align with common themes of authenticity – exoticism (Johnston and Baumann 2007; Lu and Fine 1995), continuity with the past (Johnston and Baumann 2007), personal biographies (Fine 2003), and human bodies (Bruner 2005; Desmond 1999). The racial identity of artists can establish the authenticity of their work (Chong 2011).

Interactions at the studio synthesized dominant symbols of blackness – Africa and slavery, Afro-Brazilianness, and the black body – with experiential consumption. Making meaning at Capoeira World relied on meanings of blackness ascribed by tourists far more than on Brazilians asserted racial identities and meanings. This process gave meaning to capoeira objects as socially distant (Brazilian black bodies), culturally Other (Afro-Brazilian), geographically specific (in Africa and Salvador), and historically embedded (in slavery).

It may appear inevitable to readers that capoeira be connected to these symbols, but the fixed and primordial concepts of blackness from the United States interact with an ambiguous racial context in Brazil. Only some capoeira studios in Brazil assert blackness as important to the practice (Travassos 1999). Several scholars argue that capoeira and other Afro-Brazilian derived objects are so integrated into nationalist ideology that they have lost racial meaning and reinforce a false consciousness among racially oppressed Brazilians (Hanchard 1999). Others see revitalized black identity in these objects (Agier 1992; Sansone 2003). Public and private speech on discrimination
and slave history is uncommon among Brazilians (Sheriff 2000). Finally, the term “Afro-Brazilian” is uncommon among Brazilians outside of academia. In Brazil, racial categories and skin tone do not necessarily align as they do in the US.

The racialization perspective fits this context of interacting meaning systems. Rather than presume capoeira signifies blackness, it allows us to examine how specific symbols and meanings become attached to capoeira objects – including the bodies of practitioners. Blackness appeared not as a pervasive force, but at specific moments in background presentation and daily interactions. Blackness became assigned to objects and bodies through conscious assignment and verbalization and though the unconscious influence of broad racial ideologies and their symbols on everyday interaction (Lewis 2003; Omi and Winant 1994).

The Racialized City of Salvador

The frames of the tourism market and the racialized context of Salvador reinforced the meanings tourists ascribed to capoeira within the studio. To many tourists, the food, music, dance, capoeira, and religion of Salvador represented Afro-Brazilianness and the city’s connection to Africa. “Being here is where the home [of capoeira] is,” one North American tourist told me. Though a few had no specific expectations about the culture of Salvador, the majority expected to see the stereotypical signs of Afro-Brazil present in tour books – women selling acarajé (bean fritters) on the street dressed in
Candomblé priestess costume, samba dancing and music, and capoeira. These symbols created a nexus of African-influenced culture. For example, a 28-year-old, light skintoned, North American graphic designer explained why he had come to Salvador:

Experience the more native... to play in a place where I feel like, that is the origin of capoeira... going out to the Pelourinho [the tourist center neighborhood] and seeing really bad street players... to going to Mercado Modelo and seeing a million berimbaus for sale to like seeing a billion and one tourist items that have capoeira emblazoned on them... to learning how to dance samba... also learning about Salvadorian African culture and seeing how it really is. That's a huge thing. (Field notes)

Several tourists attended samba and Afro-Brazilian dance classes elsewhere, which they viewed as related to capoeira.

Background Aesthetics

In a limited way, the physical space of Capoeira World asserted a common geographical referent of blackness – Africa. This created an aesthetic background for capoeira practice. The few wall adornments in the workout room were mainly of African reference. These included framed black and white photographs of Africans in traditional tribal wear, an African war shield, a poster depicting and describing the shield and several other African artifacts, a large tapestry in a black and yellow geometric design,

Acarajé are associated with Candomblé and street vendors often dress in Candomblé costume. See Chapter 3.
and a collection of tall drums. The number of instruments displayed greatly exceeded the number commonly used during practice (one *atabaque*, three *berimbau*, and one tambourine) and always increased before recruitment events. The Master had acquired many of these instruments during his travels to capoeira events abroad.

Discourse

African symbols remained in the background, but the group made extensive explicit connections between capoeira and a historical narrative of slavery. During recruitment presentations, a speaker – introduced as an important capoeira historian – gave tourists their first lesson in the racial meaning of capoeira. The historian was important because the studio presented him as an official and respected authority on capoeira – someone the tourists should accept as legitimate. His lecture introduced tourists to the studio and to one limited version of capoeira history and meaning. The symbols he describes reappear in the studio’s adornments and in the appearance of several of its young male practitioners. He was also the main source of information about capoeira history and philosophy for the Brazilian practitioners at the studio.

This historian drew on a narrative of African slavery in Brazil, framing capoeira as a practice tied to blackness and different from modern cultural forms, Asian martial arts, and sports. He firmly established it as a cultural legacy of slavery and blacks, as a group, and linked the studio to this legacy. His narrative presented blacks as the natural holders of capoeira, silencing the popularity of capoeira among the whiter Brazilian

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8 A tall wooden hand drum.
middle class. He did not mention that Capoeira World was founded by a middle class Brazilian.

During a presentation for nearly thirty-five North American study-abroad students, the speaker showed the group a grainy black and white ten-minute film, made in 1954 he said, of a capoeira game. Two high-pitched *berimbau*s played in the background as two shirtless dark skin toned men wearing oversized white pants played a game of capoeira. The movements and style of their game was markedly different from Capoeira World’s style and was clearly *Capoeira Angola*, though the speaker never mentioned this. The speaker told them that capoeira was prohibited during and after slavery officially ended, calling it a form of play for the slaves. He said this play still comes through in the practice today. He described the forests where slaves and ex-slaves had trained capoeira in Brazil. He then defined it as a "demonstration of freedom of the slave” and as a symbolic game – a fight that does not appear to be a fight. He went on to say that capoeira was related to the everyday lives of the slaves and gave an example of the *cocorinho*, a squatting movement used to duck beneath an opponent’s kick, telling them that the movement symbolized how slaves squatted on the ground to eat. By the end of the forty-minute presentation, one North American asked the speaker if the group only practiced *Capoeira Angola*.

The speaker then differentiated the Capoeira World’s capoeira practice from elites as a social group. He described past attempt to turn it into a national gymnastic and a military training program as a failed enterprise of
whites. Using binary racial categories – brancos and negros – he called elite capoeira practice an attempt by whites to appropriate capoeira from blacks, something that, according to him, failed to a prevailing “capoeira do negro,” or black popular capoeira.

Next, he told the visitors that capoeira was a social project and form of black political mobilization. He explained to them that political participation in Brazil commonly takes the form of social service projects rather than direct political action as it does in the US. This was a brief excursion from his historical narrative, and he never clarified if he was referring to the original creation of capoeira amongst slaves or its contemporary use in social service programs.

The speaker went on to differentiate capoeira from Asian martial arts by defining the content of capoeira as knowledge of the mind rather than the physical contact he linked to Asian martial arts, saying that it required more knowledge that Asian martial arts. He claimed that it was different from Judo and Karate, “which are full contact,” silencing the full contact grappling movements present in modern capoeira and, importantly, in studio’s style of capoeira. He concluded that it was different from sports, saying, “Watch the Olympics and you won't find a sport like capoeira.” He also compared the practice to boxing which he said was nothing more that a series of full frontal attacks, involving no thought. (Field notes, quotes my translation from Portuguese)
The historian’s speech silenced the cultural transformations capoeira underwent over the past century. It omitted inclusion of movements from Asian martial arts, which were becoming popular in Brazil in the 1930s (Assuncão 2005). The speech established capoeira as a slave practice by drawing on a narrative familiar to North Americans, and established its homogeneity as a black cultural activity. Further, the other distinctions asserted (between capoeira and sport, Asian martial art, and elite practice) are well-established cultural categories among consumers from the US and Europe. He discussed capoeira in historical terms and said nothing of its practice at present, the field of competitors, stylistic differences, or the wide social base of practitioners in and beyond Brazil. When one North American asked what it was like today, the speaker replied, “Now it is considered patrimony of Brazil,” without elaborating. (My translation from Portuguese.)

In nightly classes, Angel frequently drew on his social connections to older dark-skinned capoeira masters, known in the capoeira community as the elders of capoeira. When a Brazilian student inquired about a *chamada*⁹, Angel explained the proper way to complete the movement as told to him by “the Great Masters” as he called them, naming several well-known capoeira masters by name.

Angel had a complex understanding of capoeira tradition and was adept at picking and choosing from the bank of symbolic resources to fit his needs. The master held brief question sessions on occasion at the end of classes. A Brazilian student asked Angel, why does the school not invent new songs? Angel replied that practitioners want to invent their own music and make music CDs to sell. He said that there are trendy songs you hear

⁹ Choreographed ritualistic sequences of capoeira movements between two players.
for a month which then disappear, or that are only popular in certain cities or regions. He viewed this as a loss of tradition, and he preferred to stick to basic old songs invented by the elders.

Tourists commonly asked Angel what he thought about the Angolan/Regional stylistic split in capoeira. Though he was an aggressive defender of his version of capoeira as “Contemporary” among Brazilian practitioners, Angel always told tourists that both forms are important and he teaches both to respect the traditions of the original creators of capoeira.

Interactions

Most of these meanings of capoeira emerged from interaction between tourists and Brazilians, rather than through the conscious decisions and framing on the part of either group. Repeated interactions solidified meanings in the studio. The historian was an important exception and his description of capoeira important because they reinforces the frames of the tourism market and set the tone for subsequent interactions within the studio. Blackness became attached to common, taken-for-granted elements of capoeira culture and practitioners lives. In practice, meanings were enacted simultaneously as foreigners connected the necklace of one practitioner and the dreadlocks of another with skilled bodily practice by dark skin toned young men. These bodily cues were visible in a space where others played berimbau connected to a narrative of slave resistance against a backdrop of African artifacts.
Tourist-practitioner interactions extended this narrative to objects of capoeira, most centrally the berimbau. Brazilian practitioners and tourists drew on widely known historical myths in the capoeira community:

At the end of one berimbau music lesson attended by five North Americans, Brent asked the instructor about the importance of berimbau music. Drawing on a common capoeira myth, he asked, “Is it true there’s a special berimbau rhythm the slaves used to signal the approach of the police?” The instructor, a light skin toned advanced practitioner, raised his eyebrows and responded, “Yes, that’s one story. Capoeira used to be outlawed. They had to be aware.” He went on, reviewing the myth for the North Americans, telling them that because the police persecuted capoeiristas as practitioners of a violent activity, the freed slaves that practiced capoeira had developed a special berimbau rhythm to alert practitioners that police were arriving. He explained that berimbau players would play a dance rhythm and everyone involved would dance to hide the capoeira game from police. (Field notes, quotes my translation from Portuguese.)

Objects of Afro-Brazilian culture also became connected to capoeira in Brazilian-tourist interactions, excluding other types of Brazilian music and cultural activities from taking place within Capoeira World. Typically, these objects include samba music and dance, capoeira, drumming, maculelé,10 and Candomblé. The studio referred to capoeira as “Afro-Brazilian tradition” on posters and advertisements for its numerous events,

10 A dance performed between two individuals holding and beating wooden sticks.
including a large banner that hung in a secondary workout room. More importantly, the studio linked capoeira to these practices by including samba dancing and maculelé in classes when new tourists arrived. Samba was a regular finale to rodas, and the studio held occasional samba dance parties on Fridays.

Interaction sustained the racial meanings of these symbols. Tourists and practitioners used what were often to Brazilians mundane objects of capoeira and their lives as cues for attaching racial meanings. Tourists often asked Brazilians to teach them samba dance moves after classes and inquired about practitioners’ lives and appearance. For example, several Brazilians wore necklaces – popular in Brazil – with a small charm containing an image of a catholic saint attached to the front and another to the back of the necklace. Much conversation among tourists in the locker room revolved around deciphering the meaning of these necklaces. Usually at least one female in the changing room had asked a Brazilian about the necklaces and could offer an explanation to the others – these were saints linked to Candomblé, which offered them protection. Conversations framed these necklaces as a part of afro-Brazilian religion, which offered practitioners protection. One North American female used a locker room discussion about the necklaces to relate her trip with one of the Brazilian practitioners to see a babalorixá – a Candomblé priestess who practices divination – he knew in an adjoining neighborhood. The North American related that the woman had thrown a handful of búzios – white sea shells – to read her future, and after had given her one of these necklaces. Tourists used necklaces to engage a Brazilian in conversation, touching the necklace around a neck and asking what it meant. Brazilians were accustomed to this question, welcoming the female attention and telling them that it was “a part of our
culture, which protects us in the *roda.*” (My translation from Portuguese.) Some Brazilians linked these necklaces to *Candomblé,* while others did not. However, in locker room conversations, tourists transformed the necklaces into a link between capoeira and Afro-Brazilian religion and capoeira practitioners into bearers of afro-Brazilian culture.

Tourists complained when local reality diverged from their expectations. Melissa complained, “Men aren’t supposed to be selling *acarajé.* I want my *Baiana,*” after seeing a man selling the common food on the street earlier in the day. In other words, she expected to see only dark skin toned women dressed in the elaborate white skirt and headdress associated with *Candomblé* adherents working as *acarajé* vendors. She joked with another tourist that someone should report him to the cultural commission of Salvador. Melissa was a 21-year-old college senior of Mexican-American descent from California. She was enthusiastic and outgoing, providing salsa dancing classes to local schoolchildren, taking a Portuguese language class, and attending the capoeira classes regularly for several months.

*Distributing Culture to Capoeira Bodies*

The assertions of the capoeira historian, the studio’s inclusion of Afro-Brazilian objects, and the larger frames of the tourism market provided symbols and meanings of blackness that tourists attached to practitioners’ physical appearance in interactions. Certain bodies – those of dark skin tone, even relative armatures – became authentic

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11 *Baiana* refers to a woman from Bahia and to female *acarajé* street vendors dressed in costume.
capoeira bodies for tourists through this process. Fine argues that “the authenticity of the artist justifies the authenticity of the art work” (2003: 175), and at Capoeira World, racializing capoeira bodies also had a reciprocal effect on the meaning of capoeira. This process also shaped who could produce authentic capoeira, and thus cultural capital in the studio. Past work finds that audiences like blues musicians poor and black (Grazian 2003), outsider artists uneducated and non-white (Fine 2003), and tourist arts produced by ethnic others (Bruner 2005; Wherry 2008). Likewise, this group of tourists preferred dark skin toned male capoeira practitioners over others.

Tattoos and dreadlocks were taken-for-granted styles for the men, common among Salvador’s large lower class population (Figueiredo 1994). Four male practitioners had dreadlocks and two others wore large afros. The women liked these hairstyles. They often helped the males with afros and twists maintain their styles, gathering around these men before and after classes to tighten uncoiling hair twists with their hands.

One practitioner, Rapido, had a noticeable tattoo on his torso of the aged face of a male. A female tourist asked him about the meaning of the tattoo, touching it. Rapido would reply that the face is that of the Preto Velho, a mythical figure known as the wise black father, and asked the woman if she knew who the man was. When she said no, Rapido launched into a lengthy explanation of the importance of the figure in his life as a capoeirista, reminding his to be watchful in all of life’s situations and in the roda. The woman gave a slight nod and raised her eyebrows in response, only partially understanding his Portuguese she told me later, asking me to explain what he had said.
Dark skin was also popular among the almost exclusively twenty-something female tourists. These encounters often served as an introduction to a romantic relationship between tourists and Brazilians, as Sarah explained:

Some girls obviously show up just to see, you know, the hot black guys, which they [the Brazilians] welcome – a lot. So many North American girls come to see the black Brazilians, to see them and meet them and have fun with them. *Baians* are also very proud of the black African culture that they live here... But I guess that's all part of it, you know, the life they have, I mean they love it that girls come here and wanna see and have sex with them and they [the Brazilians] love it. They can have every girl they want. Because, I think here in Brazil they are not the hottest guys that all the Brazilians want. I mean it's an easy life. I definitely think that they think the way they dance, the way they look, the way they play capoeira makes them irresistible (laugh).

(Field notes)

In the locker room, I also learn wheat tourists were whispering about during the studio’s performances. Female tourists spent much time in the changing room discussing these “hot black guys” and ranking their attractiveness. One Serbian tourist announced to the group of women that she “just wanted to do them all.” The men were especially visible compared to the mostly light skin toned female tourists. Jennifer, who had just completed a Master’s program in counseling in the US, was in Brazil for several months to practice capoeira. She told me in an interview, “Here I feel like anything I do gets a lot of attention from the guys… because I’m white, because I’m not a beginner, because they proposition me for sex. Just about every guy has propositioned me.”
Apelidos – capoeira nicknames – also connected physical bodies to blackness. Students of darker skin tone often bore apelidos that called attention to this characteristic: Bantu – the name of an African ethnic group – was the apelido of a tall lanky dark skin toned nineteen-year-old student. Cana, or sugar cane, was the name of a twenty-five year old advanced student. His name, as he explained to me, referred to his dark skin, which made him look like he could be a slave harvesting cane on a plantation. Senzala, also commonly referred to as The Rasta due to his long dreadlocks, was named after slave dwellings on large plantations. The lighter skin toned students were named for their speed, style, or other characteristic. Some practitioners came to expect interactions with tourists and preemptively offered further information they assumed the tourists desired. For example, one practitioner would preemptively relate the history of his apelido – a reference to the slave fields of Bahia – whenever tourists asked about his name.

Even when Brazilian practitioners were not attending to their black body or hairstyle and were not especially aware of the performative nature of, say, holding a berimbau, these symbols remained as cues with which others could attach meanings of blackness in interactions, observations, and later in private conversation.

Tourists did not see all Brazilian practitioners as black. Practitioners with light skin tone were overlooked by most tourist attention in and out of classes. The importance of skin tone was brought home by numerous reactions to the light skin-toned master. He was often referred to as a “strange guy” who interrupted their nightly interactions with the guys during classes. Tourists overwhelmingly described his numerous announcements about his views on capoeira to be annoying and ego-centric.
Interactions also connected these dark capoeira bodies to poverty and the necessity for street smarts in Salvador. Neither the studio’s classes nor its conscious framing of capoeira mentioned poverty. However, the context of Salvador and the personal biographies of the Brazilians that interacted frequently with tourists established poverty as a meaning connected to capoeira bodies. Most residents of Salvador are dark-skinned and poor compared with the wealthier mostly white foreign tourists (McCallum 2005). All interviewees (and many others in informal conversations) mentioned poverty as a pervasive and noticeable characteristic of Salvador when asked how they saw the city.

Tourists interpreted the Brazilian practitioners that they interacted with to be underprivileged and the school’s middle class neighborhood – where many of the Brazilian students lived – to be poor. Often, when tourists learned that I lived in the neighborhood, they asked in shock, “but aren’t you afraid” or “and you feel safe there?” Several of the school’s advanced students began training at the school as children through the school’s social service program that provides free lessons. These students, who had grown up in poorer nearby neighborhoods, now had regular work through capoeira, but often told tourists stories of their poverty. Tourists often connected the apparent poverty of the city to capoeira practitioners:

It was definitely interesting to see here how capoeira does gain another importance for someone who doesn't have anything else. For example, Mano, he comes from a very poor family and the Mestre really took him from the street and gave him a possibility not only to have a job but to see the world. It never would have been possible without capoeira. It's interesting to see how much it can really be a life philosophy… But I guess
it's really connected to Brazil in general, you know wherever I went outside of Salvador, people were like yeah, Bahia, full of *malandragem*.\(^{12}\) (Field notes)

*Taking away Experience with Racial Others and their Culture*

Almost all tourists expressed satisfaction with their experience. Tourists’ extensive interaction with capoeira practice and practitioners provided embodied cosmopolitan lifestyle experience. During the class, which participants paid extra for, an advanced Brazilian student meticulously led tourists through the process of making the instrument – from tree branch and gourd to final product – and taught the instrument’s basic rhythms. During the *berimbau*-making class, which participants paid extra for, an advanced Brazilian student meticulously led tourists through the process of making the instrument – from tree branch and gourd to final product – and taught them three basic rhythms. Tourists rarely asked for detailed information about capoeira. They were less interested in gaining skill playing *berimbau* rhythms from the *berimbau* workshop than in the experience itself. Sarah, a light skin toned 20-year-old German university student was in Salvador for a six-month internship with a cultural organization. She told me:

Yeah, I made my first *berimbau* with them, which was fun. Well, I didn't remember everything, but that was a lot of information, even about the wood and what woods you can use and how light or heavy they are. That was nice. That was a good experience.

(Field notes)

Likewise, Capoeira World allowed tourists to receive cords (equivalent to a belt system in Asian martial arts) during the time of the annual testing ceremony, though the

\(^{12}\) Trickery or cunning.
norm among capoeira groups is to award cords only to regular, advancing students. Several announcements were made preceding the event to encourage their participation (a forty dollar fee was charged for an event t-shirt and baptismal cord). While I was there, sixteen tourists, all novices, participated in the ceremony and received cords. Most reported to me that they would probably not continue taking capoeira classes once back in the US and Europe but wanted to participate because, as one North American told me, “I just did it for the experience, you know.” She told me she was unlikely to look for a group in the US, saying, “It just wouldn’t be the same.”

Tourists were equally interested in gaining cultural experience beyond capoeira itself, and the majority preferred hanging out with Brazilians to actually learning capoeira. Their experiences translated into knowledge claims among tourists about Brazilian practitioners and Brazilian culture, as they compared stories about how they gained these pieces of knowledge from practitioners and shared photographs of their cultural encounters. Like locker room discussions about practitioners’ necklaces, foreigners discussed the meaning of capoeira rituals, the proper way to *samba*, and Brazilian behavior in general.

In addition to the many photographs taken by tourists, Capoeira World provided tourists with several material objects to accumulate as evidence of their experiences. The pants were popular with tourists. Many arrived in Brazil without workout pants, and were happy to purchase them as useful souvenirs. It was common to see tourists arrive with a new pair of the pants, smiling proudly and showing them off to the other tourists. Mindy, light skin toned a 20-year-old North American elite university student, told me she probably would not ever wear the pants in the US, but would keep them as a souvenir.
The *berimbau* class was also successful with tourists. All those I spoke with enjoyed this class, one North American going so far as to refer to her hand-made *berimbau* as her *filha* – her child. She joked that she had gotten carried away and considered buying a special *berimbau* carrying case for fifteen dollars in the tourist center in order to get the instrument back to the US. She told me it would likely hang on her wall. “Yeah, I’m gunna sit on my porch at home and play my *berimbau* alone,” she joked.

**Figure 4.5**

**Tourists in the *berimbau* workshop**

Photograph by Danielle Hedegard
Conclusion

Of those expectations stated in Chapter 3, these data support predictions two and three. This studio asserted both blackness and Africa as meanings connected to capoeira objects and bodies. These meanings also connected capoeira to *samba* and *Candomblé* during interactions between tourists and Brazilians. Tourists also valued embodied experience and interaction with Brazilian capoeira bodies as they consumed capoeira. To understand how these meanings become cultural capital for Brazilians and which Brazilians benefit from this capital, I analyze the resources upon which this studio’s success depended in the following chapter.