Racializing and Embodying Omnivorous Consumption: Evidence from the Tourism of Capoeira in Salvador, Brazil

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Abstract: This study integrates literature on omnivorism with the racialization perspective to explain how blackness becomes valuable in omnivorous consumption. I use a case study to show how interactions transform capoeira – a Brazilian martial art and popular tourist attraction – into omnivorous cultural capital. Participant observation revealed that a Brazilian capoeira studio successfully attracted foreign tourists because its Brazilian practitioners mutually constructed with tourists the meanings of capoeira. They associated capoeira objects and bodies with symbols of blackness recognizable to tourists as authentic --specifically Africa, slavery, and the black male body. Blackness became synthesized with an omnivorous disposition toward non-commercial, authentic, and experiential consumption. Interactions ascribed this synthesis of meanings to dark skin toned Brazilian bodies, and tourists then embodied these cultural distinctions by physically interacting with these bodies. Findings contribute to understandings of omnivorous consumption, the social construction of blackness, and mechanisms through which marginalized symbols become valued.

Keywords: Blackness, Capoeira Tourism, Experiential Consumption, Omnivorism, Racial Meaning
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1. Introduction

The popular Lonely Planet Guide to Brazil claims that the city of Salvador, Brazil and the cultural practices of its inhabitants embody blackness both within Brazil and globally. It asserts that Salvador is “the African soul of Brazil…[where] the descendants of African slaves have preserved their cultural roots more than anywhere else in the New World, successfully transforming them into thriving culinary, religious, musical, dance and martial art traditions” (Louis et al., 2005: 413). This positive framing of blackness – a repertoire of symbols tied to an institutionalized racial category – in the context of international tourism represents an important and understudied set of symbols within the trend towards broad and culturally distant, or cosmopolitan omnivorous, consumption (Cheyne and Binder, 2010; Peterson and Kern, 1996).

Recent evidence that blackness is a key piece of the cosmopolitan omnivore’s cultural repertoire (Cheyne and Binder, 2010; Grazian, 2003) prompts the questions, which symbols of blackness do omnivores value and how do they acquire and give meaning to them? To answer these questions, I use the case of the tourism of capoeira – a Brazilian martial art tied to a discourse of Afro-Brazilian culture – at one tourist-oriented studio in Salvador, Brazil. Long-term participant observation allowed me to focus on the how of cultural valorization (Johnston and Baumann 2007) – by examining the interactive process through which racial meanings emerge and become attached to capoeira – rather than relying on survey and interview methods. This analysis reveals how consumers construct meaning in interaction with particular contexts.
(in our case, with the producers of cultural objects), and should be generalizable to a variety of consumption contexts.

I find that Brazilian practitioners and tourists co-constructed the meanings of capoeira by connecting capoeira objects to symbols of blackness recognizable to tourists within the market for cultural difference -- specifically Africa, slavery, and Afro-Brazilian cultural objects.\(^1\) Interactions ascribed this synthesis of meanings to dark skin toned Brazilian bodies, and tourists then acquired these cultural distinctions by physically interacting with these bodies. The meanings that emerged resonated with tourists’ disposition toward cosmopolitan omnivorous consumption -- specifically authenticity and experience.

2. Relevant Literature

2.1. Blackness and Omnivorous Consumption

An extensive literature debates the types of omnivorous consumers and their role in society, but this work generally agrees that they represent an important trend in modern cultural taste and consumption patterns (Atkinson, 2011; Bennett et al., 2009; Garcia-Alvarez et al., 2007; Holt, 1997; Ollivier, 2008; Van Eijck, 2001). In contrast to older cultural status markers such as theater and classical music, omnivores value a broad range of cultural objects (Peterson and Kern, 1996). These tastes can operate as a new and nuanced form of status display and symbolic exclusion (Johnston and Baumann, 2007).

\(^1\) Cultural objects are material or practical aspects of culture. They have symbolic properties defined largely by their connections to other symbols. They exist as macro-level collective representations available to actors to adapt in concrete situations.
Cosmopolitan omnivores are members of the upper middle class who prefer a breadth of cultural genres, often tied to physically or socially distant places (Cheyne and Binder, 2010; Holt, 1997; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). They prefer cultural objects framed as authentic, exotic, and otherwise socially distant. Racial symbols are present but underappreciated in this literature. Omnivores now seek out esoteric versions of Southern foods and rare ethnic foods and rap music tied to racial ghettos and foreigners (Cheyne and Binder, 2010; Johnston and Baumann, 2007). Likewise, audiences like blues musicians poor and black (Grazian, 2003) and outsider artists uneducated and non-white (Fine, 2003).

Authenticity is central to cosmopolitan omnivores. Authenticity is a socially constructed meaning rather than a property inherent to objects (Peterson, 1997), and what constitutes authenticity varies across audiences. It is often tied to exoticism (Johnston and Baumann, 2007; Lu and Fine, 1995), non-commercialism (Grazian, 2003), and continuity with the past (Johnston and Baumann, 2007). Racial identity (Chong, 2011), personal biographies (Fine, 2003), human bodies (Bruner, 2005), and subtle enactment of cultural knowledge are also vital to establishing authenticity of artistic producers.

Cosmopolitan omnivores also value active consumption – rather than taste alone (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Han, 2003; Ollivier, 2008). Interactive consumption provides experiences with authentic producers of cultural otherness (Peñaloza, 2001; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). Grazian shows that black jazz musicians are viewed as authentic and “white audiences still expected to be entertained by black singers” (2003: 20). This suggests that audience perception of the naturalness and legitimacy of race and authenticity are vital in omnivorous consumption.
2.2. *Constructing Blackness*

To examine how symbols of blackness become attached to omnivorous consumption in actual consumption settings, I employ the racialization or “race-making” perspective (Brubaker et al., 2004). Race is a socially constructed and malleable set of meanings that people attach to bodies and objects. Actors use physical traits, assumed to be primordial and essential (usually phenotype which is itself socially constructed), to create symbolic boundaries between members and nonmembers (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007). This can create racial identities, categories, and groups. Thus, racialization assigns people to categories, applies racially charged symbols to bodies, and creates a racial interpretation of social experience.

Racial symbols take on meaning through their connection to other symbols and opposition to those outside of a given racial boundary. They can derive from societal classifications, meso-level narratives, and micro-level interactions. Many symbols establish racial meaning, though common referents are the body (skin tone, hair, facial features, and styles), geographic specificity (specific continents, regions, and city neighborhoods), narratives and discourses (of people hood, difference, and politics), socioeconomic status, language, material objects, names, and ancestry (Lewis, 2003; Nagel, 1994; Soar, 2001). Symbols must be interpreted in specific context; however, racial discourse and the symbols it draws upon are deeply embedded historical narratives that influence everyday life and interaction – even when race is not a consciously salient element of interpretation (Omi and Winant, 1994).

Racial meanings often remain unspoken and unconscious; however, in these moments they are strongest because they flow from bodily performance, appearing as a natural and
legitimate disposition (Bourdieu, 1991) of a primordially black body.² Blackness is embodied through cultural performance such as hairstyles, language use, dress, a taste for racialized music, and familiarity with cultural etiquette (Johnson, 2003). Sometimes, the performance of race is central to establishing the meaning of other cultural objects, such as jazz (Grazian, 2003), hip hop (Cheyne and Binder, 2010), and folk music (Roy, 2004). I show how the meanings attached to the bodies of capoeira practitioners migrate to the objects of capoeira through interactions between practitioners and tourists.

3. An Empirical Case: Capoeira Tourism in Salvador, Brazil

3.1 Tourism

Tourism is a key context in which to examine experience and racial otherness in omnivorous consumption. Tourism frames a place, its culture, and its people the middle and upper middle classes of industrialized nations (Grazian, 2003; MacCannell, 1989; Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Wherry, 2008), producing “cultural difference and the distinct valorization of local authenticity to stimulate people to visit a place to consume its characteristics” (Gotham, 2007: 214).³

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² The constructionist view negates that race is biologically determined, but many individuals continue to perceive race as primordial (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007).

³ An extensive literature on cultural tourism investigates how market forces and foreign tourist perceptions shape local culture (Nash and Smith, 1991).
3.2 Capoeira

A capoeira studio\(^4\) provides a strategic site in which to observe blackness in omnivorous consumption. First, because capoeira is interactional and embodied (Delamont and Stephens, 2008; Lewis, 1992), I can observe the meanings which emerge through repeated interactions among practitioners and tourists. Capoeira is a game to practitioners, but outsiders refer to it as a Brazilian martial art. Like sports, capoeira combines adherence to norms and rules of conduct with creative enactment to outplay an opponent. Practitioners form a large ring (the *roda*) with their bodies and two practitioners play within the *roda*. This play is a call and response of dance, fight, gymnastics, and martial arts movements, in which practitioners improvise combinations of movements and observe a set of rules and ritual behaviors. Practitioners are also musical performers; a *bateria* – or musical ensemble – plays Brazilian instruments, practitioners sing and clap a call and response, and the rhythm of the music determines the play in the *roda*. In studios, students train for years, doing strength and flexibility training, learning to embody the movements (Downey, 2010), and playing innovatively with opponents.

Second, capoeira is an established member of the global culture repertoire, and is popular among foreign tourists. Capoeirista.com lists over 2000 formal capoeira studios in 99 countries as of July 2011. Capoeira moved abroad beginning in the mid-1970s when a capoeira dance troupe traveled to New York City to perform. By 1979, the group’s organizer opened the first studio in the US.

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\(^4\) A studio is an organization located in a fixed space where training normally takes place.
Third, originally developed among freed African slaves in Brazil, capoeira meaning draws on a complex discourse on race (Browning, 1995; Santos, 2005; Travassos, 1999). Empirical work in the UK and Canada finds that capoeira practitioners in these countries construct authentic capoeira as Brazilian (de Campos Rosario et al., 2010; Delamont and Stephens, 2008). Joseph argues that Brazilian practitioners market themselves and their product as authentic Afro-Brazilian culture to appeal to students desire to “escape the everyday, that is, the artificiality of mainstream Euro-Canadian culture” (2008: 501). While global culture asserts the blackness of capoeira, only some capoeira studios in Brazil assert blackness as important to the practice (Travassos, 1999). An ambiguous racial context in Brazil limits public and private speech on discrimination and slave history among Brazilians (Sheriff, 2000). Put simply, capoeira is an abstract and collectively available set of representations institutionalized in Brazil and in global culture.

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5 After years of repression, the Brazilian state began promoting capoeira as a national sport in the 1930s. This led to the incorporation of Asian martial arts and gymnastics movements in a stylistic variant called Capoeira Regional, followed by the naming of the older form as Capoeira Angola. The studio examined here called its style “contemporary,” using elements of the two older styles.

6 Assuncão (2005: 212) asserts that capoeira is a “globalized subculture of protest”, which resonates with marginalized populations.
3.3 Salvador

Salvador is the second most toured city in Brazil, receiving international tourists mainly from the US and Western Europe (SCT, 2005). Salvador and the state of Bahia – where the city is located – are the epicenter of Brazil’s contribution to globalized blackness. It was the place of Brazil’s “Reafricanization” movement in the 1980s, which renewed interest in Africa, capoeira, samba-reggae, and Candomblé -- now globally-recognized objects of Afro-Brazilian culture (Joseph, 2008; Sansone, 2003). Many argue that Salvador – the study location – is the birthplace of capoeira. In 2008, the Bahian State’s database of cultural organizations lists around 130 studios in Salvador, though another source estimates there are at least 2000 formal and informal groups in the city (Loez, 2005: 15).

3.4 Participant Observation

Cultural 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. I chose to focus exclusively on one studio to thoroughly examine this process.

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7 Salvador is Brazil’s third largest city, and was the country’s first capital.

8 A musical style that combines samba and classic reggae rhythms.

9 A syncretic religion that aligns Catholic saints and African deities called orishas.

10 Afro-Brazilian objects refer to cultural practices and material objects viewed as originating among the African slave population of Brazil. However, these objects have undergone extensive reinterpretation and adaptation over the years.

11 Database accessed at: www.censocultural.ba.gov.br.

12 My goal was not to explain the presentation of capoeira in a population of studios.
I gathered data from June to August 2007 and again from August to November 2008, through participant observation in classes four times per week (classes averaged three hours), social outings with Brazilians and tourists, and informal conversations. Data took the form of extensive field notes written after each class (Emerson et al., 1995). I focused observations on my theoretical interest in the subtle process of how omnivores consumed capoeira (Burawoy, 1998). In order to examine this culture of practice – where underlying cultural codes and knowledge can be deployed rather than a discursive culture – Lizardo and Strand (2010) suggest taking as a unit of analysis the relationship between embodied dispositions and the external institutional environment. This meant observing how actors’ embodiment of blackness and capoeira related to the interactional environment of tourism. I then linked these observations to the broader social force of omnivorism. Racial constructions were objects of investigation rather than pre-defined units of analysis; as I show below, blackness became a central but not exclusive resource for meaning-making at the studio. As a white, female, US citizen, practitioners recruited me to participate in classes and social outings and placed me in the same category as tourists.13

13 My awareness of my raced, gendered, and classed social positions within the studio certainly shaped my data. Brazilians viewed me as a tourist, rather than as a researcher, which taught me how the Brazilian practitioners presented capoeira to tourists. It also influenced my interactions with the many male practitioners who were more interested in recruiting me for social activities than in discussing capoeira. A detailed consideration of these issues will be made available as an online supplement.
4. From Capoeira Practice to Racialized Cosmopolitan Consumption

4.1. Description of Capoeira World

The neighborhood sat at a distance from the 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.

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. 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.

Capoeira World’s master, Angel, was a light skin toned,\textsuperscript{14} 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 \textit{mestrando} (person in the process of becoming a master) in the capoeira

\textsuperscript{14} Those I describe as light skin toned would be viewed as white in the US. Those I describe as dark skin toned would be viewed as black in the US.
community. 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.
Several of his advanced students also traveled abroad with him and on their own to capoeira
events.

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 children.

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. I argue
that these young college-age tourists are important as budding members of the upper middle
class. Interviews revealed that these tourists’ parents have upper middle class occupations. The
cost of traveling to Brazil excludes working class people from this tourism. 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.15

15 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 the studio were beyond tourists’ language skills.
4.2. Enacting Experiential Consumption

Extensive interactions between Brazilian practitioners and tourists transformed embodied capoeira knowledge into an interactive consumption experience. 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\textsuperscript{16} 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.\textsuperscript{17} 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-program students. These interactive presentations introduced tourists to the embodied practice of capoeira and the racialized bodies of its practitioners:

\textsuperscript{16} A master or *mestre* is a practitioner that has reached the end of the training period – which normally includes a lengthy period teaching capoeira students.

\textsuperscript{17} Songs all draw on a call-and-response format in which one practitioner sings lengthy call lyrics and the *roda* members sing back a short repetitive response.
The master told the group of at least forty North Americans they would do a quick workout and had them 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 were crowded around the small circle vying for a position from which to see the show. Other Brazilians began to clap loudly, circling the *roda* and encouraging the North Americans to clap by clapping loudly in front of the tourists. 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 again.
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 female, 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, clueless. 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*\(^{18}\) 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 interactive experience, the studio framed its activities as existing outside of the tourism market. (Though the studio derived most of its revenue from tourists.) Brazilian students rarely attended the studio activities popular among tourists. However, Brazilian instructors drew on distinctions between tourism and the taken-for-granted practices of the studio, framing these 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.

\(^{18}\) The *ginga* is a central swaying step in capoeira in which the practitioner shifts his weight from leg to leg while swinging his arms to protect himself.
Flexivel, the resident *berimbaus*-maker and an advanced practitioner, told me that his *berimbaus* are all over the world:

During a *berimbaus*-making workshop, Brent, an enthusiastic light skin-toned 19-year-old North American, attending an elite US university, asked the Brazilian instructor where people buy *berimbaus*. Flexivel, the instructor, 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 even sound good, but were not made to last. “They won’t hold the good sound over years like a professional *berimbaus* will,” said Flexivel, 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. (Field notes, quotes my translation from Portuguese)

Claim-making regarding authenticity became explicit only when tourists asked these direct questions. More often, objects subtly implied the non-tourism focus of the studio. Numerous 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 *berimbaus* charms. Brightly painted *berimbaus* in a variety of sizes, in lengths from one foot to over five feet, were the most visible. The studio did not display or use any of these items, instead non-painted natural wood *berimbaus* and instruments were used. Several North American
participants in the *berimbau* workshops told me that painting or decorating their hand-made *berimbau* would “ruin it.”

Tourists viewed the taken-for-granted way that practitioners played instruments, sang, and played in the *roda* as strong evidence of the studio’s non-tourism character. When tourists arrived, they would find Brazilian practitioners practicing the *berimbau* or capoeira movements alone in the workout room, the *berimbau*-maker cleaning gourds to construct new instruments, and 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)

Brazilian practitioners saw capoeira as a profession. This interpretation, constructed through years of socialization at the studio, made public performances, travel, and photographs a normal part of their lives as capoeira practitioners.

The group also aligned capoeira with consumer tastes for understated commercialism. Tourists valued this, and many complained of street vendors constantly asking them to purchase things, especially in the city’s tourist center. The studio charged roughly $35 per month for unlimited classes. Though the fee was more than that at nearby capoeira studios, it was comparable to the fees charged in the Tourist Center and was a small expense for tourists. There was no price list posted in the building. At recruitment events, the Master would quickly remark that they offered classes “if anyone is interested.” The receptionist informed inquiring tourists of
the price and received their money. Tourists were required to pay to attend classes, and the receptionist gave them a quick reminder when their month had expired, asking if they planned to train for another month rather than asking for money.

Brazilians 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.

The studio 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. An inconspicuous rack displaying one of each item sat in the reception area at night. No prices were given on the clothing. Many missed the rack until a tourist appeared in class wearing the clothing. The receptionist gave them prices when they inquired and allowed them to try on the clothes. Again, the price was reasonable to tourists – roughly $17, and less than the price in the Tourist Center.

4.3. Synthesizing Experiential Consumption with Authentic Blackness

4.3.1. 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, and a collection of tall drums. The number of instruments displayed greatly exceeded the number commonly used during practice (one atabaque\textsuperscript{19}, three berimbaus, and one tambourine) and always increased before recruitment events. The Master had acquired many of these instruments during his travels to capoeira events abroad.

4.3.2. 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 middle class. He did not mention that Capoeira World was founded by a middle class Brazilian.

\textsuperscript{19} A tall wooden hand drum.
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 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.)

4.3.3. Interactions

Most meanings of capoeira at the studio 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*, and *Candomblé*. The studio referred to capoeira as “Afro-Brazilian tradition” on posters and advertisements for its numerous events, 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

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20 *Capoeirista* translates as someone that practices capoeira seriously.

21 A dance performed between two individuals holding and beating wooden sticks.
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

22 A woman from Bahia and to female acarajé street vendors dressed in costume.
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.

4.4. Distributing Capoeira to Human 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 capoeira bodies for tourists through this process. Fine argues that “the authenticity of the artist justifies the authenticity of the artwork” (2003: 175), and at Capoeira World, racializing capoeira bodies also had a reciprocal effect on the meaning of capoeira. This shaped who could produce authentic capoeira, and 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... 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.23 (Field notes)

23 Trickery or cunning.
4.5. 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 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.”

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 skin toned, 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.

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

24 Acarajé are associated with Candomblé and street vendors often dress in Candomblé costume.
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.

5. Blackness and Experience in Omnivorous Consumption

By mobilizing several symbols of blackness, interactions between tourists and Brazilian practitioners co-constructed capoeira as an authentic experience. The value of blackness relied on two broad social processes. First, blackness became valuable due to the centrality of authentic socially distant cultural objects, as revealed in recent work on omnivorism (Cheyne and Binder,
The retooling of capoeira was consistent with this literature. Blackness was transformed into aesthetic and geographic ties to Africa and Salvador; the rare, exotic, and aesthetic appeal of socially distant dark toned skin and dreadlocks; nonindustrial berimbau hand-made by racial others; and practice embodied as a historic manifestation of slave tradition. Associating capoeira with *samba*, *Candomblé*, and *maculelé* further extended the symbols of socially and culturally distant blackness gained by tourists. Blackness – and symbols of other socially distant racial and ethnic peoples – should become important in other contexts of interactive consumption such as music and art venues and martial art and bodily activities such as yoga and dance classes. Future research should attend to the variety of ways that actors attach racial meaning to omnivorous consumption and the underlying cultural distinctions that inform this process.

The second broad social process that granted blackness positive value was the importance of cultural experience (Peñaloza, 2001; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). Foreign tourists gained not nuanced – or often even basic – skill at capoeira practice, but experiences with a racially aesthetic version of capoeira and the human bodies of its practitioners. The experiences and material objects they acquired abroad are more limited in availability than consumer objects at home. For example, capoeira is practiced in the US and Europe, but the embodied claims of knowledge about authentic capoeira and Brazilians gained through these experiences are inaccessible to many within the US. This distinguishes tourists’ experiences with capoeira as legitimate and excludes the capoeira knowledge and skill of non-Brazilian practitioners in their home societies. The interactions at the studio should have provided tourists with sufficient knowledge and experience to incorporate into their lifestyle as members of the traveled culturally omnivorous class. How the experiences and materials acquired by tourists are enacted in the
tourists’ home societies is beyond the scope of this manuscript. Future work should examine this reenactment after the moment of consumption.

The centrality of experience with producers’ bodies in the case of capoeira tourism suggests that work on omnivorism should shift its focus to embodied interaction in consumption contexts. This will further the goal, set forth by Johnston and Baumann (2007), to look for cultural hierarchy within rather than across genres. The expectation suggested by my analysis is straightforward in this regard. In addition to preferring aesthetic versions of a genre (Johnston and Baumann, 2007), omnivores will valorize interpretations that allow them to gain significant embodied experience. Omnivores diverge in their intensity of consumption (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro, 2007), and these cultural tourists may represent a special type of omnivores that distinguishes themselves from others by seeking out significant experiential consumption. Thus, these omnivores may seek out interactions with artists, musicians, authors, and chefs rather than simply attend cultural events. Given the growing importance of experiential consumption (Holt, 1995; MacCannell, 1989; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999), the interactive process of meaning-making described above should provide insight into a variety of contexts such as music, art, dance, and food consumption.
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