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*Cultural Sociology* 2008 2: 57

DOI: 10.1177/1749975507086274

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## Up on the Roof: The Embodied Habitus of Diasporic *Capoeira*

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### ABSTRACT

The majority of the popular martial arts in Britain are of South East Asian origin. One exception is the Brazilian dance and martial art *capoeira*, which has grown in popularity in the UK over the past twenty years at the same time as it has become a global phenomenon. Brazilian teachers have spread across the globe to create what the article calls diasporic *capoeira*. The ethnographic research reported here focuses on how Brazilian *capoeira* teachers in the UK create and sustain a habitus for their students using a contrastive rhetoric. Teachers in the UK routinely stress the similarities and differences between the habitus of *capoeira* in Brazil and its habitus in the UK. Variations in the habitus of *capoeira* in the UK, at the individual and the institutional level are explored drawing upon the ethnographic data on *capoeira* groups, teachers and students.

### KEY WORDS

authenticity / *capoeira* / globalization / glocalization / habitus / martial arts

## Introduction

**U***p on the Roof*, a hit for The Drifters in the 1960s, was an ‘escape’ song. The narrator sang that when he felt overwhelmed by city life he went to the rooftop where his cares floated away. When the mainstream BBC 1

TV channel interpolated a series of station identifiers featuring dance and exercise routines between its programmes, including skateboarding, tai chi and tango, one showcased the Brazilian dance and martial art, *capoeira*, performed by two agile men on a London rooftop.<sup>1</sup> Famous landmarks, such as St Paul's Cathedral, could be seen behind the players performing a beautifully choreographed routine of *capoeira angola*.<sup>2</sup> For the thousands of *capoeira* enthusiasts across the world, there are two iconic backgrounds for *capoeira* performances: either a Brazilian beach, or the historic district of the city of Salvador de Bahia, home of *capoeira*. In the UK the third iconic *capoeira* image is Master (*Mestre*) Poncianinho on that London roof. *Capoeira* is an escape from ordinary urban life, a metaphorical rooftop where cares float into space.

This article focuses on the habitus of UK *capoeira*, using the analytic concepts of globalization and diaspora. The structure is as follows: we outline our usage of habitus, globalization and diaspora; then give an account of our research project and its methods, exploring how far our findings are representative. We explain the important features of *capoeira* in Brazil and in the UK in the context of debates about globalization and diaspora. The article then concentrates on the habitus of British, diasporic *capoeira* and its varieties, drawing on our ethnographic data. When we write of *capoeira* without qualification we refer to general features of the martial art. When we qualify *capoeira* with the label Brazilian, we are drawing on features specific to its homeland. We use the term *diasporic capoeira*, which we explain and justify later in the article, to refer to *capoeira* outside Brazil.

## Capoeira

*Capoeira* is simultaneously a fight, a dance and a game. Its history is highly contested but it probably developed in Africa before the slaves were taken to Brazil. It was part of the culture of the male African-Brazilian urban underclass by 1900. After a period of illegality and persecution (Holloway, 1989; Assunção, 2005), *capoeira* was legalized in 1937 when the Vargas government self-consciously created a Brazilian cultural identity around carnival, samba, and other hybridizations of Portuguese and African-Brazilian elements. After 1975 *capoeira* spread to the USA and Europe, reaching London in 1985. Today *capoeira* is even found in the heartlands of the Asian martial arts. Assunção (2005: 196), drawing on theories of globalization and research on slavery and the subsequent fate of the African-Brazilians, uses the term 'diasporic *capoeira*' for this process.

*Capoeira* in Brazil has been the subject of two English-language monographs (Lewis, 1992; Downey, 2005), and an academic history (Assunção, 2005), endorsed by Luis Renato Vieira (1995), a professor of sociology, a respected *mestre*, and composer of *capoeira* songs. There is an extensive scholarly literature on its history and practice in Brazilian Portuguese (e.g. Travassos, 1999; Vieira, 1995). Several of the most globally famous *mestres* have published

books on *capoeira* translated into English (Almeida, 1986; Capoeira, 1995, 2002, 2006); others have yet to be translated, such as those by Vieira (1995), Zulu (1995), and Falcão (1996).

## Habitus

The concept of ‘habitus’ has its origins in the work of Mauss (1979 [1950]), who focused on techniques of the body, the socially constructed customary habits of moving bodies – which varied across societies – classes and training and education systems. For Mauss, bodily techniques were interconnected with modes of life and systems of manners. Bourdieu (1962, 1977) brought the concept into the mainstream of cultural sociology, from his early writing on bachelors in the Béarn, through *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), and then elaborated it in his study of photography (Bourdieu et al., 1965).

Bourdieu, like Mauss, understood ‘habitus’ to consist of socially produced bodily postures, tastes, thoughts and feelings (which he called dispositions). Dispositions are closely linked to stratification and social class, and that link is central to grasping what Bourdieu meant by the ‘classic’ definition of habitus:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules ... Collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (1977: 72)

Subsequently focusing on sport, Bourdieu argued that ‘the teaching of a bodily practice’ was an important site to study: ‘a set of theoretical questions of the greatest importance’ (1990:166). Wacquant followed up these ideas in his autoethnography of boxing in Chicago: studying its ‘pugilistic habitus’ (2004: 98–9). Our use of ‘habitus’ parallels Wacquant’s: we are interested in the pugilistic ‘habitus’ of *capoeira*. Wainwright et al. (2006) draw on the same ideas to explore three varieties of habitus in the field of ballet. *Capoeira*, being both dance and martial art, sits comfortably between the pugilistic habitus of Wacquant and the balletic habitus. Wainwright and colleagues argue that much of the sociological work on the body has been overly theoretical. Modelling their analysis partially on Atkinson’s (2006) ethnography of an opera company at work, they focus on the ‘balletic body as a series of cultural practices’ (Wainwright et al., 2006: 392). They separate an individual’s habitus (e.g. that of Wayne Sleep), the institutional habitus (e.g. The Royal Ballet) and the choreographic habitus (e.g. a particular role choreographed for Sleep by Ashton).

The habitus is both a state of mind and a bodily state of being. At the individual level, a person’s biology, and biography, gives him or her a unique habitus. Simultaneously, however, that person is also shaped by the collective history of any group(s) to which he or she belongs. Thus education and occupational socialization contribute to the individual habitus. Wainwright et al. use the life histories of two dancers who left the New York City Ballet for the American

Ballet Theatre, with consequent changes to their individual bodily habituses, to illustrate this point. In the next section we outline the collective history shared by British *capoeira* players, both to provide a context equivalent to that offered by Wacquant for Chicago boxers and Wainwright and his colleagues for ballet dancers and to explain our use of the term diasporic.

## Globalization and Diaspora

*Capoeira* is Brazilian because of the slave trade which was not only a diaspora, but as Assunção (2005: 212) comments, also a process of globalization.

The term globalization is commonly used to suggest that the process is a recent, late 20th-century development. In fact, one can hardly imagine a more momentous process of dislocation of peoples and cultures than the one produced by the slave trade for almost four centuries. The difference is that it happened outside Europe in distant colonies.

Assunção argues that the diaspora of Africans to the Americas is not routinely seen as an example of globalization, because of Eurocentricism in the writing on the term. In Brazil, especially under the Vargas administrations (1930–54), there was a self-conscious process of cultural hybridization, in which Portuguese ‘colonial’ traits were blended with African traits to create the carnival, the music, the dance, the football, and the *capoeira* that are seen as typically, even stereotypically, Brazilian (Bellos, 2003; Browning, 1998; Schreiner, 1993). In Robertson’s (1995) terms, Brazil in the Vargas era was characterized by governmentally directed glocalization. Globally dominant features, espoused by the white, Portuguese-origin elite, were systematically blended into new Brazilian cultural forms, eulogized in the novels of Jorge Amado. *Capoeira* was taught to white men in private academies, ‘modernized’ by the addition of attacking kicks from Japanese martial arts, and re-labelled as a national sport. What had been an African, ‘savage’, male, underclass, street fight was redefined as a sport. This was glocalization.

The spread of *capoeira* out of Brazil since 1975 could be characterized as a form of globalization, and the use of *capoeira* by multinational companies in video games and advertising reinforces that. We prefer the term diasporic because at present the spread of *capoeira* involves Brazilians relocating to the rest of the world. The *capoeira* classes across the world are taught by expatriate, self-exiled Brazilians to students who are enrolled into ‘schools’ of *capoeira* that are still based in Brazil. As Assunção (2005: 212) defines it: ‘A diaspora presupposes the existence of a real or imaginary homeland to which its members aspire to return.’ *Capoeira* teachers all over the world have a homeland and aspire to return to it. Our research is on a globalized phenomenon, but we use the term diasporic because the teachers are Brazilians, who express *saudade* (nostalgic, homesick longing) for Brazil, and present themselves to their students as self-exiled, nomadic Brazilians. The term diasporic is particularly apt for the African-Brazilian *capoeira* teachers.

The use of the term diasporic rather than globalized or glocalized to characterize *capoeira* in the UK can be developed by contrasting *capoeira* with hip hop and comparing it with tango. Bennett (1999a), drawing on an ethnography of white hip hop culture in Newcastle, a post-industrial city in North East England, argued that hip hop was becoming glocalized, and moving away from its African-American roots. He also explored the glocalization of hip hop in Frankfurt am Main, a multi-racial German city (Bennett, 1999b), where local bands wrote and performed German lyrics about German problems. In the work on Newcastle, Bennett challenged the idea that all hip hop outside inner-city African-American ghettos is non-authentic, an idea widespread among cultural sociologists in the 1990s. Rejecting the argument that globalization inevitably erodes local differences, Bennett used Robertson's (1995) concept, glocalization (a process whereby homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies intertwine). In Bennett's analysis, the glocalization of hip hop was characterized by contradictions and tensions as the young people integrated 'authentic' style and music into their lives in Newcastle. Condry (2000, 2001) has produced a similar analysis of the ways in which hip hop has been adopted and adapted by its devotees in Japan.

*Capoeira* in the UK is different in three ways. Firstly, *capoeira* is spread by the migration of Brazilian teachers. Thus the *capoeira* in Newcastle, Tokyo and Frankfurt is taught by Brazilians, as it is in Rio. Secondly, the language of *capoeira* remains Brazilian Portuguese, as students from Newcastle, Tokyo and Frankfurt sing the same songs and learn the same vocabulary as those in Rio. Thirdly, the core aspects of the habitus of *capoeira* outside Brazil are presented to the students as inalienably and inexorably Brazilian. Hip hop, as portrayed by Bennett and Condry, is glocal, *capoeira* is not.

A better parallel with *capoeira* is tango. Tango can be characterized as diasporic. Savigliano (1995, 1998) and Viladrich (2005, 2006) have analysed tango in Argentina, its country of origin, and in two of its global outposts, Japan and New York. In both locations, the tango is taught by Argentineans, who can recreate authentic *milongas* (dance halls). The songs are sung in Spanish, and the teachers are the self-exiled and the expatriates, who have the Argentinean equivalent of *saudade*. Viladrich (2005) reports that the expatriate Argentineans in the New York *milongas* were often dark-skinned, working-class immigrants, similar to the *capoeira* teachers in the USA (Downey, 2005; Browning, 1995). The global spread of tango is similar to that of *capoeira* – grounded in concepts of Latin exoticism, of suffering 'overcome' through music and dance, and black soul<sup>3</sup> – but carried across the world in the bodies of teachers who are Argentineans and Brazilians.

So while hip hop, tango and *capoeira* are all globalized and all have glocal forms, *capoeira* and tango are also diasporic, while hip hop is not. Hip hop is a grass roots movement, whereas *capoeira* has a clear hierarchy, in which *discipulos* are apprenticed to a *mestre* who requires fidelity and loyalty. As long as the teachers are expatriate Brazilians, and the schools have Brazilian roots, the glocalization of *capoeira* is restricted. Once teachers indigenous to the UK,

Japan and Germany emerge, and hybrid forms evolve, *capoeira* will become more glocal. In the next section we move to the specificities of our fieldwork.

## Capoeira in the UK

We open with the climax of a typical lesson, to illustrate the fieldwork on which the analysis is based.

It is 9.15 pm on a cold, wet night in Tolnbridge,<sup>4</sup> a British city: on the streets people hurry, wearing hats and scarves, anxious to get inside out of the sleet. Between a pub and a car showroom, a former shop now advertises itself as a kickboxing gym. Inside it is hot, brightly lit, and very noisy. There is a distinct smell of stale sweat, the floor mats are grubby, and the changing-room walls are covered in mould. The lavatory often floods, and its roof leaks.

Thirty young people, of both sexes and several nationalities, are singing loudly, in Brazilian Portuguese, '*Paranue, Paranue, Parana*'. They stand in a circle, eight playing instruments. A deeply tanned man sings the verses of a song, to which the words '*Paranue, Paranue, Parana*' are the chorus. He is Achilles,<sup>5</sup> the Brazilian *capoeira* teacher. The students, about two-thirds male, are aged between 16 and 35. Most wear a uniform of white trousers and T-shirts emblazoned with scenes of *capoeira*, the word 'Beribazu', and the name Achilles. Ropes of different colours hold up their white trousers. The colour signals, to initiates, what level of skill each player has.

Drums beat, tambourines are struck, and five people strum *berimbau*: instruments made up of a long wooden bow, pulled into a curved shape by a wire, with a gourd attached. The players strike the wire with a short stick and shake a small rattle. The students clap the rhythm of the melody, which determines the speed and style of the players. Inside the circle (the *roda*), a man and a woman are fighting, or perhaps dancing, or perhaps both.

Achilles is unhappy with their interaction. He stops singing and signals to everyone to stop too. He calls the two players back to the foot of the *berimbau* and says, 'Lunghri, too fierce! Too fierce! Play softly with Aconite – she's a beginner, no kicks really strong, help her to enjoy the game.' He begins to play the *berimbau* again, the other instruments join in, the circle starts to clap and, when Achilles starts to sing, again provide the choruses. On his nod, Lunghri and Aconite, who have been crouched at the foot of the *berimbau*, cross themselves, touch the floor, and then cartwheel (*au*) into the centre of the ring and begin to move in a triangular step facing each other in time to the music. Aconite lifts and swings her leg at Lunghri in a kick (a *meia lua de frente* – 'half moon to the front'). Lunghri drops elegantly beneath it, and then cartwheels away from her. Everyone claps and sings.

A small, grubby kickboxing gym in an inner-city neighbourhood is a typical setting for a British *capoeira* class. The extract describes the end of a ninety-minute class, when two students play, after an hour of working individually or in pairs, learning and then drilling specific moves or short sequences prescribed

by the teacher. In this small gym, the energy and enthusiasm are palpable. The *roda* at the end of each class is an escape from Tolnbridge.

The authors were both in that kickboxing gym that night as we had been many times before. Our experience of *capoeira* is only from such gyms. In winter the locations are often very cold, in summer far too hot. All the teachers are trying to balance the hire costs of decent venues (smooth floors, showers, mirrored walls, mats available) against the income that the class can generate. Stephens was one of the students (*discipulos*) in that class. During the *roda* (the term used for both the circle and the game within it) he played an opponent, took a turn on the *berimbau*, led the singing of two songs, played another opponent, and beat the tambourine. That is expected of all serious *discipulos*. Delamont stood in that *roda*, clapping the rhythm and singing the choruses, watching the *capoeira* play, as a regular part of her ethnographic work. In diasporic *capoeira* the teacher gives students nicknames and, like ‘Lunghri’ and ‘Aconite’, we have nicknames given by Achilles, though we use pseudonymous nicknames in our publications.

*Capoeira* demands agility and gymnastic ability, because many moves are done upside-down. Players attack using kicks, delivered either with one foot on the ground or, more strangely to British eyes, from a hand-stand or head-stand. Dodges and escapes are valued as much as attacks, and students spend hours not only practising kicks but also learning many ways to escape. *Capoeira* is always done to music, and students are required to play instruments and sing in Brazilian Portuguese. Men and women train and play together in Britain, where diasporic *capoeira* is predominantly a non-contact sport. Teachers emphasize not only physical fitness, but also the need for beautiful, rhythmic, elegant play.

## Research methods and representativeness

Stephens (*Trovão*), who is a male *capoeirista*, and Delamont (*Bruxa*), a female ethnographer, have conducted a two-handed project. *Trovão* has been learning *capoeira* for four years, taking two classes of 90 minutes per week for 45 weeks of each year. *Bruxa* has observed two classes of 90 minutes per week for 27 months, augmented by interviews with teachers and students. We pool insights in regular formal conversations. *Capoeira discipulos* are required to choose one teacher and remain loyal to him (or her). *Trovão* has therefore learnt most of his *capoeira* from Achilles, with occasional classes by guest teachers invited by Achilles.<sup>6</sup> *Bruxa* has observed Achilles more than any other teacher, but has watched 42 other men and women teach. Achilles chooses to abandon his protective pseudonym, and prefers to be named as Claudio de Campos Rosario of the Beribazu Group. Because he is our teacher, we respect his choice.

The ethnographic research is being conducted according to the procedures set out by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). *Bruxa* writes field notes in every class, and tape records the formal interviews. *Trovão* is developing an embodied



knowledge of play and music. His experience has parallels with Wacquant's (2004) acquisition of a pugilistic habitus. He is, like Wacquant, acquiring the *habitus* whenever he does a cartwheel (*au*), an attack (*ataque*) or an escape (*esquiva*). His engagement with *capoeira* as an academic field of investigation developed as we discussed what each was learning and began to write together. We have published more detailed accounts of, and reflections on, our methods elsewhere (Stephens and Delamont, 2006a; Delamont, 2005a, 2005b).

The account of diasporic *capoeira* is grounded not only in the depth of our fieldwork, but also the behaviour of teachers and students from other groups seen and described to us. The fieldwork, observation of 293 classes by *Bruxa*, and participation by *Trovão* in 370 classes, is itself extensive. Other data allow us to compare Achilles's classes with others. Inspection of websites and DVDs featuring other *capoeira* groups in the UK reveals them to be essentially similar. London classes are shorter, more expensive and more crowded than those elsewhere, but the content is the 'same': warm-up, stretching, drill and practice of moves, paired practice, short lectures, music lessons, a *roda*, and sometimes samba to relax at the end. We have also observed the responses of *discipulos* we know to visiting *mestres*, and of experienced learners joining Achilles's group as visiting students. Teachers in the UK routinely visit each others' classes to run guest workshops, judge students and perform displays at festivals. We have seen 35 guest teachers present their workshops to the Tolnbridge students in familiar ways. Students who move to Tolnbridge find Achilles's classes 'normal'. Achilles's students report teachers in other cities running their classes in essentially similar ways. Our accounts of the teaching of diasporic *capoeira* have been recognized as representative by other social scientists who are *capoeiristas* and *capoeira* scholars. We are confident that the classes we have taken and observed are 'typical' of diasporic *capoeira* in the UK.

## Brazilian and Diasporic Capoeira

Our account of Brazilian *capoeira* is drawn from the work of those scholars mentioned earlier, and the regular lectures about Brazilian *capoeira* that are given in British classes. *Capoeira* in Brazil is not, of course, uniform. In a country of such vast size, racial diversity and inequalities of class and wealth, *capoeira* is taught and learnt in different ways. White university students in Florianopolis, army recruits in Brasilia and African-Brazilian street children in Olinda learn *capoeira* differently. The big differences in wealth and social position between the white middle class, on one hand, and the darker skinned, poorer working classes and the impoverished underclass, that characterize Brazilian society, are manifest in different types of *capoeira* instruction, as in every other aspect of social life (Telles, 2004). Travassos (1999) contrasted the *capoeira* classes in Rio taken by middle-class *discipulos* and those led by African-Brazilian teachers or taken by poor, lower-class students. The middle-class and lower-class students attended classes which had different habituses.

She found that the middle-class *discipulos* were not required to wear a uniform, and learnt only *capoeira* without having it embedded in other African-Brazilian cultural manifestations. In contrast, African-Brazilian teachers and those with poor, lower-class students emphasized neat uniforms and embedded *capoeira* in other African-Brazilian cultural phenomena, such as *maculélé*, *samba de roda*, *bumba meu boi* and the fisherman's dance *puxada de rede*.<sup>7</sup>

The *capoeira* taught in the UK is, generally, closer to the *capoeira* Travassos found taught by African-Brazilians and learnt by poor, often African-Brazilian, students. Teachers we study require *discipulos* to buy, and wear, uniforms; and they routinely expose students to *maculélé*, *samba de roda* and other African-Brazilian dances, while encouraging them to enjoy performing the fisherman's dance and the *bumba meu boi*. *Capoeira* students in the UK learn the martial art in a thorough-going Brazilian context, embedded in an historical narrative about the enslavement and then liberation of Africans in Brazil. Lewis (1992) analyses *capoeira* song lyrics, many of which are firmly grounded in African-Brazilian culture, with explicit and implicit allusions to that culture. One famous song has the slaves rejoicing that they have spilt their master's butter and avoided detection. Many songs celebrate *capoeira's* African origins (e.g. *Origem da Capoeira* by Mestre Beja-Flor says *capoeira* is from Yoruba, Nigeria, Angola, Zulu peoples). Other songs celebrate African deities such as *Iemanjá* or *Oxala*, African-Brazilian foods like dende oil, African-Brazilian masters of the past, or simply state *capoeira* is black. The Beribazu master Luis Renato Vieira composed a famous song, *Sometimes They Call Me a Negro*.<sup>8</sup> He is himself white, and the song has a powerful message: that calling a *capoeirista* a negro may be intended as a humiliating insult, but it is not, because whites and blacks play in the *roda* like brothers, and share the memories that *capoeira* is a powerful weapon in liberation struggles. Nicknames are explained to students in an historical narrative about the African-Brazilians' fight for the survival of their own culture: keeping *capoeira* alive when it was persecuted and outlawed.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of UK students have no direct experience of *capoeira* in Brazil: they 'experience' Brazilian *capoeira* vicariously through their teachers, who draw rhetorical contrasts between Brazil and the UK, while simultaneously stressing how authentic UK *capoeira* is. *Capoeira* teachers in the UK stress the authenticity of the students' *capoeira* experience (that is how Brazilian it is) and simultaneously draw contrasts between Brazilian and diasporic *capoeira*. Teachers emphasize that *they* are Brazilian, and have authentic knowledge and experience.<sup>10</sup> In May 2004, for example, Achilles began a firm statement about loyalty to one teacher by saying 'I'm your teacher! I'm Brazilian!' At Perseus's winter festival in 2006, in a question and answer session where students could ask the five visiting *mestres* to solve queries or tell stories or give advice, we asked if *malicia* (the deceit or trickery that is fundamental to good *capoeira* play) could be *taught*. Three *mestres* all said *malicia* was fundamental to everyday life in Brazil, so *malicia* came easily to Brazilians, especially poor people who had to survive on the streets. It could be *learnt* by non-Brazilians, but could not be taught.

*Capoeira* teachers earn income by selling clothing, shoes, instruments, jewellery, CDs and DVDs to students: the attraction of these items is that they are Brazilian. Students buy, for example, flip flops or bikinis from a *capoeira* teacher, as well as *capoeira* clothing, because they are genuine Brazilian beachwear. The history, the nicknames, the language, the music, the bodily styles, and the social life of parties and dancing are all presented to students as central to *capoeira*, and as a Brazilian experience. Yet at the same time, teachers warn students that *capoeira* in Brazil is different because there it is a dangerous contact sport, a fight, in which the social cohesion and friendship of UK classes cannot be expected. Brazilian students routinely warn diasporic learners that in Brazil *capoeira* is dangerous, violent, and 'very different' in other, usually unspecified ways. Playing in the streets, or at local classes for Brazilians, is perilous. The contrasts between Brazilian and diasporic *capoeira* are not only reinforced in regular classes. When festivals are held – and most groups not only have one or two a year of their own, but are regularly enjoined to travel with their teacher to the festivals of other groups<sup>11</sup> – the presence of guest masters from Brazil is always presented as a highlight. Typically Achilles will say 'Guys! On Saturday *Mestre* Sicinnus has his festival in Fordhampton – his guest is the famous teacher *Mestre* Harmodias from Rio – come with me, and take a master class from *Mestre* Harmodias'. Such events are filmed, and then sold as DVDs, which focus particularly on the famous Brazilian masters.

Teachers in the UK organize trips to Brazil, so their students can experience 'real' Brazilian *capoeira*, and the culture of the country. Perseus's group from Longhampton went on such a trip in 2006. Serious students have been to Brazil, are planning to go, or are 'saving to go'. Those in Brazil send emails full of excitement, which are circulated in their clubs. On their return photographs are shared, often via club and personal web sites, to genuine interest. Advanced students who want to become *capoeira* instructors themselves learn that they will need to become fluent in Portuguese and spend a prolonged period in Brazil, apprenticed to their diasporic teacher's own home group, and ideally his or her own master(s) there. The message is clear: diasporic *capoeira* is not a sufficient basis from which non-Brazilians can become instructors or masters; only in Brazil can one become an authentic expert.

In the remainder of the article we focus on the individual and institutional habituses that are being acquired by Achilles's most advanced male students in Tolnbridge: that is *Trovão* and his cohort.

## Acquiring Habitus

Wainwright et al. (2006) use the term institutional habitus to encapsulate the style and culture of the Royal Danish Ballet as compared to the Kirov or the Royal Ballet of London. The *capoeira* equivalent is the group, a lineage with Brazilian origins, 'founded' by a famous historical *mestre* or *mestres*. Senzala, for example, traces its origins to *Mestre* Bimba's time in Rio, via two of his

students Paulo and Rafael Flores.<sup>12</sup> *Senzala* groups now exist all over the world, and their institutional habitus is characterized by high kicks, some particular throws and ‘unbalancing techniques’ (*rasteiras*) (Assunção, 2005: 173–76).

A core value of *capoeira* is loyalty and fidelity to one’s *mestre*. In practice, that means joining his or her group. Downey (2005), for example, joined the Group de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP) in Salvador, and later, took GCAP classes in New York. When he was first in Salvador he trained in several different academies although he had been warned that ‘conflicting instructions would lead me to develop an incoherent style’ (Downey, 2005:51). He was caught, thrown out of another academy, and forced to choose one. Downey describes his immersion in GCAP as an apprenticeship, and likens his time in Salvador to Wacquant’s (2004) period in the Chicago boxing gym. He acquired an individual *capoeira* habitus, and the GCAP’s institutional habitus. Diasporic *capoeira* students in cities like Tolnbridge acquire the institutional habitus of their teacher.

Achilles is a loyal member of Beribazu (Blue Berimbau) founded in Brasilia in 1972 (Assunção, 2005: 183–4). Its European stronghold is Warsaw (Reis, 2005), rather than the UK, where Achilles is currently the only Beribazu teacher. The institutional habitus of students, in Cloisterham and Tolnbridge, is the habitus of Beribazu. The first man to teach *capoeira* in Tolnbridge, Cadmus, is from Unaio and if his classes had survived (they folded because costs outweighed receipts) *Trovão* and his cohort would have acquired the habitus of Unaio, not Beribazu.

*Capoeira* is an embodied activity, with a strong performative element. Elsewhere (Stephens and Delamont, 2006b) we have contrasted the expert body of the *capoeira mestre* with the novice bodies of the disciples. Here we deploy the theoretical idea of habitus to compare the varieties of individual habituses among the men and women in *Trovão*’s cohort. We illustrate the institutional habitus with fieldnotes – those included above, and from a class held before the 2006 summer festival, when Achilles made several aspects of the habitus manifest. We then illustrate individual habitus with material on what students need to achieve to be awarded the third belt – the level *Trovão* and his cohort reached in 2005.

The class was scheduled from 8.00 to 10.30, and by 8.05 there were 15 people. Achilles arrived, laden with instruments – changed his clothes and set out chairs for the ‘band’ – 10 chairs instead of the usual five. He began the warm-up at 8.10 with 19 present. At 8.33 Achilles announced that everyone had to play an instrument, and sent 10 students to do so. He concentrated on coaching the musicians rather than the nine people doing *capoeira* movements. *Trovão*, Shere Khan and Fuchsia arrived: they warmed up in a corner. From 8.33 until 9.15 Achilles ordered individual students to join the musicians, and to leave the band, interspersed periods of *capoeira* play for all and a CD with periods of intensive coaching on the instruments, and taught one new move. There was a break so the students could pay for the lesson and the festival. After the break came a *roda*, first with an angola rhythm, then a regional one.

Aspects of the Beribazu habitus can be seen in the two fieldnote extracts: in the first, the name Beribazu worn on the uniform, the teacher's authority, and the requirement that experienced players adjust their game to encourage, and not intimidate, beginners, are apparent. In the second, Achilles is forcing all students to play instruments, coaching them as musicians, and rehearsing them in the two styles of *capoeira*. These are all central tenets of the Beribazu Group.

## Individual Habitus

Achilles evaluates the individual habitus of each of his students in the context of diasporic *capoeira*. He is adamant that he teaches the same content in the UK and Brazil – ‘Everything we teach in Brazil we teach here as well’ – but in Brazil the shared Portuguese language makes teaching easier. Students in the UK are more enthusiastic and committed, train harder, learn the instruments and read more widely about *capoeira* than many *discipulos* in Brazil. Capoeira (2002) reports instructors in Germany commenting that devotees there begin *capoeira* with very little bodily skill: they have ‘hard waists’ (i.e. inflexible torsos) and do the moves in a jerky, ugly, unsensuous, paramilitary way. However, they treat learning it very seriously, coming to class regularly and through sheer determination and self-discipline become competent. They are ‘better’ students than Brazilians who have more ‘natural’ aptitude but are not hard working. Achilles has a similar view. Comparing his experiences as a *capoeira* teacher in Brazil with the UK, Achilles drew the following contrasts:

In Brazil everyone knows what *capoeira* is. In England it is something quite new and maybe that's why people here give it more importance than in Brazil. Because it is something quite new, and not part of their culture, people here want to learn more than people in Brazil.

He is clear that his British students are more committed to learning the game, and work harder.

The fieldwork between August and December 2005 provided a good opportunity to see the individual student habitus made explicit and embodied. In 2005 there were five women and a dozen men in Tolnbridge who had the second (blue and brown) belt, and were therefore potentially eligible to be awarded the third (brown) belt. *Bruxa* asked Achilles to explain the criteria which were circulated by *Trovão* to the Tolnbridge club email list. The criteria were, as is normal with any habitus, a mixture of visible, technical competencies (e.g. knowing the name of the kick, *meia lua*, and being able to deliver it) and tacit, indeterminate ones (e.g. being a loyal student of Achilles and of Beribazu). Achilles explained the criteria for the brown belt as follows:

- 1) Physical ability: first, doing the moves and second, playing stylishly not mechanically;
- 2) Grasp of terminology and vocabulary: naming the moves and rhythms, knowing the words of the verses, or at least of the choruses, of the songs;

- 3) Musical ability: recognizing the five rhythms, playing the five instruments;
- 4) Grasping the subtleties of the game: being able to play in the *roda*; especially watching the opponent, dodging, and, ideally, developing *malicia*;
- 5) Participating in class: playing instruments while others train, taking turns with the singing, turning up regularly and helping train the beginners;
- 6) Showing loyalty: not training with any other teacher, turning up to do performances – especially those which earn money for the club or are recruiting events – taking whatever role in performances Achilles assigns even if it is dull or low-status, wearing the uniform with pride, joining in the social events such as camping trips, and going with Achilles to other groups' festivals.

Some of these are susceptible to a formal test: Achilles can examine a student's grasp of the names of moves and their ability to do them, by calling out the name of a move (e.g. '*meia lua*') and watching the student's execution of it. Others, such as loyalty to Achilles, are more indeterminate. Some students are unwilling, or very reluctant, to perform *maculélé*, to dance, or to clown around in the *Bumba meu Boi* in public performance, and some will not do *capoeira* in front of paying audiences. Achilles expects his students to do these things, and values the loyalty of those who will, because 'they are Brazilian', they publicize the club, and the group raises funds by such events. He sees willingness to dance, to act, and to do *capoeira* in public as an important aspect of an emerging bodily self-confidence. This is why Achilles values Lavender and Fuschia who are always willing to dance, and happily play *maculélé* in public performances, and Mong who will dress up as the pregnant wife in *Bumba meu Boi* and dance through the streets of Cloisterham in drag.

The men and women in *Trovão's* cohort who were judged ready to have the brown belt demonstrated mastery or loyalty in differing degrees across the domains. Each of these 17 disciples had a different individual habitus. *Trovão* himself is not skilled at the inverted moves – those done from a hand-stand or head-stand – and does not use these attacks or flourishes in the *roda*, but his kicks delivered from an upright position are good. He plays the *berimbau* and sings verses in public. In contrast, Jagai, Yegasuri and Drupada regularly use the inverted moves in the *roda* as attacks and displays of prowess, but avoid playing the *berimbau* in public. Bariann and Darzee never sing verses. Lunghri has excellent 'ring sense', turns up loyally for everything, plays the *berimbau*, sings verses in public, has read widely, and locates *capoeira* in the context of African-Brazilian culture. Foxglove plays beautifully in the *roda*, plays all the instruments, and turns up to everything, but knows no song verses and confuses the names of moves she can perform stylishly. Kripa has advanced bodily skills, but will not perform in public, and Yegasuri never comes to any performances, social events or trips.

Achilles used his judgment of the 17 students' abilities and performance across all his criteria to decide that they could all get their third belt. Similarly, he decided in the autumn of 2006 that no one in Tolnbridge was ready to be promoted to the brown and green *corda*. That is, no one had yet acquired the

individual habitus of a fourth-level belt: all needed to train harder physically, or musically and/or show more loyalty.

## Conclusion

*Capoeira* is a paradigm case of an embodied social practice that is ‘collaboratively orchestrated’ and ‘regular’, without being ‘the product of obedience to rules’ or ‘the orchestrating action of a conductor’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). *Capoeira* is, as Bourdieu’s theory predicted, an ideal site to study varieties of habitus. A *capoeira discipulo* is acquiring a state of mind and a state of bodily being. The way he or she plays *capoeira* is shaped by the group the student belongs to and by their individual biology and biography. While there have been several ethnographies of its habitus or habituses in Brazil, the ways in which it is taught, learnt, embodied, and performed in its diasporic manifestations has not previously been investigated. Given the popularity and geographical spread of diasporic *capoeira* it deserves sociological attention. This article has focused on contrasts between Brazilian and diasporic *capoeira* to provide foundations for sociological investigation of diasporic *capoeira* as a pedagogic site in which the acquisition of individual habituses can be explored. Both Wacquant’s (2004) pugilistic habitus and Wainwright et al.’s (2006) balletic one are produced by education and training. *Capoeira* too is an embodied social practice that its adherents embrace as they acquire the habitus (as Achilles calls it, ‘the way *de capoeira*’) during formal pedagogic instruction. Explicit and implicit aspects of *capoeira* are, respectively, taught and absorbed as students attend classes.

The habitus of British diasporic *capoeira* is relatively young, is evolving, and is developing a collective history. Compared to boxing and ballet, diasporic *capoeira*’s habitus is emergent. However, as it evolves, paradoxes and all, it provides a fertile research site for cultural sociology in general, and for the exploration of embodiment and habitus in particular.

## Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all the teachers and students who have played *capoeira* with us, to Mrs Rosemary Bartle Jones for word-processing the article, to all our colleagues for advice, and to Rodrigo Ribeiro for his *axé*.

## Notes

- 1 The men are Master Poncianinho and his best student. This identifier can be viewed at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A920099>

- 2 There are two main styles of *capoeira* today: angola which is more ‘African’, played slowly and close to the ground, and regional which is played faster, upright, and includes kicks that are similar to those used in karate (Assunção, 2005).
- 3 Thompson (2006: 8) has recently argued that tango has black origins, which explained its low status in Argentinean society, stating that tango’s ‘strongest root is pure Afro-Argentine, a development of Kongo-style dancing, as elaborated in black dancing groups called candombles that also existed in black Uruguay’.
- 4 All places are protected by pseudonyms, except London which has at least 50 *capoeira* teachers. Cloisterham, Fordhampton, Longhampston and Tolnbridge are pseudonyms for university cities with only one or two *capoeira* teachers each.
- 5 All the teachers and students are protected by pseudonyms. Teachers have names from Greek mythology (Achilles, Scinnius), the male students from Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*, the females have flowers. These pseudonyms reflect ways in which *capoeira* operates: teachers are usually known by one name (e.g. *Mestre Zulu*, the founder of Beribazu). Our use of Kipling and flowers is designed to avoid any nicknames real *capoeira* students in the UK have. After a student has studied for a few months they attend a *batizado* (baptism) when they get their nickname and first belt. The nicknames are typically Brazilian, echoing those of soccer players, but also had their role in the era when *capoeira* was illegal and players were safer if their real names were not known to their fellow *capoeiristas*. UK *capoeira* students are widely known by their nicknames, hence our use of pseudonymous *capoeira* nicknames in publications: to protect the confidentiality of our informants.
- 6 *Trovão* started with Cadmus.
- 7 *Maculélé* is an African-Brazilian dance, in which sticks held by each player are clashed together. *Capoeira* clubs do public performances with the students dressed in grass skirts. The *samba de roda* is done for fun – everyone forms a *roda* moving to a samba rhythm. In the centre a man and woman dance until another player shimmies into the *roda* and cuts out the same-sex dancer. It is a Brazilian, sexy, version of a ladies’ and gentlemen’s ‘excuse me’. *Bumba meu boi* is a rustic bucolic ‘miracle’ play, in which a dead bull is brought back to life (see Mukuna, 1999). In *puxada de reda* the men re-enact fishermen pulling in a huge net full of fish, while the women pay homage to *Iemanjá* the African-Brazilian sea goddess. *Trovão* has learnt these Brazilian manifestations, and performed *maculélé* and the *puxada de reda* in public with his group when Achilles requested it.
- 8 The lyrics, translated by Assunção, a friend and co-author of Luis Renato Vieira’s, can be found in Assunção (2005: 209).
- 9 The link between nicknames and the period when *capoeira* was illegal establishes the authenticity of *capoeira* as Brazilian. The explanation also reinforces the attractive idea that to play *capoeira* is to be a rebel.
- 10 We have written on authenticity elsewhere (Delamont, 2006).
- 11 There is, for example, a big European festival in Amsterdam at Easter, to which several hundred *capoeiristas* go with their teachers (Vieira, 2004).
- 12 *Mestre Bimba* and *Mestre Pastinha*, both long dead, are revered as the founders of modern regional and modern angola *capoeira*.



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