

RUNNING HEAD: BRAZILIAN MARTIAL ARTS AND CANADIAN CAPOEIRA

A Perfect Match:

Brazilian Martial Arts and The Canadian Multiculturalism Act

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## Abstract

Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial art, game and dance that has been played in Canada since the early 1990s. Canadian participants create truly multi-cultural communities when Brazilian and Canadian participants take up an activity that is a fusion of Brazilian, African, and European customs. This study reveals that players in Canada use capoeira to fulfill aspects of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in different ways. Canadians of Brazilian descent idealize what capoeira is/was like in their homelands and use the martial art to preserve and share their culture; connect to a dispersed, international community of 'their people'; and maintain their native language. Canadians of Caribbean descent come to see the game as a way to (re)connect with their Black heritage and maintain 'their ancestral culture'. Canadians of European ancestry regard the dance as an escape from mainstream Canadian culture, a way to discover and practice 'new' and 'different' verbal, musical, and corporeal languages. As participants learn to conjoin music and sport, aggression and grace, competition and cooperation, through the complex martial art/dance/game that is capoeira, they play a part in bringing Canadian ideals of multiculturalism to life.

## A Perfect Match:

## Brazilian Martial Arts and The Canadian Multiculturalism Act

In the past century international borders have become increasingly porous and technological developments have allowed an ostensible speeding up of time and shrinking of space, a globalization of inter- and intra-national processes. The cultures of the world now “operate on a global scale... cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organizations in new space-time combinations, making the world in reality and in experience more interconnected” (Maguire & Tuck, 1998: 110). As people cross borders, their cultures, including sport forms, are instilled into their minds and their bodies.

Today, without ever leaving their homes, children in Tanzania and India have adopted as their own sports of English origin such as soccer and cricket, while in Canada opportunities to learn physical activities as diverse as yoga from India and judo from Japan are rapidly increasing. All of these cultural activities allow some individuals to fulfill not only their need for physical activity and fitness, but also for being seen and known as members in a particular group, and to give physical expression to social values. “With the acceleration of change and increasing cultural complexity, the possibilities of different sources of identification have expanded” (Wheaton, 2004, p. 5). The types of physical activities different people take up and their devotion to those activities tell us something about who these people are, how they perceive their social identities and the degree of centrality or marginalization of their social, racial, or ethnic group. Just as cultural studies facilitate understandings of sport, sport studies also play a primary role in understanding the character of cultures, and in the current era of permeable borders and diasporic identifications, sport studies can also offer a window into the character of multiculturalism.

*Multiculturalism Ideals*

In countries such as Brazil and Canada, where the majority of the country is populated by non-natives, and the government simultaneously promotes multicultural yet monolithic national societies, individuals often struggle to find their own place, create their own communities and forge their own identities in relation to their ancestry and cultural backgrounds. “What is said to make Canada distinctive is its diversity...suggesting that

competing ideas of Canadian culture and identity are welcome.” (Dunk, pp. 19-20); it remains true, however, that fixed categories of race prevail and White Canadians dominate Canada’s cultural landscape. Hence ‘multiculturalism’ in Canada, as promoted by the government, does not reflect the mixing of English and French cultures, nor Irish and Italian communities for that matter. In contrast to previously exclusionary policies, it is the incorporation of ‘Yellow,’ ‘Brown,’ and ‘Black’ peoples into a predominantly White mono-culture that Canada’s multicultural policy is based on. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (CMA) makes the goals of the state explicit: “It is the policy of the government of Canada to recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges,

- the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage ... to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise [sic] their own religion or to use their own language;
- the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development”; and
- the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and ... promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins” (Department of Justice Canada).

These three elements of the CMA are exemplified within one Canadian sub-cultural sporting community.

Capoeira, a martial art of Brazilian origins, has been played in Canada since 1993. *Ginga Capoeira*<sup>1</sup>, is a group whose participants hail from a wide range of nationalities and ethnicities and play the sport with a plethora of motivations and meanings. My research<sup>2</sup> shows that three distinct groups of Canadian capoeira players use the martial art to enhance their experience of multiculturalism. Canadians of Brazilian descent use

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<sup>1</sup> The name of this capoeira group has been altered and its specific location omitted to protect the identities of the participants.

<sup>2</sup> This study of capoeira in Canada focused exclusively on the experiences of *Ginga Capoeira* participants. This ethnography was carried out over six months in 2005, and involved participation in between two and four two hour classes per week, observation of participants’ behaviour both in classes and at capoeira social events, and interviews with nine participants with nine months to 23 years capoeira experience. While I recognize that my identities as a university-educated, middle-class, female, Black Canadian may have limited my observations of and interactions with some of the participants, my four years of experience with this group afforded me unique insider status in this community of capoeiristas, close relationships with many of the participants and deep understanding of the meanings we make from our experiences and the history of the group dynamics.

the martial art to preserve, enhance and share their culture, and connect to a dispersed, international community of their compatriots. The capoeira community can act as a home away from home for a group of recent or landed immigrants, or Canadian-born Brazilians for that matter, who idealize what capoeira is/was like in their homelands and feel a nostalgia for home, overcome through a commitment to maintaining their native language and preserving 'real' capoeira in Canada. Canadians of Caribbean descent come to see the game as a way to (re)connect with their Black heritage and maintain their 'ancestral' culture. They emphasize the African roots of the musical and physical elements of capoeira, the game's history as a vehicle for political resistance and a means to unite people of common origins in their local Black communities. Canadians of European ancestry regard capoeira as an escape from mainstream Anglo- or Franco-Canadian culture, which strictly classifies sport, dance, play, and performance. Participation in capoeira is one way to discover and practice 'new' and 'different' verbal, musical, and corporeal languages and creative self expression. All participants play a part in bringing Canadian multiculturalism ideals to life.

To understand how a capoeira community can embody the Canadian multiculturalism act, one must have an appreciation for how the game is played. It is difficult to play and some might argue even harder to define. Rodrigues and Svinth declare "Capoeira is Brazilian. That much is certain. Beyond that, it is many things at once." (2000, 91). It is 'played' as a group of devotees form a *roda* (circle) around two players who compete/converse in martial contact and dance. Capoeira is traditionally described with a tripartite definition: game, martial art and dance<sup>3</sup>. It is a game that anyone can win, (regardless of class, race, size, or gender) by outsmarting his or her opponent. There are no points awarded, but spectators assess who was the more talented, expressive and effective player. Capoeira is also a *martial art* used for self-defense. Players use kicks, sweeps, head butts and other theatrics to fight their opponents. Thirdly capoeira is a dance that can distract an opponent and/or act as a mode of self-expression or cultural celebration. *Capoeiristas* (capoeira devotees) who form the circle provide music for the dance through vocals provided by one lead singer and a chorus; percussion created by the *agogô* (double cowbell), the *atabaque* (drum), and the *pandeiro* (tambourine); and melody bestowed by "the magisterial berimbau...the sacred one-string musical instrument of capoeira" (Thompson, 2001, pp. 1-2).

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<sup>3</sup> I will use the terms game, martial art, and dance along with sport, art and physical activity throughout this work interchangeably, in the vernacular of the players themselves. Capoeira is 'played' with ludic and antagonistic, competitive and cooperative, artistic and violent connotations. The meanings players derive constantly vary. See Downey (2002) for more on capoeira's multiple definitions.

Capoeiristas in Canada engage in a multicultural community not only because they themselves are an ethnically diverse group, but also because they adopt a new physical movement practice with African, Native-Brazilian, European and Japanese roots, learn to play Afro-Brazilian instruments, sing songs with Portuguese and Yoruba/Kongo (African) words, and perform Brazilian folkloric dances. Some students even go so far as become fluent in Portuguese. Capoeiristas engage in many aspects of many national cultures, furthermore they bring their own eclectic ethnic differences to the academy, which infuses their learning and allows for creativity to arise from their interactions with each other. We have long passed the era of “racial ‘health warning[s]’ in which encounters with otherness are presented as dangerous to the well-being of one’s own singular identity” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 133); rather, these experiences are encouraged. Capoeira facilitates the growth of the multicultural nation through creation of multi-cultural individuals, people who have traveled, speak multiple languages, and perform a variety of movement vocabularies based primarily on Brazilian, African, and European customs.

#### *Demonstrating a Brazilian Identity*

The experience of displacement, migration and diaspora is having one of the largest influences on the construction of contemporary identities (Davis, 2004, p. 180). Today, individuals can be simultaneously connected to their land of residence, nation of citizenship, place of birth, ethnic group and/or community. Brazilians in Canada have undertaken many strategies to be simultaneously rooted in Canada and yet connected to Brazil. They unite with large Portuguese communities to maintain their language; organize and attend cultural events/nightclubs featuring samba, forro, and other Latin music styles; watch and play *futebol* (soccer) at various local pubs or parks; and, of course, start or join capoeira groups where they can communicate and compete in their (other) “national sport”. (Downey, 2002).

Over ten percent (n=6) of the *Ginga Capoeira* players are Brazilian<sup>4</sup>. The founders of the group are dark-skinned Afro-Brazilians or *morena(o)s* (of mixed descent), born and raised in Brazil. They began playing capoeira there and moved to Canada as adults to improve their livelihood and (in some cases) share the art with Canadians. Other Brazilians immigrated to Canada without ever playing capoeira in Brazil, but now engage in

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<sup>4</sup>“Brazilian’ players may be first generation Canadians, landed immigrants, recent immigrants, tourists, or illegal aliens. Regardless of the amount of time they’ve been in Canada, their legal status with respect to the Canadian state, their assimilation into the Canadian nation (especially linguistically), or their race, they all identify as Brazilian within this capoeira community.

the subculture to (re)connect to a dispersed, international community of their compatriots and explore the culture they left behind. In short, Brazilian *capoeiristas* live out the tenet of the CMA that recognizes the freedom of all members of Canadian society to “preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage ... and use their own language” (Department of Justice Canada).

Brazilian *capoeiristas* wear their Brazilian nationality as a badge of honour and have taken on the role of Brazilian ambassador, teaching Canadians what capoeira (and life) is like in Brazil. Sharing their knowledge of their native country gives Brazilian *capoeiristas* a sense of power, status and authority over non-Brazilians within the group and strengthens their sense of national identity. They are able to speak in Portuguese and teach capoeira movements, music and songs to the uninitiated. They enhance their culture as they strive to maintain its integrity, keep capoeira the same in Canada as it is in Brazil. Capoeira could never maintain the same form in two countries as ethnically, politically, historically and environmentally different as Brazil and Canada<sup>5</sup>, however, concepts of “authenticity” entertained by individuals “are much looser than those entertained by intellectuals” (Cohen, 1998, p. 383) such as anthropologists and sociologists. Admitting that capoeira in Canada is different than in Brazil would reveal that Brazilian capoeira ambassadors had failed at their ‘mission’ to share capoeira with the world and that ‘true’ Brazilian culture is slipping away. Instead Brazilian *capoeiristas* in Canada slip seamlessly between ‘the true capoeira is only in Brazil’ and ‘real capoeira can be brought here to Canada’. If the Brazilian participants believe in their ability to recreate a *true* capoeira community, they can create a home away from home, a community of talented and expressive *capoeiristas*.

Unlike other sports comprised simply of movements and rules to be learned by neophytes, capoeira requires participants to adopt new physical, cultural, musical, *and* verbal vocabularies. Capoeira traditions were rarely written about before the nineteenth century. The art is based on an oral culture (Rodrigues and Svinth, 2000, ¶ 3), this combined with the lack of formal education of many Afro-Brazilian *mestres* has led to the pre-eminence of spoken language. The majority of Canadian players do not speak Portuguese when they begin to train and many *mestres* (capoeira teachers) do not speak English when they begin to teach in Canada, making

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<sup>5</sup> Capoeira in Canada is *necessarily* different from that in Brazil due to a myriad of factors, not least of which is the general lack of Canadian participant exposure to African based rhythms, music, and movements; cold weather that keeps Canadians training and playing indoors for much of the year; and greater socio-economic status and age of the majority of Canadian participants which gives them a number of competing obligations and little free time to fully devote to the sport as poorer younger Brazilians might.

initial encounters between Canadian students and Brazilian *mestres* frustrating and entertaining depending on the circumstances. Those who began capoeira in the early 1990s were forced to learn Portuguese in order to communicate with and help their recently immigrated Brazilian *mestres* adjust to life in Canada.

It was a really good experience for me with such a small group. There was maybe like ten people at the most and so it was a lot of one on one with a [teacher] and he spoke very little English so I was — it was really forcing me to speak Portuguese with him. I started teaching him English, he started teaching me Portuguese. (Pulinho)<sup>6</sup>

As *mestres* learned more English, the capoeira academy changed from an exclusively Portuguese to a bilingual training space; however, the capoeira *roda* has remained primarily Portuguese. Both Portuguese and English are used to explain movements, translate songs, and describe the history and philosophy of capoeira. Being bilingual is essential to avoid exclusion from conversations, to enhance knowledge and to be actively involved in the most distinctive aspect of the activity from the English-speaker's perspective.

Although the Brazilian *Ginga Capoeira* teachers now all have a strong grasp of English, they sometimes intentionally speak Portuguese because a) some expressions are impossible to translate, b) songs of the *roda* are never sung in English, c) students must hear Portuguese in order to learn the language, or d) those who are not devoted to the art enough to become proficient in the language 'deserve' to be excluded. Students' feelings of exclusion or misunderstanding often fuel their desires to learn Portuguese. In fact, all students of the art are encouraged to learn Portuguese in order to understand the message of the music; sing more songs; take advantage of their *mestre's* capoeira books; better grasp instructions; participate appropriately; learn about the myths and histories of old Brazilian *mestres* and groups; and benefit from special attention, additional advice and personal coaching a Portuguese speaking *mestre* may have to offer. Ostensibly all of this is to benefit Canadian students, to prepare them to become teachers.

Ideally is to become an instructor you must speak Portuguese. Yep, because by that time you know you're gonna start teaching and how you gonna teach capoeira if you don't know how to sing a song or even if you know how to sing a song you don't know what it means and right, so you

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<sup>6</sup> Within the capoeira community, every student receives a nickname based on his or her appearance or style of play. The names used here are neither participants real names, nor their nicknames.

should understand the language and know what you're singing it for ... if you don't understand the language you not gonna know what kind of game you have to play. (Sol)

However, the benefits of speaking Portuguese go beyond improvements in just the students' games. A group of capoeiristas speaking in Portuguese keeps capoeira a 'unique' physical activity, and maintains a sense of community for Brazilians who may feel more comfortable communicating with others in their mother tongue. They can bring those who are new to Portuguese into their circle, so to speak, and expand the group of friends and family they communicate with. Speaking in Portuguese brings the dedicated members of the Canadian capoeira community together. This is the only way they can be "a family, like the groups are in Brazil" (Jonathan).

I have heard from [Brazilian] people that, 'oh it's hard sometimes to express ourselves' and the culture is different and sometimes you say something that like for us its something like normal but then they would take as something offensive ... so we talk Portuguese because is easier for us to be close and if you can speak [Portuguese] is better for you too because you will have a new language and be close too. (Serpente)

According to Serpente and her peers, being able to maintain her native language with fellow Brazilians and Canadian students is a very unique experience.

Through connections with the capoeira community Brazilian-Canadians can find a sense of self unavailable through mainstream Canadian sports. Instead of trying to assimilate into a Canadian monoculture, they make strong links with the local Brazilian communities and share capoeira with the Brazilian community as much as possible. Sol and Puma see the value of starting capoeira in a new country.

I know a lot of Brazilians that lives here and they began doing capoeira here. You know because they value more what they have there. (Sol)

You go and do capoeira and you feel closer to your country. (Puma)

Participants took capoeira for granted when they lived in Brazil, now they use it to bolster their Brazilian-ness in 'multicultural' Canada. Brazilian capoeiristas in Canada become very invested in their national identities.

Expertise in capoeira is seen by some as a source of national pride (Downey, 2002) and *Ginga* capoeiristas try to uphold the widely promoted and accepted image of Brazilian-ness.

The stereotype is favourable, known for being good singers, good dancers, and a mixture of different races, Brazilians are quintessential exotics in Canada.

I remember when I left Brazil I couldn't sing at all. I could clap and play the instruments...[but] I was scared and shy. You know everybody there singing sounds so beautiful and oh my goodness, but when I first came to Canada I said 'oh, there nobody knows me, nobody — like most of people don't speak Portuguese. I'm gonna learn how to sing. So I started just you know — my first song was awful, (laughs) but then I started you know every time I tried one. I'd try again and then you know, I don't think I have a beautiful voice but at least I can do without being shy no more.

(Serpente)

Through her rough game and her loud singing voice, Serpente shows Canadians how to *be* a capoeirista. She knows that because of Canadian students' inexperience for the most part, she can get away with doing and saying virtually anything about Brazil or capoeira, and claim authenticity. However, she prides herself on making an accurate representation of her home country.

I speak the language but I see everybody trying hard like I am, you know, everybody trying to learn a little bit more like everyday.... I can help you know with something that they don't know or some song that they're singing wrong. (Serpente)

Serpente believes it is her duty to correct her classmates, teach them about Brazil and its culture, help them with their Portuguese, and show them the culturally appropriate ways and timing for dancing and singing. "I feel proud that I'm like I'm there and I can help" (Serpente). Puma too prides herself on her mastery of Afro-Brazilian dance. Whenever samba or maculelê music plays during a class she is the first to demonstrate her 'authentic' dance moves, but does not privilege her Afro-Brazilian background. Anyone can learn to dance or to play capoeira. She emphasizes the multicultural nature of the martial art and of Brazil.

When it started from — it was in Brazil but it was from African slaves so it was already mixed. You know you had many different types of people because of in Brazil — It's like Brazil it's a mixed country, totally mixed because when we had the Indians and then came the Portuguese and the Spanish so they started mixing so I think I see capoeira kind of that way so it doesn't matter where you're from if you're Chinese, Japanese. (Puma)

Gato Preto also suggests capoeira in Brazil is a good example of racial mixture.

You see so many different types of people playing [in Brazil] that maybe here it'll attract so many different people because they'll see 'Hey that's a white guy! Hey that's a black girl! That's a white girl! That's an Indian girl!' so they won't feel it's only Black, it's only White." (Gato Preto)

Part of the Brazilian capoeirista identity is that they are not only a multicultural, welcoming group of people but also they are the connection to Brazil for those Canadians who have not traveled, they are *the* role models to follow. Their job is to represent Brazil's language, music, dance, multiculturalism, and overall capoeira community as accurately as possible. Brazilians emphasize that *their* capoeira is the style to emulate, that they are teaching the techniques Canadians will need to competently play against Brazilians.

Maintaining the emphasis on how the game is played in Brazil enables Brazilian capoeiristas to generate a continuous sense of time and place although they have immigrated to a new country and been ex-patriots (in some cases) for many years. They refuse to focus on the aspects of Brazil and its culture that forced them to leave, (i.e., rampant poverty, lack of formal education, poor health care, inability to teach/ train capoeira full time), instead, they convince themselves that capoeira in Canada can be the same as home and by immersing themselves in 'authentic' Brazilian culture they are able to allay feelings of loss and homesickness. "By cultivating memories and fantasies and fueling their longing, immigrants were engaged in reinterpreting and reconstructing a vision of the life and land they had left behind." (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2000, p.34). Immigrants who uproot and take on a new home indefinitely make a connection to their homeland and culture, seek a bit of the old with the new and in turn transform that new culture into a multicultural space.

Assunção (2005) points out that not only the songs, but also the entire practice of capoeira constitutes a 'commemorative performance'. "The conviction that an unaltered 'essence' of capoeira has been transmitted from that foundational moment down to the present confers greater authority to contemporary practice" (Assunção, 2005, p. 5). In Brazil and in Canada, players pay homage to a Brazilian tradition, but in Canada, that tradition takes on so much more meaning, it allows Brazilians to sustain their customs in a new environment. Capoeiristas are in a unique position in that they are teachers of their culture to the uninitiated. Like the immigrant restaurateur, connecting to, defining and sharing their culture is their occupation. The Brazilians of *Ginga*

*Capoeira* idealize their homeland. Canadians too buy into romantic notions of a perfect place over there, which tells us something about what they feel is missing over here.

### *Creating a Black Identity*

A hundred years ago most immigrants to Canada were European. At the turn of the twentieth century, the country was primarily a British or French, Christian, agricultural, male-governed country. In the 1960s immigration policy reforms eliminated preferences for migrants of European origin and implemented a points-based system, which allowed Asians and the Caribbeans to make Canada their homes. Despite one of the world's highest immigration rates (World Citizen Guide), and claims of a fair and equal multi-cultural society, a Canadian is not just a Canadian, and racial discrimination affects many ethnic minority groups who began to arrive in Canada over forty years ago.

Blacks, especially those born in Canada to immigrant parents, face daily the problems of fragmented postcolonial identities. They may feel polarized, not really Canadian, as James has pointed out, the popularly held notion of 'Canadian-ness' is related to the construction of Canadians as 'phenotypically white'" (James, 2003, p. 210), and not really Caribbean having never lived on the hot islands themselves. They are members of the Black diaspora, a concept that "transform[s] the terms in which identity needs to be understood ... The term opens up a historical and experiential rift between the locations of residence and the locations of belonging" (Gilroy, 2000, p. 123-124). Black Canadians may identify with the nation-state, or, in an attempt to resist discrimination, marginalization, and ethnic confusion, they may use difference to stress their own separateness, mystify others, and to authorize their own representations. Whether in Brazil, Egypt, China or Canada, Black groups are 'seizing the category' (Bulmer and Solomos, 1998, p. 825), holding on to their many ancestral cultures.

Black Canadians adopt various indigenous cultural forms in their attempt to connect to the African diaspora. "The reiteration of Black cultural practice and production can be tools for not only enacting, but also constructing Black identities" (Hanchard, 1999, p. 76). African drumming circles, Caribbean restaurants, African American hip hop can be found the world over because the circuits of dispersal that at once characterized colonial and modern societies are no longer one way. An intricately webbed network has developed and the global 'ethnoscape' (Appadurai, 1996) has become so traversed that we now have a situation where Canadian-

born people of African descent with Caribbean parents are (re)discovering 'Black-ness' from Afro-Brazilians in Canada.

Claiming racial space in Canada often involves participation in 'multicultural' festivals where ethnic minorities demonstrate their costumes, cuisine, and corporeal cultures. Black culture, that is, African and Caribbean based music, dancing and food, is superficially displayed for touristic consumption; however true multiculturalism is exemplified by world-wide migration of Black cultural forms from hip hop to jazz, samba to reggae, which "help[s] create a kind of transnational identity among Afro-descendants, and are rooted in the early forms of pan Africanism" (de Almeida, 2004, p. 30) and in the very transit throughout the Black Atlantic during slavery (Gilroy, 1987; 1993). These forms are taken up by people of all ethnicities, but are adopted especially by Blacks to manifest *their* culture.

*Ginga Capoeira's* Black students make up 25 percent (n=15) of the participant base. Some students emphasize capoeira's 'Blackness' because it gives them a sense of pride, connection to their roots and is a unique expression of multiculturalism. For those who struggle over the seeming contradiction between being Black and being Canadian, the migrating cultural forms of the African diaspora offer one solution. Black Canadian capoeiristas have gained a new sense of community and connection with their brothers and sisters of the African diaspora and its many cultures and communities through this Afro-Brazilian cultural activity. The CMA does not explicitly recognize sport as a venue for expanding multicultural ideals, but capoeira is one site where "communities whose members share a common origin" can be recognized and steps taken to "enhance their development" (Department of Justice Canada), which are two of its goals. Black players focus on capoeira as a lifestyle, a tool for self-expression, and a symbol of Black resistance; although capoeira is Brazilian, they take ownership and honour it as a legacy of *their* ancestors. Through capoeira they make connections to a transatlantic community and proselytize the art at every opportunity in hopes to broaden their community and bring 'their people' from margins to center stage.

Capoeira was illegal in Brazil for much of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, however there was no way for a law or an institutional power to annihilate a social practice based on a fight for freedom (Santana, 2002, ¶5). Some capoeiristas understand capoeira as part of political resistance strategies that are central to their common

origins. Although Sol, Vão, and Gato Preto were born in Brazil, Canada and Jamaica respectively, they are three Black capoeiristas who focus on their African heritage and Africans' roles in developing the art.

Gato Preto controversially suggests that capoeira is originally African. When he is asked to describe the art he focuses on the origins: "I'd say well it originated in say Angola and it moved to Brazil" (Gato Preto). The lions share of capoeira movements and myths derive from Kongo and Yoruba, pre-colonial regions of Africa whence slaves came. Thompson asks us to consider the upside down positions, which are the foundation for many of the kicks, headstands, handstands and acrobatics of capoeira. "Kongo children still play this way today. They call the effect *ta kinkindu*, meaning 'play upside down.'" (Thompson, 2001, p. 3). When capoeiristas put their hands on the floor, look between their legs to kick or hold a handstand, they are "walking in the other world" (Thompson, 2001, p. 3) adopting and endorsing an inversion of the dominant, European gestural vocabulary, using their legs for self-expression and to taunt or distract their opponents.

Vão and Sol place capoeira's origins firmly in Brazil on the plantations and in the *senzalas* (slave quarters) and *quilombos* (runaway slave villages) of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

It is a Brazilian martial art that was developed by the African slaves in Brazil... for me, capoeira it is a martial art which is also dance so it was disguised as a dance, right, so for me it is both, it's all together. (Sol)

Capoeira is from slavery, straight, boom, nothing else needs to be said....if somebody calls me and says 'What's capoeira?' I'll tell them 'Yeah, it was born out of slavery, or a child or slavery' I would say 'and these are the reasons why it is what it is in terms of why it's been camouflaged as a dance and why it wasn't able to be practiced. (Vão)

Their emphasis on capoeira's origins, when asked to define the activity suggests that for them the game's most salient features are that it was a martial art invented by the downtrodden, suppressed by the government and concealed as a dance to escape government repression<sup>7</sup>. I too am mysteriously drawn to the idea that capoeira stands as a testament to the enduring will of African slaves, who I regard as 'my people'; their persistence against many obstacles, including overt efforts to divest them of their heritage and destroy their customs, is a source of

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<sup>7</sup> See Assunção for more on myths surrounding capoeira's origins. It is unlikely that the martial art was concealed as a dance because fighting, dancing, drumming, singing, and gathering of dark-skinned Brazilians whether slaves or free people were seen as seditious and harshly repressed, yet this myth generates pride amongst capoeiristas who believe in their ability to use *malandragem* (trickery) to overcome oppressive situations.

pride. The desire to associate with the past or with a different place is evident in the testimonies of both Black Canadians and Brazilians who suffer from what I term *cultural estrangement*, a longing for a connection to their roots.

It was a great experience when I first saw it because there — they had an Afro-descendant so it really hit home when I watched it ... there's this Afro- like art that was just unexplainable and I was just amazed how they could use all the instruments and be so aggressive and really it was an expression ... that's what caught me. (Vão)

This reflection demonstrates how rare it is for African culture to come to the fore in Canada. Vão was surprised that an activity like capoeira could exist without him hearing of it. He had no knowledge of African combat traditions though there are dozens of forms (Green, 2003; Assunção, 2005). As a Black Canadian, Vão has 'seized the category' and labeled capoeira as "an offspring of African culture" a cultural activity he has special access to.

I have a link to it and most let's say Islanders or African descendant people might have a link to capoeira in a certain sense. The reason being is because my grandfather's father was a maroon and a lot of capoeiristas were maroons<sup>8</sup> ...I'm sure somewhere down the road I could draw on a cousin in Brazil you know, I don't know. It's all linked together. (Vão)

Vão sees his connection to capoeira as genealogical, and easily extrapolates that connection to all West Indians and all Blacks, who are of common origins. Through capoeira he can connect with his "*bredren*" (brothers), speaking in patois and singing capoeira songs to Jamaican dancehall "*riddims*" (rhythms).

Vão and Gato Preto simultaneously demonstrate Brazilian and Jamaican cultures and regard their jobs as capoeira teachers as important for increasing students' awareness of Black achievements, alternative ways of being and moving, and new ideas about sport, martial art and dance. They emphasize the importance of learning about cultures generally, and African cultures specifically, to gain a greater appreciation for its Afro-Brazilian slave roots and the many cultures that make up Canada.

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<sup>8</sup> Africans who preferred to take a chance of freedom in the mountains rather than bear the burden of slavery on the plantations, ranches and estates ran away into the undeveloped mountains and jungles. Experts in guerrilla warfare, they won battles against the British (in the Caribbean) and the Portuguese (in Brazil). Maroons were agents of active protest against slavery and in Jamaica, 1739, became the first nation/group in the New World to be granted their freedom by a colonizing European power.

You have to know your history especially people that, lets say from African descent they should know what they're studying and even people from non-African descent, its even better for them to know -- it frees their minds even more world-widely ... Canadians are let's say black Canadians, Indians, East Indians, Aborigines, Caucasians, ah Chinese, Filipino, — these are — that's what Canada is made up of, all immigrants, so we should know about each other (Vão)

Gato Preto has been teaching for over a year and says it is not his own experience, but his students and friends share with him how important capoeira is to learn about what other cultures have to offer.

My friends that are really pro-black and pro-Afro-American, pro-Afrocentric period, they thought [starting capoeira] was a good thing ... the music the drums they pretty much talk to a lot of people from an Afro-centric background so they relate to that so well. The singing, the music, even though it's a different language they still have — it has an African um I'd say flavour to it ... You know, they pretty much open my eyes ... [to] the cultural connection that they've made with it within themselves. (Gato Preto)

In their search for something with an 'African flavour' students are interested in moving beyond Black culture as hip hop and basketball to something 'real'. Sombra explains,

Capoeira is not just like hip hop or whatever where you wear the clothes and walk like this [with a limp]. I mean you wear the [capoeira] pants and you walk like a capoeirista (laughs) but there is so much more. The history, the philosophy, this is *real* black culture. (Sombra)

For him, capoeira goes beyond other so-called 'black arts' or 'black sports' to serve educational *and* spiritual purposes.

Black Canadian capoeiristas proudly act as ambassadors for capoeira in Canada. The sport's growing popularity within this racial demographic group is related to the growth of a Black middle class (de Almeida, 2004, p. 30), which is thrilled with the opportunity to participate in an activity that they perceive as 'their own culture' (Gato Preto), which speaks to the lack of venues to learn about African culture or non-Eurocentric forms of physical activity and opportunities for meaningful multicultural experiences in Canada.

Although the Black Canadian capoeiristas of *Ginga Capoeira* are invested in the notion of capoeira as an *African* art, with roots that must be salvaged, protected, and cultivated they also go to great efforts to expose all

Canadians to the art and try to get more participants from a wide variety of backgrounds. One of the main goals of the CMA is to enhance the development of ethnic minority cultures. The best way to ‘protect’ and ‘develop’ capoeira and its ancestry is to demonstrate to others, especially the uninitiated, the true form of the art. Otherwise, misconceptions about capoeira as a workout, non-contact martial art, or stylized dance will proliferate.

Black capoeiristas of *Ginga Capoeira* make proselytizing capoeira through public demonstrations a priority. In Brazil, the physical environment and climate lends itself well to performing capoeira outside; capoeiristas share their art with neighbours, friends, and family during their outdoor *rodas*. In Canada, for most of the year, a concerted effort must be made to arrange demonstrations at conferences, schools, martial arts tournaments, health shows, and fitness exposés, because it is primarily played indoors. Vão has made it his goal to “show [Canadians] what other things exist in our world, open their mind”. (Vão)

[My] short term goal, is to spread capoeira in Canada or try to let other people know what this art is. Get them involved ... Nobody knows what it is, so why not, why not get it out there and show them what it is. For me capoeira is an expression ... this is why people do albums and music, it's to express themselves. I express myself through capoeira. So why not put it out there and people will eat it up. (Vão)

Vão recognizes that an art like capoeira has a lot of cultural currency in contemporary Canadian society. When he suggests that ‘people will eat it up’ he makes an astute prediction; he recognizes that a martial art with flashy acrobatics, extreme feats of strength and dangerously close contact will be easily accepted by the mainstream used to seeing such exploits in Hollywood action movies. Furthermore, dark-skinned sporting bodies are welcomed as entertainment and the most proficient capoeiristas will be consumed in the bell hooks ‘eating the other’ sense. On some level, widespread acceptance of capoeira may be related to dominant (racist) notions of music and corporeal expression as ‘black domains’; however capoeiristas such as Vão and Gato Preto also see capoeira as a venue to resist invisibility and discrimination.

Capoeira has the potential to follow in the steps of jazz and hip hop (both dance and musical forms) and catapult practitioners into a more visible position. Vão prides himself on being a Canadian capoeira pioneer and he is adamant that it should not remain underground. Gato Preto and Sol echo this sentiment.

I have such a passion for it that I'd like to share it, just have other people just kind of um experience what I've experienced. (Gato Preto)

What good is it if you are there and no one knows you? ... For me I wanted capoeira in Canada be recognized in all over the world. (Sol)

Sol takes the goal of multiculturalism one step further, looking to expose not only the Canadian masses to the other cultures within, but also flaunt the multi-cultures of Canada to a global audience. These Black Canadian and Afro-Brazilian players seek firstly to guarantee a more visible status for their subordinate racial group and secondly to contribute to Canadian multiculturalism by putting a Black expressive form in plain sight and emphasizing the history of the activity. They position black folklore, history and entertainment at center stage while simultaneously displaying a racially boundless, harmonious community. In other words, capoeira in Canada can serve the same needs as it did when co-opted by mainstream Brazilian society in the 1960s, where it was used to promote what was called 'racial democracy', equality between the races, and Brazil as a mixed-race nation (Telos dos Santos, 1998). Although neither Canada nor Brazil are free of discrimination, capoeira communities can offer one example of people of different ethnic backgrounds working together, learning from each other, and transforming the game in the process.

### *Refining a White Identity*

Many middle-class White Canadians who engage in capoeira may feel like immigrants within this community. Unless they are of Brazilian, Portuguese, or African descent, they are initially positioned as outsiders, and must negotiate their way in by learning the music, history and philosophy of capoeira; traveling with the group to local and international capoeira events; and learning to make capoeira instruments and speak Portuguese. Though they may be of English, Italian, German, Scottish or Spanish descent, they collectively identify as White and form fifty percent (n=30) of the Ginga Capoeira students. Multiculturalism should not be conceived of as an Anglo- or Franco- cultural landscape, peppered by Other cultures. This assumption is Eurocentric at best and racist at worst. All Canadians, even the white majority, contribute to the creation of a multicultural Canada. White Canadians also bring their backgrounds and cultures with them as they interpret, absorb, and transform Brazilian culture. The multiculturalism act calls for "the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of *all origins* in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian

society” (Department of Justice Canada, emphasis added). White Canadians not only learn about Brazilian and African cultures, but may come to rediscover their own heritage through participation.

Upon playing a new sport or participating in a new activity, athletes often describe physical and spiritual transformations. Capoeiristas also describe discovering a new ethnic identity or confirming their self image through capoeira. Because learning this activity involves adopting new movement and verbal vocabularies as well as learning about Afro-Brazilian culture, participants of various ethnic groups come to see themselves and their own cultural backgrounds in a new light. Brazilian and Black Canadians already cast as Other in Canada may struggle to assess ‘their’ culture. Middle-class, White Canadians, too may have difficulty understanding their racial and geographic privilege and even feel ‘culture-less’ until an interaction with capoeira reveals just what Anglo- or Franco- mainstream culture is. “The Brazilian case is particularly rich for understanding the passions, powers and products associated with ‘race’” (de Almeida, 2004, p. 26).

Many White Canadians see participation in capoeira as one way to escape a mundane mono-culture; they focus on capoeira as a unique subculture; they participate for their own joyous activity; for fitness; for foreign linguistic, musical or movement appreciation; for a window into an *alternative* culture. Most participants are eager to affirm the ways capoeira is a unique subculture and differs from mainstreams sport. They consider it a venue to redefine White masculinity and femininity. Many of the White *Ginga Capoeira* participants, are not interested in sharing capoeira with the masses, nor in emphasizing the Black origins of the activity. Instead, they would prefer the capoeira community to remain as small as possible, a private, underground club. They constantly emphasize the plurality of Brazilian racial identities while they avow the Canadian multiculturalism rhetoric that suggests that all cultures should be accessible to both subordinate and powerful groups.

The conjoining of music and physical activity is rare Canada. Where music is present, it is most often used as either a played-back recording that accompanies movement (as in aerobics, dance, or skating), or as part of the cheering and celebration of sport (as in baseball, hockey, or rugby,). In these cases the performer or audience passively consumes music, whereas capoeiristas are responsible for the simultaneous performance of movement and music. Feliz, a White Canadian, posits “live music” as one of capoeira’s greatest assets.

The musical component is also part of what makes capoeira special. There are other sports that use music, like gymnastics and figure skating, but not live music. (Feliz)

Music makes capoeira a remarkable, unique sport, and transforms the participants into special athletes; they can do something special while attaining membership in a community of other 'special people' (Joseph, 2002).

Serpente, a Brazilian capoeirista suggests that many Canadian capoeiristas feel the same way. "[Canadians] join more because of the music, because it is different. That's what I always hear from them" (Serpente). Capoeira's difference is a key attraction for many white participants. They choose to focus on the varied music and movements, not the origins of capoeira, when describing it to the uninitiated.

I say it's kind of like dancing mixed with gymnastics, mixed with karate throwing in a few back-flips and music and a band (laughs). Everyone kind of looks at me like I've got three heads.

(Jonathan)

A self-identified non-athlete, Pulinho takes pleasure in the opportunity to learn and perform 'crazy moves'.

I tell [my friends] it's a martial art before I tell them it's a dance, cus ah I get my share of harassment from people calling me twinkle toes at work (laughs) ... I just tell them that it's a martial art but it's a lot cooler than most martial arts because it's — you're doing it to music and so it's a lot more fluid than just standing around and throwing kicks. (Pulinho)

Pulinho recognizes that capoeira is outside of what is popularly deemed appropriate behaviour for men in Canada. Dance is feminized within Canadian society and many capoeira-playing men may initially have trouble thinking of themselves as dancers, freely and sensuously moving their bodies, or sharing their newfound passions with people outside the capoeira community because outsiders may deride the graceful fluidity, and aggressive self-expression performed to music and their heterosexuality may be called into question. Full immersion in this Brazilian martial art, however, allows Canadian participants access to new cultural norms that favour sensuality and dance skills as symbols of virility for men. Jonathan explains, "In Brazil it's cool for guys to dance. Like it's not cool to not dance or if you're not willing to try." This came as a shock to him, but when visiting Brazil he enjoyed the opportunities for free physical expression as does David.

When I was young, boys didn't dance, they didn't sing, they didn't play musical instruments, they didn't do gymnastics and those are the strongest elements of capoeira and they're all together. ...

Brazil is a much more sensual society for sure and they allow for that. Shaking your hips isn't something to be pointed at and laughed at — I mean it's part of the culture. Everything revolves

around this playfulness that is this sensuality... I mean there's definite masculine and feminine roles I think in the Brazilian culture but in a lot of areas where they're more defined here they're more blurred there. (David)

Embracing the way another culture defines masculinity and movement allows these men to expand their self-concepts and feel more comfortable with their bodies and its capacities. One of the best aspects of multiculturalism is that it allows for an expanded understanding of what it means to be human. Sport need not be separated from art; men shaking their hips can be a sign of potency, not deficiency.

The same applies to White Canadian women and their conceptions of femininity. Although intense physical activity is no longer proscribed for women (female international level competition in most sports from tennis and track and field to weightlifting and water polo attests to that), sports that require female violence against women or worse yet, against men, is still not fully sanctioned in the Canadian consciousness. Female hockey players are prohibited from fighting the way male players do, women's boxing gets little media acknowledgement and the fact that some female wrestlers, boxers and martial artists compete against men is regarded with suspicion. Yet female capoeiristas relish the opportunity to demonstrate a different kind of femininity.

Getting kicked at really takes some getting used to. Your first instinct is to duck out of the way and close your eyes. Then we learn to *esquiva* (escape) properly. Now [my teacher] wants us to go in<sup>9</sup>. It's totally counter-intuitive. ... I'm not there yet, but soon I'll really be able to work out the timing, go in, and totally shock some big guy by putting him down. (Madeira)

Madeira sees herself as a woman who, with enough training, can compete on equal footing with men. Feliz also resists all notions of White women as weak.

I would describe myself as going against the mainstream in many aspects of my life.

Unconventional employment situation, I used to be an unconventional dresser, non-mainstream musical tastes and other interests. Actually, the fact that something is *mainstream* often turns me off of it. I love the challenge of doing or accomplishing something that is unexpected or not usual,

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<sup>9</sup> Going 'in' means playing close, preparing to take your opponent off his or her feet or applying a swift counter attack.

particularly when it comes to what is expected of girls. If young, White, middle class girls were expected to be a certain way, you can bet I'd try to be the opposite. (Feliz)

Feliz describes herself as a postcolonial, White Canadian feminist, who rejects mainstream values in favour of identifying with the underdog, the third world, and/or Black cultural forms.

Not only do White capoeiristas' understandings of the boundaries of femininity and masculinity change, but they reveal that through participation in this multicultural art they come to understand White-ness differently. Unlike other mainstream sports where the foundational skills, running, jumping, kicking, skating, and swinging (a bat, club or stick) are transferable, the movement vocabulary of capoeira is so foreign that it is especially difficult for people who have not been exposed to any type of African musical or dance cultures.

I'm surprised I still do it because it was so hard for me to pick up... It felt so completely awkward. I looked something like a robotic capoeirista. ... [Brazilians] just learn to move themselves, move their hips and swing and have that swagger that Canadians, or at least my- the cracker-ass Canadians don't (laughs) ... I've seen my parents dance, like, (pause) maybe at a wedding, I don't even know. (Pulinho)

Maybe things are changing more now, but from the traditional 'Anglo' point of view, the 'Anglo', white male point of view [moving in an African style] wasn't the expected or accepted norm.

(David)

A lot of Canadian capoeiristas find they must abandon the things they once practiced in conforming to conceptions of White-ness. Mainstream Canadian culture teaches them to be quiet and not make a spectacle of their voices or their bodies, to move their bodies in straight lines, and avoid others' personal space. Furthermore middle-class culture teaches them to be rational, efficient and productive. In capoeira opposite characteristics predominate. In fact, capoeira was once a synonym for *vadiar* (to bum around), and a cyclical rather than linear conception of time prevails. The key elements of deception, being 'in the moment', ignoring all responsibilities, and replicating occult practices within sport are not regarded negatively, but part of an alternate reality.

Just as boxing is used as a means for men (especially English, working-class men) to define themselves as 'tough', and hockey is said to encapsulate the identity of 'real men' in Canada, participation in capoeira embodies the musicianship, open self expression, physical mastery, and close knit community of the true working-class

Afro-Brazilian. Many if not most Brazilian cultural activities, from samba to soccer, feature fundamental aspects of Afro-Brazilian working-class cultures. *Mestre Acordeon*, the foremost contemporary capoeira *mestre* in North America has said “*Afro-Brazilian* is a redundant term. African folklore is at the heart of Brazilian culture” (personal communication, July 15, 2005). Capoeira is particularly appealing for White Canadians because of the absence of African cultures from mainstream Canadian culture. Capoeira movements are outside typical White Canadian means of self-expression, dance and sport.

All of the participants explained that they see looks of confusion when they explain capoeira to their friends because people do not understand what capoeira is; however, they are not usually offended, in fact some of them prefer it that way.

I like the fact that it's something special here and that its not um something that everyone's doing or that it's ah the newest fad or whatever so I kind of hope that it doesn't get like [Taekwondo].  
(Feliz)

For some reason I — I kind of get annoyed when people ask me about it. I just don't want to tell them about it. It's just like 'yeah, yeah, you wouldn't understand' you know ... Maybe [I'm] not wanting to share, keeping it like private club type thing..Just having everyone do capoeira it sort of loses its mystique to me...If I see capoeira on — like I don't know, opening up for like the Argos [professional football team] or something like that maybe it will annoy me slightly. (Pulinho)

Much like the Brazilian and Black Canadian participants, White Canadians truly enjoy having this multicultural art as something that is ‘their own’. Committed participants privilege the game and the possibility of building a community of belonging. They can lay claim to capoeira as long as it remains underground; it offers them a sense of identity in a fragmented post-colonial society.

Todd Boyd (1997), Bell hooks (2001), Greg Tate (2003), and others have written of the White desire to consume Black arts as their own. They suggest that Black arts can provide the ‘spice’ required to ‘season’ a bland mainstream (Anglo-) Canadian-ness. Although none of the White participants mention the Black roots of the activity, African slaves, or capoeira as a tool of political resistance, and instead focus on capoeira an exciting, exotic physical activity that is far outside mainstream Canadian sport, theatre, spirituality, choral and dance realms, “it is precisely the constructed hypervisibility of Blackness and *hybridity* associated with an essentialized

'Brazilianness'" (Hanchard, 2000, p. 180) that attracts White Canadian participants. Brazil's exported culture industry is internationally known for the icon of the *mulatta/o* (Hanchard, 2000), who represents an ambiguous racial category, a 'flavour' that is unfamiliar but appealing to Canadians. The *mulatta/o* demonstrates how racial boundaries are imagined and fluid. Some *mullatta/o* capoeiristas are considered mixed, while others are black and some are white, depending on the social context. The search for an identity 'more interesting' than that of a White Canadian is tied to a need for empowerment, community and sense of self as different from the stereotype. The notion of Brazil as a 'hybrid' nation with a visible white and *mullata/o* population makes its culture feel more accessible and tempting to non-Blacks. When asked specifically about capoeira's Black roots, some participants emphasize that Brazilians are not strictly racially classified and neither is capoeira.

By and large a Brazilian is a Brazilian and it's not a White Brazilian, not a Black Brazilian...

[therefore] it's not a black art, a white art, it's a *Brazilian* art. (David)

I mean in Brazil, they were Brazilian and that was it. (Feliz)

Even if you have red hair and freckles, in Brazil, if you speak fluent Portuguese everyone will think you are Brazilian. (Sorriso)

Thus, they open up space for people of any racial background to adopt capoeira as 'their own'. They recognize that race and ethnicity are not natural categories "their boundaries are not fixed, nor is their membership ... like nations, [they] are imagined communities ... [with] material consequences for those who are included within, or excluded from them (Bulmer and Solomos, 1998, p. 822-825). They open up space for people of any racial background to play.

Jonathan used to play football, rugby, hockey, swimming and different forms of cycling, but more recently started playing ultimate Frisbee and capoeira. At age 30, he has come to see a multicultural art as the ideal form of exercise and community.

I would consider myself open to new experiences. Many of the conventional sports I've played have solely a physical component whereas capoeira is physical, cultural, musical and historical... [I want to] keep playing for a long time, and just learning more about Brazil and the culture of capoeira. (Jonathan)

When I was young I imagined being a great martial artist and being a gymnast and being able to do yoga and sing and being able to implement all these things together in one lifestyle ... all different people come together under one roof and are really respected ... capoeira just had all those things intertwined and that that's what the appeal was for me. (David)

In Brazil there is a consistent tendency to move toward a middle ground of mediation and ambiguity. Hess and da Matta underscore that “[d]iversity is not a good descriptor, mixture is better; miscegenation, syncretism, and diaspora characterize the Brazilian society” (1995, p. 2). Embracing the Brazilian approach to mixture is paramount for many of *Ginga Capoeira*'s White participants. Capoeira is liberating in that there is unlimited room for growth and no restrictions on the ‘type’ of player who joins. Young or old, Black or White, Brazilian or Canadian, all are welcome and all have something to contribute to capoeira. Thompson notes that “mainstream Anglo pop and jazz are percolating with borrowed Afro-Brazilian rhythms” (2001, p. 1) and an Anglo cadence and shift in meaning constantly creeps into capoeira music and songs. Within the *Ginga Capoeira roda* this following is one of the most popular songs.

Conheci Mestre Bimba,	I know Mestre Bimba,
Tambem Canjuquinha, tambem Su Maré,	Also Canjuquinha, also Su Maré,
Eles me disse um dia,	They told me one day
Capoeira é pra homens meninos e mulheres,	Capoeira is for men, children and women
Capoeira é pra homens	Capoeira is for men
Pra meninos e mulheres,	For children and women
Capoeira é pra negros,	Capoeira is for blacks
É pra brancos tambem,	And for Whites too
Capoeira é Brasileira,	Capoeira is Brazilian
Canadense tambem	Canadian too

Participation in capoeira is simultaneously an element of and a reaction against globalization; the transformations of the lyrics and meaning of this song to suit the Canadian setting are examples of the “creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins” (Department of Justice Canada). White capoeiristas can demonstrate liberal attitudes and live out the CMA ideals.

*Conclusion*

The Canadian desire for a multicultural nation is complex, predicated on a rejection of racial discrimination but also a distraction from other forms of prejudice (i.e. class and gender). It could also be argued that it fuels a wanton desire for 'the other', attempts to undermine Quebecois nationalism, and demonstrates a commitment to global (capitalist) flows. It is not solely an altruistic quest for ethnic equality; however, the creation and maintenance of subcultures that resist mainstream assimilation and recognize cultural difference, native languages, desire for home, and recognition of ethnic roots are admirable goals set by the Government of Canada. Capoeira offers a multicultural community, and in Canada since the early 1990s, participants have used it to define themselves as a unique type of multi-cultural Canadian.

The introduction of sporting cultural activities to a new region creates 'contact zones' where disparate cultures collide, clash and/ or conform as individuals confront new ways of thinking and moving (Pratt, 1992). Much like cricket pitches offer a place for West Indian- and Pakistani-Canadian communities to rally, capoeira offers a unique opportunity not only for Brazilians and Portuguese to reconnect with their national culture and language respectively, but also for all Canadians to learn about another culture. Ostensibly, capoeiristas commune together while celebrating the history, music, and movement of the peoples of Brazil. In reality, capoeiristas also celebrate African roots, emphasize racial fluidity, and discover (often invisible yet omnipresent) White-ness, as they learn to conjoin music and sport, aggression and grace, and competition and cooperation.

Brazilian, Black and White capoeiristas in Canada attempt to claim ownership of the art. Some capoeiristas believe "Brazil is the source" (Sol), and that no other capoeira can truly compare to the Brazilian original. They try to recreate a home away from home through capoeira to assuage their nostalgic feelings and preserve, enhance, and share their national heritage. Others see the Black body, regardless of its nationality, as the foundation of capoeira. African descendants are "all linked together, especially it's - [capoeira]'s in the blood" (Vão). Black Canadians can connect with people of common origin and enhance their development. Lastly, there are students who refuse to accept capoeira as restricted to one nationality or one racial group "A capoeirista is a capoeirista, if you put in the time then capoeira is yours" (David). White Canadians can embrace the culture of another country and learn about the history of oppressed peoples through full and equitable participation in the sport. Despite harbouring private ideas about the origins and ownership of capoeira, the overt claims by

capoeiristas, regardless of ethnic origin is that capoeira is an inclusive multicultural art, open to all people regardless of size, strength, gender, or ability.

Fulfilling the CMA requires a move beyond cuisine, and costume exhibitions towards sites for people of many cultures to come together, learn from each other, enhance their heritage and participate in each others' customs. The tourist gains only a superficial glimpse into others' cultures. The participant gains a deep appreciation for another culture. Multiculturalism takes on new meaning as Canadians become engaged in a Brazilian activity, especially because Brazil is a country known for its high rates of immigration and miscegenation, and its colourful ethnoscape.

Capoeiristas' repeated references to the game and community as unique multicultural sites speaks to the lack of genuine multi-cultural settings available to them in Canada. Although people of many cultures come together in sports arenas, workplaces, shopping centers and night clubs, there is little opportunity to actively experience a multitude of cultures, learn new physical and verbal languages, (re)discover their national heritage, share their cultures and cement their identities in a nation other than Canada. Capoeira is the embodiment of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act because the goal of the capoeirista is to achieve unity in diversity (Santana, 2002). Through participation in a martial art/dance/game with Brazilian, African and European roots, people of all ethnicities can unify and become multi-cultural Canadians.

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