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Evading biopolitical control: Capoeira as total resistance¹

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Total war

Extended definitions of violence have long been theorised as structural violence within peace studies,² and more recently as objective violence³ and systemic violence;⁴ Duffield defines 'total war' as that which "demands the destruction of an enemy's environmental life-world."⁵ There are variations in these conceptualisations of violence but they share the perspective that violence is patterned, multi-layered and inflicted systematically as part of national and international politics. Violence is supported politically in that 'hegemonic systems' according

¹ The author would like to thank three anonymous referees for their comments on this paper.

² Johan Galtung, *Peace and world structure* (Copenhagen: Ejlers, 1980).

³ Žižek, S. *Violence. Six sideways reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

⁴ David Keen, "A tale of two wars: great expectations, hard times" *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol 9, No. 4 (2009), pp. 515-534.

⁵ Mark Duffield, "Total War as Environmental Terror. Linking Liberalism, Resilience, and the Bunker" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol 110, No. 3 (2011), pp. 757-769.

to Kupchan “have distinctive normative character; order emerges not just from hierarchy, but also from packages of ideas and rules that inform the nature of a given order and govern social relations within that order.”⁶

The concepts associated with total war challenge the parameters on the category of violence – it is not necessarily physical, time-bound or intended – and simultaneously upturn conventional understandings of resistance that are conceptually dependent on the ways that violence is theorised. Extended definitions of violence demand analytical frameworks that interrogate resistance and particularly the non-violent resistance that takes place within the systems of violence. Nardi observes that questions of “resisting-as-lived-experience have not been posed,”⁷ and this article investigates how, in situations of ‘total war,’ some people – namely capoeira players – demonstrate ‘total resistance,’ defending themselves against the myriad, interlinked and relentless threats of control, destitution and assault.

Resistance defies a single definition on account of the diversity of power and violence exerted, and the resources available for formulating a response, but can be examined for its characteristics and mechanisms. In the *Journal of Peace Research*’s special issue on non-violent resistance (volume 50, issue 3), non-violent resistance was equated with ‘civil resistance’ and ‘nonviolent struggle,’ and these indicate directions for enquiry. The authors observe that its study has lagged behind that of violent resistance, identifying reasons as being: violence is perceived to be more pressing, nonviolence is hard to measure, and the category of nonviolence has been elided with others, such as weak, passive, pacifist or activist.⁸ While these factors can explain the lack of academic attention, they also highlight the intriguing nature of resistance that is not connected with armed struggle: the fact that it is hard to track qualitatively or quantitatively flags an area for empirical investigation and theorisation.

⁶ Charles Kupchan, “The normative foundations of hegemony and the coming challenge to Pax Americana” *Security Studies*, Vol 23, No. 2 (2014), pp. 219-257. p. 221.

⁷ Sarah De Nardi, “An embodied approach to Second World War story-telling mementoes: Probing beyond the archival into the corporeality of memories of the resistance.” *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol 19, No. 4 (2014), pp. 443-464. p. 444.

⁸ Erica Chenoweth and K. Gallagher Cunningham, “Understanding nonviolent resistance: An introduction.” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 50, No. 3 (2013), pp. 271-276. p. 272.

The mechanisms of total war have become more intricate and extensive in the last 30 years, but the experience of pervasive violence and the need to survive it is not new. Duffield, theorising contemporary processes of development that generate ‘surplus life,’ reflects on the history of populations who have been deemed irrelevant or deviant to progress, including ex-slaves who were ‘surplus life’ in the post-slavery era.⁹ This article’s empirical work identifies ways in which the Afro-Brazilian art form of capoeira, which originated amongst enslaved and marginalised black populations, contributes to the concept of resistance. The abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, and the legacy of slavery resulted in a large black population who did not fit the European-inspired state vision of political, economic and social progress, and obstructed the dominant European version of civilisation.

Capoeira is an art that involves two people interacting with kicks, sweeps and acrobatics within a ring of musicians and singers. The article focuses on the two most influential capoeira teachers: Mestre Bimba and Mestre Pastinha (the title *mestre* signifies a master of the art) formulated the styles of Regional and Angola respectively in the first half of the 20th century. In addressing itself to artistic expression, the article makes reference to the ‘aesthetic turn,’ defined by theorists “working at the intersection of popular culture, arts, and politics in IR... [and drawing] attention to the human side of war by demonstrating how popular culture and art provide us with different forms of representation.”¹⁰ Bleiker proposes that aesthetic practices are “political in so far as they promote a complex interplay between our cognitive, imaginative, perceptual and interpretive capacities.”¹¹

The aesthetic turn has included into scholarship on violence a diverse array of contributions, with an inclination towards the presentation of trauma and war, and including resistance in the face of war violence. Much of the focus has been on visible or material representation,

⁹ Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 13.

¹⁰ Simon Koschut, "The Structure of Feeling - Emotion Culture and National Self-Sacrifice in World Politics." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol 45, No. 2 (2016), pp. 174-192. p. 176.

¹¹ Roland Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol 30, No. 3 (2001), pp. 509-533; Lola Frost, "Aesthetics and Politics." *Global Society*, Vol 24, No. 3 (2010) pp. 433-443. p. 433.

with a dominant strand of scholarship engaging with representation through the media.¹² The range of perspectives and cultural dispositions involved constructing or observing images or objects has explored both how representations are made, and how they are interpreted. This vastly increases understandings not only of the practices of representation but also of the subjectivity of violence, a line of study that has opened the scope for including emotions in accounts of political processes.¹³

Capoeira extends the discussion on aesthetics and politics empirically as, despite its origins in the violence of slavery, capoeira is not a representation of trauma (popular narratives of resistance will be discussed in the next section); further, capoeira is an art consumed primarily through participation, rather than observation. Capoeira also extends the discussion analytically as it is not only an art; it is also a game, a fight and a way of life. Practitioners faced legislation and police action that threatened not only their bodies with physical violence, but their identity and culture. Fierke argues “Survival, for a human community, is not equivalent to the physical survival of the individual... When leaders refer to protecting a ‘way of life,’ it is not merely death that is feared, but a loss of autonomy in defining the values that underpin this life.”¹⁴ Capoeira is brought to the study of total resistance as an infinite game: a finite game is one with rules and victory, whereas an infinite game has as its objective the continuation of the game.¹⁵ Capoeira, according to Pastinha, is “everything that the mouth eats.”

¹² David Campbell, “Cultural Governance and Pictorial Resistance: Reflections on the Imagining of War”, *Review of International Studies* (2003), 29: 57-73; Jenny Edkins, “Trauma and the memory of politics,” (2003) Cambridge, UK, New York. Cambridge University Press; Lene Hansen, “How images make world politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib,” *Review of International Studies* (2015), 41 (2), 263-288; Linda Åhäll, “Images, Popular Culture, Aesthetics, Emotions. The future of International Politics?” *Political Perspectives* Vol 2, No. 1 (2008).

¹³ Roland Bleiker and Hutchinson, Emma, “Fear no more. Emotions and World Politics” *Review of International Studies*, 34 (2008), pp. 115-135; Neta Crawford, “The passion of world politics. Propositions on emotion and emotional relationships,” *International Security*, Vol 24, No. 4 (2000), p. 116-156; Andrew Ross, “Coming in from the cold. Constructivism and emotions,” *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 12, No. 2 (2006), pp. 197-222.

¹⁴ Fierke, p. 16.

¹⁵ Rosângela Costa Araújo, IÊ, VIVA MEU MESTRE. A Capoeira Angola da ‘escola pastiniana’ como práxis educativa. (São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo. Faculdade de Educação, PhD, 2004), p. 32. Citing Corse 2003.

Capoeira practitioners rescued themselves and their way of life from both repression and apathy by engaging with and protecting themselves from the state, in the processes of “uneven and combined development” in Brazil.¹⁶ In qualifying for the tag of resistance, capoeira played a role in “shaping the course of conflicts”¹⁷ in the political territory of the predominantly white state and marginalised black sections of society in early 20th century Brazil. By continuing to play, adepts pushed back the legal barriers to capoeira, generated cultural space, and influenced not only the state’s legal institutions but also the national identity. Over the course of the 20th century, the game also changed considerably, at least in part as a result of its interaction with state power.

There are various narratives of resistance associated with capoeira, and the article focuses on Regional and Angola capoeira players' interface with state power, and the legacies of these interactions, presenting this alongside the corporeal expression of each style. Contemporânea is not part of the study as it was not played until the 1960s. The interface with state power draws on literature on the history of capoeira, starting from the early 20th century, and biographies of the players. Corporeal expression was researched through training, playing and participation within capoeira communities in Bahia from March to August 2012 and July to August 2015. The presentation of data is designed to capture the spectrum of activity that shaped capoeira as a way of life, and the mix of methods captures what Bourdieu has theorised as ‘cultural capital,’ by means of which status is gained through particular forms of knowledge and skill.¹⁸ Downey, who investigates the ways in which capoeira changes the player through the acquisition of embodied knowledge, cites Bourdieu: “The body believes in what it plays at... What is “learned by body” is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Justin Rosenberg, "International Relations in the prison of Political Science " *International Relations*, Vol 30, No. 2 (2016), pp. 127-153, p. 127.

¹⁷ Chenoweth, op cit, p. 271.

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, “The forms of capital” in J. Richardson ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood 1986), pp. 241-258.

¹⁹ Greg Downey, *Learning Capoeira. Lessons in cunning from an Afro-Brazilian art.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 24; Pierre Bourdieu, *The logic of practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 73.

The pervasive violence in contemporary hegemonic global governance has been discussed with reference to Foucault's work on biopolitics, governing who lives and who is allowed to die.²⁰ This article brings together consideration of the normalisation of violence through biopolitical force with the Foucauldian concept of 'making strange' which critiques the apparently normal state of things.²¹ According to Foucault, "'making strange' is the process of denaturalizing political practices that appear inevitable or natural."²² Capoeira is presented to chart the processes of non-violent and uncoordinated resistance. The two styles of Regional and Angola were largely defined in contrast to each other but there is also complementarity in their approaches, and capoeira players demonstrated resilience in adapting to the context. The article brings corporeality to the discussion of biopolitics, and discusses how, by 'making strange' what biopolitical control sought to normalise, capoeira players countered the inevitability of violence with the possibility of other outcomes. The proposition that capoeira players demonstrated total resistance does not preclude negotiation and compromise; on the contrary, the politics and corporeality of capoeira highlight flux and change, rather than an ideology or performance.

Popular narratives of resistance in capoeira

A popular narrative describes capoeira as a form of resistance that was used to escape or fight slave masters or the police. There is, though, no evidence that connects capoeira with defence against state agents or slave revolts; revolts in Brazil were uncommon, as escaping to the vast bush was less hazardous.²³ Police records detail capoeiras' attacks on gangs and the

²⁰ Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, "Global Liberal Governance: Biopolitics, Security and War." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol 30, No. 1 (2001), pp. 41-66; Brad Evans, "Foucault's Legacy: Security, War and Violence in the 21st Century." *Security Dialogue*, Vol 41, No. 4 (2010), pp. 413-433.

²¹ Michel Foucault, "Practising Criticism" in L. Kritzman ed. *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture Interviews and Other Writings. 1977-1984* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 152-158.

²² Louise Amoore and Alexandra Hall "The clown at the gates of the camp: Sovereignty, resistance and the figure of the fool." *Security Dialogue* Vol 44, No. 2 (2013), pp 93-110. p.102.

²³ Greg Downey, "Dance of the Disorderly. Capoeira, gang warfare and how history gets in the brain." Latin American Studies Centre at the University of Maryland, 2 December 2014.

population more broadly, rather than the police.²⁴ Commenting on the violent crimes committed by capoeiras in Rio de Janeiro 1852, the city's police commissioner reflected, "It is singular that neither revenge nor the desire to commit theft is the cause of these offences."²⁵ Holloway records blood-letting, turf wars and trophy violence as the forms of activity that characterised capoeiras' behaviour, with violence directed mainly at other blacks, possibly because killing whites would have incurred higher penalties. He warns against romanticising capoeiras as 'social bandits' who refused to submit to illegitimate authority, as this interpretation would likely mean little to the capoeiras themselves or their victims, who came from classes that were not protected by the police.²⁶

A second common narrative of resistance in capoeira is the use of disguise, claiming that dance and music were used during the time of slavery to disguise combat training. Fighting was illegal for slaves, but so too was Afro-Brazilian dancing and drumming, and people could be arrested for wearing ribbons or carrying instruments that suggested they were capoeiras, so pretending the fight was a dance would be futile. Talmon-Chvaicer, critiquing the narrative of disguise observes that, rather than being a distraction, the drum was the instructor, and crucial to communication in capoeira.²⁷ She observes that the narrative that the music acts to disguise is misguided as, not only does it lack empirical foundation, it imposes a spurious functionality on an artistic practice and approaches capoeira from perspective of coloniser. When examined from the perspective of the capoeira player, the drum is central to the game and used for guidance and clarity rather than obfuscation.

From oppression and obscurity, two styles were formulated

Despite the lack of supporting evidence, the popularity of these narratives indicate the significance of resistance to capoeira practitioners, and the centrality of capoeira's

²⁴ Maya Talmon-Chvaicer, *The Hidden History of Capoeira. A collision of cultures in the Brazilian battle dance*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008). pp 22 & 65.

²⁵ Maya Talmon-Chvaicer, "The Criminalization of *Capoeira* in Nineteenth-Century Brazil." *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol 82, No. 3 (2002), pp. 525-547. p. 530.

²⁶ Thomas Holloway, "'A healthy terror': Police repression of capoeiras in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol 69, No. 4 (2012), pp. 637-676.

²⁷ Talmon-Chvaicer, *The Hidden History*, p. 32.

relationship with the state and the control it exerted. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, capoeira was illegal and was violently punished by state agents. Capoeira was practised in the face of threats of flogging (for slaves) and incarceration or isolation (for free people). There were three socio-political rationales for the state to ban capoeira: firstly that it was practised predominantly by blacks, and along with other Afro-Brazilian manifestations – Candomblé and samba – capoeira was considered by the ruling classes as an embarrassment to a civilised nation. As late as the 1920s, the police chief of Bahia confronted expressions of Afro-Brazilian culture with cavalry forces.²⁸ Second, capoeira was associated – by its adepts and by the state – with vagrancy; the term ‘*vadição*’, meaning ‘hanging out’ is synonymous with capoeira, and the clause banning capoeira placed it alongside vagrancy in Brazil’s Penal Code of 1890. Third, capoeira in Rio de Janeiro was linked to violence and gangs and the associated threats to the public through clashes and disorder were magnified by the use of capoeiras as hired hands for political factions.²⁹

From the 1920s onwards, the formalisation of two styles of capoeira by Bimba and Pastinha institutionalised Regional and Angola respectively; capoeira had been effectively repressed in Rio de Janeiro³⁰ and the innovations in Bahia in the 1930s were the beginnings of a reawakening in popularity.³¹ Bimba had an impressive stature and a history of street-fighting but, according to his son, he taught for over fifty years and no one left his academy injured.³² Pastinha was a shorter, less muscular, man and promoted the cunning, dance and theatrical elements of the game. Neither Bimba nor Pastinha taught the intent to hurt the other player: the point of capoeira is not to kick the other player (although kicks are a large part of the

²⁸ Bira Almeida, *Capoeira. A Brazilian Art Form. History, Philosophy and Practice (Mestre Acordeon)*. (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1986), p. 29.

²⁹ Matthias Röhrig Assunção, *Capoeira. The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Downey, “Dance of the Disorderly”

³⁰ Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, C. A., Ed. *Roda dos Saberes do Cais do Valongo*, (Rio de Janeiro: Kabula, ACIMBA, 2015).

³¹ *Contemporânea* (‘Contemporary Capoeira’) is a third strand, developed in the academy and not associated with violence (beyond feisty games); ‘street capoeira’ - a fourth strand - remains less refined and less regulated.

³² Mestre Nenel, “Somos felizes e satisfeitos com o que herdamos’ Interview with Mestre Nenel (Manoel Nascimento Machado).” *Iê Capoeira. Empório Editorial*, Year 1, No. 3 (2010), pp. 6-9. p. 7.

repertoire), it is to trick them, demonstrate skill, and take them down with a head-butt or by sweeping their feet from under them.

Regional: history of engagement

The creation of Capoeira Regional is the only comprehensive codification of capoeira and it was innovative in introducing a method of instruction that could be applied irrespective of the teacher. Bimba named his version of capoeira the 'Bahian Regional Fight' (Luta Regional da Bahia) in 1928; he could not avow to teaching capoeira because it was still illegal³³ and the name he chose fore-grounded the martial elements and its origins in Bahia. Regional also taught players to defend themselves if attacked on the street.³⁴

Bimba opened his academy in 1932. The military takeover that ended the First Republic in 1930 eased the state repression: capoeiras had been conscripted as mercenary forces to defend the monarchy and had been hounded after its fall.³⁵ The presidential rule of Getúlio Vargas (1930-45) introduced integrationist policies: Vargas abolished laws banning capoeira and Afro-Brazilian religion in 1934, although practices could take place only indoors and under police supervision. The establishment of the academy provided a structure for state surveillance; Andersen proposes that “surveillance is not simply a security practice but also a practice blurring the boundaries between security and the everyday.”³⁶ This blurring also functions in reverse, easing previously illegal activity into legality.

Bimba made direct overtures to representatives of state power; he performed to Juracy Magalhães, the Governor of Bahia in 1936, and the following year was presented with a teaching certificate, an official endorsement of his work.³⁷ He taught in the military academy

³³ Filhos de Bimba (2015). “Câmara Memória - Capoeira Regional.” available: <<https://youtu.be/LcsoE15cMmM>> (accessed 18/05/17).

³⁴ Angelo A. Decânio Filho, *A Herança de Mestre Bimba. Filosofia e Lógica Africanas da Capoeira*. (Salvador: Coleção São Salomão, 1997), pp58-9.

³⁵ Almeida, p. 31.

³⁶ Rune Andersen and Frank Möller "Engaging the limits of visibility: Photography, security and surveillance." *Security Dialogue* Vol 44, No. 3 (2013), pp. 203-221. p. 208.

³⁷ Leticia Vidor De Sousa Reis, *O mundo de pernas para o ar. A capoeira no Brasil*. (Brasil, 2nd edition, 2000), pp. 83-4; Matthias Röhrig Assunção, *Capoeira. The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 141.

and seven years later his academy was recognised by the Office of Education and Public Assistance. Bimba opened his academy to the middle classes, this being the first time that whites had trained capoeira in the racially stratified city of Salvador. The exposure of capoeira to powerful classes expanded the constituency and interests of players, contributing to the renegotiation of the relationship between capoeira and the state.

In the 1940s, the state started to acknowledge the public standing achieved by Bimba and his students. In 1944, the director of the Division of Physical Education in the Ministry of Education and Health referred to capoeira as “a sport of our folklore” and “a typically Brazilian kind of fight.” In 1953 Vargas, having seen Bimba perform in Rio de Janeiro, asserted that capoeira was “authentically Brazilian” and “becoming considered our national fight.”³⁸ Capoeira was no longer associated with vagrancy or gang violence as it was taught in an academy, and Bimba prohibited his students from fighting in the street. Regional was presented and perceived as modern and compatible with the Brazilian state's integrationist policies, and it could be accommodated within the policy ideal of a racially mixed future.³⁹

The game of engagement

Regional's mode of interaction with state authority is conceptually coherent with the style of play. Bimba asserted, “when two players are at a distance, fear separates them.”⁴⁰ The innovations of Regional, and the popularity that it sparked across social classes and across Brazil, rescued capoeira both from obscurity as a limited and folkloric form and from oppression by the state. The legal pressure against players and a lack of creative steer amongst players had reduced capoeira to nine moves with negligible combat credential.⁴¹ Bimba claimed, “It was me who recovered and lifted up capoeira – who pulled it from under the bull’s hoof!”⁴² He constructed a more robust game, and public competitions and shows

³⁸ De Sousa Reis, p. 82

³⁹ Araújo, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Decânio Filho, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 172.

⁴¹ Antonio Carlos Muricy, A. C. *Pastinha. Uma vida pela capoeira* (Raccord Produções, 1998).

⁴² Decânio Filho, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 128.

became sites for negotiating the parameters of capoeira, such as the legitimacy of moves.⁴³ Regional was trained in the academy, but it was always extroverted, and public performances increased its visibility. Regional's physical expression of open kicks and fast-paced interaction won capoeira widespread attention, including media coverage and celebrity status for practitioners.⁴⁴

The Regional style is combative, focusing on the trading of attacks and escapes linked by the *ginga*, the swaying base movement. Bimba claimed that capoeira was “the mother of all fights,”⁴⁵ and he cut theatrical aspects, including the *chamada* – when one player breaks the interactions of kicks and escapes to ‘call’ the other and parade across the ring, paring down the game to prioritise more dynamic moves. The body is kept upright and centred, contact with the floor is maintained to the greatest extent possible and the only parts of the body to touch the floor are the hands and feet. Kicks are executed with force, usually maintaining straight legs. One former-student recalled that Bimba considered the upright game to reflect a change in the political situation: blacks were no longer slaves and had no reason to roll around on the floor.⁴⁶ The primary escape is the ‘negativa’ which, in Regional, simultaneously avoids the kick and hooks the supporting leg of the other player, thereby combining a counter-attack.

Regional also has strong collaborative elements to it, particularly in the *Sequence of Mestre Bimba*, a series of kicks and escapes that rehearse the key moves, and other choreographed interactions such as *Cintura Desprezada* (abandoned waist) and *balões* (balloons), in which players throw each other in acrobatic movements. These collaborative sequences allowed players to perform rehearsed pieces that train the body and impress the audience. Bimba established a catalogue of over fifty kicks, a range of rhythms for the five-foot long musical bow, the *berimbau*, that directs play, and a compact accompanying ensemble of one berimbau and two tambourines.

⁴³ Röhrig Assunção, p. 135.

⁴⁴ de Almeida, R. C. A. *The Saga of Mestre Bimba* (North Arlington, New Jersey: Capoeira Legados, 2006).

⁴⁵ Decânio Filho, Mestre Bimba, p. 175.

⁴⁶ Meste Oto at FUMEB meeting, Salvador 15/7/12

Core to Bimba's accomplishment was a methodology for teaching that enabled players to reach proficiency in six months. He instituted a graduation ceremony when new students were initiated into the group, and later a series of different-coloured neckerchiefs to mark stages in a player's achievements. These ceremonies and conventions accommodated modernist ambitions of assessment and progress, whilst also consolidating hierarchy within the group. With the introduction of the academy came uniforms and the regularisation of the authority of the teacher over students. There was a surge in popularity in capoeira in Bahia, where Regional became an 'exotic sport' for white elites.⁴⁷ Bimba's innovation was crucial to gaining an audience and participation of students, and his charismatic teaching channelled his practice and development of the art.⁴⁸

The legacy of Bimba's work is continued through the 21st century Filhos de Bimba group, headed by his son, Nenel: one of the group's song includes the lyrics "in order to play you have to know how to negotiate." The extroversion formerly directed at the state is now continued through contesting exclusion through social work. The group's *Capoerê* project teaches children in Salvador, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, to play capoeira and become part of the capoeira community, taking part in games and graduations. Capoeira is presented as disciplined and traditional, and an alternative to the often unstructured way of life of children from large families in poor neighbourhoods. Nenel, reflecting on Capoeira's impact on the children, stated, "we're not going to save any children, but capoeira has this power to transform and give opportunities to children to have another sort of life."⁴⁹

The developments introduced by Bimba responded to the constraints of legality and social acceptability and were primarily artistic, not diplomatic. The engagement of capoeira with mainstream Brazilian culture and society depended both on alleviating concerns held by the state and on the political opportunities that were generated by players. Bimba's efforts to regularise and broadcast Regional allayed misgivings that it was cultish, violent or unwashed. The development of something that was strong and combative provided an opportunity for

⁴⁷ Araújo, p. 94.

⁴⁸ Sergio Fachinetti Doria, *Ele não joga capoeira, ele faz cafuné: histórias da academia do Mestre Bimba*. (Salvador, Brazil: EDUFBA, 2011), pp51-2.

⁴⁹ Filhos de Bimba, 19m50.

common cause with the political elite in defining the emergent Brazilian identity that acknowledged mixed heritage. With powerful favour, both within Regional and from outside, Regional swept across the southern part of Brazil from the 1950s onwards.

Angola: history of protection

According to his biographer, Pastinha was the first player to analyse capoeira as a philosophy.⁵⁰ In response to Bimba's creation of Regional, Pastinha refined existing forms of capoeira to protect the folkloric style both from obscurity and from the changes introduced by Regional. Pastinha held that Bimba broke with tradition by including blows with the hand, but there was little rivalry between the two men, and they did not meet until a demonstration in 1957 when Pastinha was 68 years old. Pastinha abandoned capoeira in 1912, returning in 1941 to open his academy; by this time, capoeira had been legalised and Pastinha's development of Angola, like Bimba's, introduced the academy, uniform, and the discipline of the teacher.

In the early years of Capoeira Angola, there were few teachers or students and the style was counter-cultural in the modernising political climate of Brazil, although revivalist movements were occurring across the Caribbean.⁵¹ Some within the Angola community resented what they viewed as the concessions made by Regional, particularly with regard to its accommodation of the state's racially integrationist policies;⁵² Angola players did not court attention with spectacular fights or competitions, but they performed for tourists in Salvador, as they were popularly perceived as "bearers of tradition."⁵³ There was also some contact with state power: Pastinha was invited by the Ministry of Foreign Relations to join the

⁵⁰ Angelo A. Decâncio Filho, *A Herança de Pastinha* (Salvador: Coleção São Salomão 3, 1997), p. 5.

⁵¹ Röhrig Assunção, p. 151.

⁵² Frigerio, A. (1988). "Capoeira: de arte negra a esporte branco" available: <http://www.anpocs.org.br/portal/publicacoes/rbcs_00_10/rbcs10_05.htm> (accessed 18/5/17)

⁵³ Ana Paula Hofling, (2012). *Dancing, fighting and staging capoeira: Choreographies of Afro-Brazilian modernity and tradition*. Culture and Performance Studies. California, University of California. PhD, p113.

official delegation to Senegal in 1966 (two years into the dictatorship) to participate in the 'First worldwide festival of Black Arts.'

St Anthony's Fort in Salvador was refurbished in the 1980s and became a cultural centre for Afro-Brazilian art, with a focus on preservation. Pastinha's student João Pequeno established his academy there in 1981 – the year Pastinha died – and Moraes, the student of Pastinha's other pre-eminent student João Grande, shortly after. Moraes had started teaching in Rio de Janeiro and, returning to Bahia in the early 1980s, found the Angola game critically weak. In collaboration with senior students, Moraes reinvigorated Angola as a conservative art. His academy, the Pelourinho Capoeira Angola Group (GCAP), brought younger blood to what had become an old man's game, training younger and predominantly black Bahian students. Mestra Janja, who learnt from Moraes, describes capoeira Angola as a political practice, maintaining the character of Angola in the face of the development of Regional. For her, resistance was expressed through the attention to understandings of “African knowledge... in the Brazilian civil codes,”⁵⁴ and GCAP provided cultural space to discuss issues of race, slavery and inequality. There was increased interest in Angola in the late 1980s, at the end of the military dictatorship and inspired in part by the civil rights movement, radical Black movements and liberation movements in Lusophone Africa.⁵⁵

The protective elements were not only ‘protective of’ capoeira’s roots and history but also ‘protective for’ its adepts. A cohort of GCAP students who were trained through the 1980s dispersed to form sibling schools in the 1990s, establishing a core of groups whose identity was protected by privileging lineage. Röhrig Assunção observes that there are groups “where practice alone is seen as somehow enough evidence for the mantra that ‘capoeira is resistance’”⁵⁶ and there is a commitment within the Angola game of training to protect and continue the art, rather than to gain fitness or strength.⁵⁷ Other groups espouse social projects, environmentalism and black consciousness. A particularly coherent discourse and practice is

⁵⁴ Araújo, p. viii.

⁵⁵ Niyi Afolabi, N. "Quilombismo and the Afro-Brazilian quest for citizenship." *Journal of Black Studies* Vol 43, No. 8 (2012), pp 847-871. p. 862.

⁵⁶ Röhrig Assunção, p. 207.

⁵⁷ Araújo, p. 111.

maintained by Mestre Cobra Mansa, who heads the International Foundation of Capoeira Angola (FICA) and who teaches capoeira on a permaculture farm in rural Bahia. Named *Kilombo Tenonde* after the maroon settlements, students visit the farm from across the world, and the community is organised around capoeira training and learning, and contributing to sustainable agriculture.

The game of protection

Pastinha observed, “the best defence is not to get involved in conflicts,”⁵⁸ and the Angolan game is less overtly combative than Regional. Pastinha was introduced to capoeira as a child after being beaten up by an older boy. This anecdote gives the context of capoeira as self-defence but also enshrines the idea that capoeira mobilises skill against superior force and provides protection for the weak. Angola players sing long songs (*ladainhas*) at the beginning of the game, and common lyric themes are social dislocation or slavery, and the need for divine assistance (both Catholic and Candomblé protective forces are invoked). *Ladainhas* are also used to convey messages to others, including cautions, sometimes to adversaries.⁵⁹ One of Pastinha's most famous *ladainhas* starts “God is great, I am small”; the juxtaposition power with vulnerability underscores the need for divine protection.

Corridos are shorter songs, sung in both styles of capoeira, and protection is a theme in those sung by Angola groups. Lyric examples include: “St Anthony is the protector” (St Anthony being equivalent to Ogum, the warrior orixá, and guardian of many male capoeira teachers in Bahia). Yemanjá, the orixá of the sea (appearing in many songs as a mermaid) is called on to protect those at sea (“don't let my boat tip over”); sailors and dockers were a large part of the Bahian capoeira constituency in the early 20th century. Another line of protection is found in songs about Exú, trickster and orixá of the crossroads, invoked as a cowboy (cowboy songs have layers of meaning); “Put on your leather jacket, cowboy” is advice to take care while playing.

⁵⁸ Decânio Filho, Mestre Pastinha, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Zoë Marriage, “‘Grande Mestre’ (Great Master): Longing and Celebration in Capoeira Angola, Brazil.” In R. Harris and R. Pease ed. *Pieces of the Musical World. Sounds and Cultures* (London & NY: Routledge, 2015) pp. 65-80. p. 75.

When the corridos start, two Angola players enter the game with tentative interaction each testing the capacity of the other, and underscoring the need for protection. Attention is played to *malícia* – cunning – which defines a good player. Players maintain a low profile, moving around, often slowly, with extensive use of the hands or head on the ground, waiting to exploit the mistakes or vulnerability of the other. Kicks are low and generally manipulative rather than forceful, pushing the opponent to the ground and engaging in 'inside play,' which depends on the close interaction of the players rather than on creating a spectacle. Store is set by improvisation in 'breaking' the moves so as to be unpredictable and create escapes from attack. The body is 'closed' bringing the legs towards the body to cover and defend the torso and to project a protective identity somatically.

Resilience: complementarity between the approaches

Observing that direct confrontation is unlikely to deal with the reality of environmental terror, Duffield develops the concept of resilience as “a defence that relies more on constant adaptation to surrounding uncertainty. Indeed the ability to change and adapt becomes a virtue in itself.” Duffield writes, “a resilient species is that which can avoid extinction through the ability to constantly adapt to uncertainty; life and lifelike cyborg systems were ordained as complex, emergent, and adaptive.”⁶⁰ Capoeira players did not mount direct confrontation, which would have been disastrous for marginalised groups in the early 20th century, and instead adapted to the opportunities available. “The aim of Bahian capoeiras” writes Röhrig Assunção “was to survive using – not overthrowing – the system.”⁶¹ Bimba's overtures to state authorities and a diverse public led to a broader set of interests being vested in the continuation of the art. The developments in the game were commensurate, as capoeira became both an effective martial art and a popular spectacle.

Josilvaldo Pires describes the practice of capoeira in public spaces in Bahia as “strategies of resistance to the mechanisms of repression, surviving as a social practice,”⁶² and the diversification of capoeira into two strands – and the later emergence of a Contemporânea –

⁶⁰ Duffield (2011) p. 757.

⁶¹ Röhrig Assunção, p. 201.

⁶² Luis Vitor Castro Júnior, *Campos de Visibilidade da Capoeira Baiana: As festas populares, as escolas de capoeira, o cinema e a arte (1955-1985)*. (Brasília, DF, 1º Prêmio Brasil de Esporte e Lazer de Inclusão Social, Ministério do Esporte, 2010), p. 59.

also demonstrates resilience: without determining a strategy, the styles and their approaches of engagement and protection complemented each other. Bimba's innovations also sparked a debate within capoeira, and the response made by Pastinha preserving folkloric elements was part of this debate. Folkloric forms of capoeira were in decline in the early 20th century, and despite Pastinha's efforts, Angola may not have survived in the 1970s without the popularity of Regional. Regional in turn benefited from the reputation of Angola as cultural activity rather than a fight, and the spectrum of practice allowed for later styles, particularly Contemporânea, to attract millions more students. Resilience explains capoeira's ability to survive and grow, but the political influence of capoeira extends beyond the artistic ambitions of its practitioners. The outcomes in terms of the popularity and diversity of the art would have been inconceivable to the innovators of the first half of the 20th century. It is not simply that capoeira has expanded: Afro-Brazilian expression has become central to Brazilian culture, effecting a shift in the distribution – albeit still unjust – of power, and gaining space in Brazil's history and national identity.

Total resistance

The concept of total war identified at the outset of this article generates difficulties for contemporary resistance: if, as Fierke argues, “the neoliberal project is about controlling and managing populations globally,”⁶³ how is it possible to conceptualise and practise resistance? Analysing total resistance requires understanding of how people survive and sometimes make progress in conditions that, according to Duffield's definition, threaten their environmental life-worlds. In the early 20th century, capoeira players were threatened by an invasive power assemblage of legal, political and cultural oppression. It was the innovations of capoeira players that transformed the situation from one of total war to one of total resistance, meaning that physical and cultural existence of players was no longer threatened either by state abuse or by apathy.

The outcomes of situations of total war are not necessarily intended or foreseen as violence is embedded in the systems of governance that describe the monitoring and regulation of life processes, but the interplay of powerful and aggressive agendas sets up an apparent

⁶³ Karen Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security. Second Edition* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity, 2015), p. 176.

inevitability of violence. By the same token, total resistance is characterised not by a particular agenda but by not submitting to this inevitability. Foucault stated in an interview,

If I don't say what needs to be done, it isn't because I believe there is nothing to be done. On the contrary, I think there are a thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are involved, have decided to resist or escape them. From that viewpoint, all my research rests on a postulate of absolute optimism. I don't construct my analyses in order to say, "This is the way things are, you are trapped." I say these things only insofar as I believe it enables us to transform them.⁶⁴

Transformation in capoeira was effected through the agency of practitioners who developed the art, and two mechanisms were crucial to these transformations. First, the corporeality of the game provided scope for elaborating lines of communication within the community of players and with those outside, and secondly, the innovations in the practice of capoeira 'made strange' the normality of legislation and prejudice, and contributed towards alternative or expanded identities and culture. In negotiating competing interests through capoeira, players generated the possibility of outcomes that escaped the apparent inevitability of violence.

Biopolitics and corporeality

Biopolitics controls the body and life processes, and the corporeality of capoeira asserted autonomy over the body and its expression, enabling players to use their bodies to generate cultural space. The consonance between the corporeal expression and the players' interface with state power blurred any distinction between the art and its political meaning, and despite the combat elements to the game, capoeira's influence was exerted through the negotiations that took place in aesthetic and practice norms. Early gains were made with the revitalisation of capoeira and the repealing of the law prohibiting play, but the body as a site of creativity maintained significance in providing for continuous and changing debates over history and identity.

⁶⁴ C. Heike Schotten, "Against Totalitarianism: Agamben, Foucault, and the Politics of Critique." *Foucault Studies*, December, No. 20 (2015), pp. 155-179. p. 155.

As academies consolidated and increased the popularity of the art, capoeira was strengthened as a conduit for Afro-Brazilian identity and history, passed through the music, ritual and movement embodied by players; performances and shows transmitted this culture to a wider audience. The embodiment of Afro-Brazilian expression in capoeira is not simply a reminder that slavery brought people from Africa, but that people of African heritage, their diverse aesthetics and identities are constitutive of the population and character of Brazil. The partial illegibility or ambiguity of capoeira to outsiders, and the scope for aesthetic development in an art that was bound by convention rather than definitive rules, afforded practitioners some control over their interaction with more powerful actors, whether by engaging directly or protecting themselves. Corporeal expression generated opportunities to invest in discourses, including the celebration of Afro-Brazilian heritage, and critiques of inequality, that were outside or contrary to the assumptions and values of hegemonic politics and the forms of violence they imposed.

The corporeality of capoeira and the way it was used by practitioners indicates points of contact with contemporary cultures that counter the neoliberal order, and its associated disorder of destitution and armed conflict, by rejecting mainstream values and behaviour and carving out creative space. Members of the Sapeur movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Republic of Congo parade in fantastically expensive clothing to create an social movement and alternative forms of beauty, and simultaneously dismiss the poverty that marks and limits their lives. Styles of music, including hiphop, punk, and rap routinely interweave the form and movement of the body – and the clothing that the body wears – with musical genre to challenge not only the mainstream but also the boundaries within their own genres. Music, dance and theatre are created in many zones of conflict; heavy metal provides psychological and physical relief in Syria;⁶⁵ the Somali hip hop band Waayaha Cusub, have used music to reduce violence through challenging the agendas and tactics of militant groups.⁶⁶ The socio-political space, including autonomy over the body, that is generated by

⁶⁵ Syrian Metal is War, Documentary (Monzer Darwish). Available: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lkg2q7n8J8>> accessed 19/05/17.

⁶⁶ Live from Mogadishu, Somali Hiphop's Journey (Humanitarian Bazaar), available: <<http://livefrommogadishu.com/>> (accessed 19/05/17).

artistic activity is acknowledged by the organisation In Place of War (IPOW),⁶⁷ which provides a platform and network for artists working in areas of conflict.

While many artistic expressions have corporeal elements of resistance in their performance, capoeira extends the discussion as its corporeality links the game with a way of life, tracked through practitioners' interface with the state. The resistance offered through corporeal expression was total not in that it was uncompromising but that it placed the human body at the centre of the complex of social and political activity. Acknowledging this breadth of activity allows resistance to be read from the opposite perspective too: examining how corporeal culture, understood as a way of life, has political outcomes. Within the contemporary political configuration, cultural choices of food, travel and communications become political acts, as bodies are fed, tended and connected through their interaction with the market. As biopolitical control maps life patterns, interaction with the market becomes defining of identity, and consumption the path of least resistance as people participate in security regimes of legal compliance and political conformity, including by supplying information that facilitates their surveillance. Asserting or retaining control over the body maintains the ability to create alternative spaces – including ‘counter’ cultural communities – that reject dominant life-style choices of mobile communications, consumer technology and supermarket loyalty. Understanding the body as the site of biopolitical control implies that decisions taken about the body that reclaim cultural, social or political space contribute to the analysis of how resistance operates.

Making strange and potentiality

The second mechanism of resistance in capoeira is that of making strange the normalised violence within a given political system. Legal prohibitions in the early 20th century normalised the suppression of Afro-Brazilian identity, and by taking capoeira to state power and a wider public, Bimba made strange the prohibitive legislation: his innovations proved that capoeira did not threaten public decency, and it appealed to people because it was attractive to play and watch. Pastinha's protection and reiteration of folkloric practice made strange the assumptions of modernity and progress that presented the whitening of Brazilian

⁶⁷ In Place of War: Supporting the development of creative communities. Available: <<https://inplaceofwar.net/>> (accessed 09/05/17).

society and cultural expression as normal political evolution. His development of Angola maintained a counterweight to the ideas projected by Bimba, marking a spectrum of Afro-Brazilian experience and identity. The denaturalisation of political practice through capoeira meant that culture resisted mainstream political discourse, maintaining reference to Afro-Brazilian experience in an expanding cultural expression; with time capoeira became iconic within Brazilian identity.

Apathy, by its complicity with the normal state of things, was a parallel threat to the continuity of capoeira in the early 20th century. As Foucault states, “We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.”⁶⁸ The meaning that Bimba and Pastinha injected into capoeira through their innovations, including raising its public profile and drawing more self-conscious and reflective attention to capoeira’s history, drove the cultural expansion. This, in turn, increased capoeira's socio-political impact in forging diversified constituencies of players and divergent negotiations with state power. The cultural capital generated and transmitted by players defied the asserted superiority of European-inspired culture, and challenged the racial hierarchy that was normalised in social patterns and political institutions.

By embodying African heritage, millions of players of all skin colours made strange Brazilian race relations, highlighting identities and parts of history – in particular slavery and racial differentiation – that the state was attempting to deny or forget. With the introduction of a more studied discussion on race in the 1980s, capoeira highlighted the bigotry of the state and channelled discontent at the on-going inequality in Brazil. According to Foucault, “As soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible.”⁶⁹ In accordance with Fierke's definition of survival for a human community as evading the “loss of autonomy in defining the values that underpin this life”⁷⁰ capoeira is a way of life that has demonstrated the potential to be

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power-knowledge : selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980), p. 93.

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, “Practising Criticism” in L. Kritzman ed. *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture Interviews and Other Writings. 1977-1984* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 152-158, p. 155.

⁷⁰ Fierke, p. 16.

transformative by creating different outcomes and possibilities. Capoeira is 'public art,' in that it is a contemporary practice that is not costed or sold and which has an ancestry. Reflecting on capoeira, Haddad describes public art as “a possibility to construct another human possibility, another way of living in society;” public art, he claims, “is not a fantasy, a myth or a joke. It is the ultimate reality for the human being.”⁷¹

While neither Bimba nor Pastinha had a defined political agenda and there was no coordination of approach between them, the practice of capoeira broke the inevitability of violence, including cultural obliteration, and generated potentiality: other outcomes were made possible. Contemporary examples have been presented of the potentiality of capoeira, beyond its survival: Cobra Mansa's *Kilombo Tenonde* provides players with the opportunity to incorporate capoeira into a daily routine alongside teaching and practising permaculture. In doing so it combines capoeira training with the vision of sustainability, as an alternative to a future of industrialised farming and environmental damage. The Filhos de Bimba *Capoerê* project also generates the possibility of other futures, specifically for children from disadvantaged areas. It was described by Nenel as not saving any children, just keeping open possibilities.

The notion of potentiality links capoeira with forms of resistance offered by social movements, for example *Occupy's* mission statement that “another world is possible.” *Occupy's* tactics of squatting public areas and unused buildings make strange the privilege of corporate business in the face of social and economic inequality. *Occupy* members laid claim to space in which the norms of property rights and elite privilege were suspended and the prospect of a radical anti-establishment movement was developed. In a contemporary act of ‘making strange’ race relations, the assertion that “Black lives matter” is potent because its proposition is simultaneously undeniable and exposes the normalised violence of state agents, particularly in the USA. Its formulation proposes an alternative outcome to the apparent inevitability of police brutality: one in which black people are valued and protected by the state. While these social movements do not share the aesthetic development or historical continuity of capoeira, they highlight a further perspective on the concept of resistance as a

⁷¹ Amir Haddad, A. “Valores do Sonho e da Memória” in C. A. Teixeira ed. *Roda dos Sabadores do Cais do Valongo* (Rio de Janeiro: Kabula, ACIMBA, 2015), pp, 102-107. p. 105.

way of life, resisting not so much through confrontation but by making strange and proposing alternative outcomes to historically entrenched inequality.

Conclusions

This article has investigated how the study of capoeira contributes to the understanding of total resistance, characterised by the ability to evade the inevitability of violence and make other outcomes possible. Claiming control over the body in the face of biopolitical control and making strange what is normalised by that control have been identified as central mechanisms of the resistance offered by capoeira, and the time frame of a century of history provides insights into the political developments resulting from the decisions made by practitioners. Initially a localised practice, capoeira provides insights that speak to broader narratives. In that its practitioners faced cultural, legal and political oppression, the lessons from capoeira can be extended to contemporary critiques of neoliberal control. There are two sets of conclusions, one relating to non-violent resistance and one to the study of aesthetics and politics.

At the outset, the reason for a lack of scholarship on non-violent resistance was attributed to three factors: violent resistance is more pressing, non-violence is hard to measure and non-violence is associated with pacifism, activism or weakness. Examining capoeira as a way of life expands the analysis to include data from what Bleiker terms the “cognitive, imaginative, perceptual and interpretive capacities,” and has provided responses to all three of these factors. First, violent resistance may appear more pressing because of the evident disruption it causes, but the history of capoeira has given insights into transformation and the evasion of total war; or in Žižek's terminology, instead of focusing on individual acts of violence and their agents, it has addressed the objective violence that exists in the normal state of things.⁷² Secondly, non-violent resistance is hard to measure, but qualitative understanding can be gained from studying the aesthetics that are culturally defined and rendered partially ambiguous by ritual; resistance can be analysed and gauged by reference to its meaning and participation, not simply its intentions or outcomes. Thirdly, non-violence is associated with weakness, but capoeira has demonstrated potentiality, which is an ultimate form of strength.

⁷² Slavoj Žižek, *Violence. Six sideways reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

With regard to aesthetics, the nature and form of capoeira challenges usual categories of representation, and examining it simultaneously as an art and a way of life makes specific contributions to discussions on politics and aesthetics. The study of corporeality provides inroads into understanding how capoeira players were able to develop and direct their art and way of life using their bodies, the very entity that the Brazilian state was attempting to control. Further, the unscripted and participatory nature of capoeira expands the boundaries of analysis of aesthetics, in Bleiker's terms 'opening up thinking space,'⁷³ as representations are dynamic and co-created. Knowledge and power, including new versions of the art, in capoeira are produced through participation, which involves not a rehearsed interaction but a corporeal conversation between two players who are testing each other's capacity and experience. The production of meaning, including the significance of lineage and identity, takes place in training and playing, which bind together the creation and interpretation of the art.

In more practical terms, capoeira has been seen to have points of contact with other artistic expressions and with counter-cultural movements that display comparable, if less comprehensive, forms of resistance as a way of life. Foucault's reminder of agency in the production of truth stands in contrast to the passivity or apathy of populations subject to biopolitical control. Acknowledging the aesthetic in capoeira includes in analysis a range of cognitions and behaviours that provide the means to go beyond commemoration or trauma to celebrate diversity, create and express, and invest in values that are not determined by dominant politics. As such, artistic practice as a way of life scopes a broad field of activities that have the potential to evade or disrupt contemporary biopolitical control, whether manifested in regimes of violence, or in the wholesale harvesting of personal information on movement, consumption and communication.

⁷³ Roland Bleiker, "In search of thinking space: reflections on the aesthetic turn in International Political Theory," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol 45, No. 2, p. 258-264.