This dissertation focuses on relations between African-Brazilian capoeira angola and Russian bodies. The study is an outcome of ethnographic research. Participant observation and interviews were carried out in Russia between 2012 and 2016. Feminist theories, anthropology of body and dance, phenomenology and new materialism are the main theoretical perspectives. Russian bodies and capoeira angola relate to each other in ways that both follow and defy the logic of late capitalist patriarchy.
SPONTANEOUS INITIATIVES

ETHNOGRAPHY OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CAPOEIRA ANGOLA AND BODIES IN RUSSIA
Tatjana Lipiäinen

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Publications of the University of Eastern Finland
Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies
No 210

University of Eastern Finland
Joensuu
2020
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on relations between bodies and practice. The main research question is: how do the African-Brazilian capoeira angola and the bodies that practise it in Russia relate to one another? I explore this question using the methodology of feminist ethnography. I carried out participant observation in the cities of Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod in Russia between 2012 and 2016. I collected various types of fieldnotes, visual and audio data during and outside of capoeira angola classes. I conducted interviews in Russian with 25 participants, some of whom were interviewed twice. The collected data was analysed through the prism of multiple theoretical views on the body. Feminist theories, anthropology of body and dance, phenomenology and new materialism are the central theoretical perspectives in the dissertation. An ethnography of relations between capoeira angola and bodies in Russia, explored through the frame of interdisciplinary body studies, suggests that bodies and practice relate to one another in ways that simultaneously reflect and defy the logic of late capitalist patriarchy. Relations between capoeira angola and Russian bodies are hierarchical and they involve appropriation of the other. The practice and the bodies challenge patriarchal logic of late capitalism when they let go of the desire to dominate the other. In such moments, intersubjective relations emerge between African-Brazilian capoeira angola and bodies in Russia that enable two different subjects to relate non-hierarchically.

Keywords: body, ethnography, feminist theory, relations, capoeira angola, practice, Russia, phenomenology, new materialism, anthropology
TIIVISTELMÄ


Avainsanat: keho, etnografia, feministinen teoria, suhteet, capoeira angola, harjoitus, Venäjä, fenomenologia, uusmaterialismi, antropologia
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The making of this dissertation has been marked by a variety of spontaneous initiatives. I would like to thank, above all, my supervisors for their support, patience and assistance. Laura Assmuth has been the main supervisor of this work from 2012. I am very grateful to Laura for her encouraging words and deeds throughout the years. I would like to thank my two other supervisors, Eeva Jokinen and James Scott, for reading and commenting the dissertation in addition to all the other help they provided.

This dissertation springs from the practice of specific individuals in St. Petersburg, Samara, Ufa and Nizhnii Novgorod. Capoeira practitioners in Russia have both inspired and enabled this ethnography. I would like to thank all participants in this study for welcoming me to their cities, capoeira classes and homes. Огромное спасибо всем каноэйристам участвующим в этом исследовании!

I am very thankful to Leena Rouhiainen for agreeing to be the pre-examiner of this dissertation and the opponent at the defence. I appreciate Leena’s engaged reading of the manuscript and her many helpful comments on it. I would also like to thank Suvi Salmenniemi for her detailed feedback and all the constructive suggestions. I am indebted to both pre-examiners for their time and ideas, which have offered me plenty of food for thought.

A special note of gratitude goes to Ewan King for proofreading the dissertation. His careful work has significantly improved the text. Moreover, I would like to thank Ewan for teaching us English the way he did back in Ressu. My good friend Izabela Czerniak has also proofread parts of the dissertation, for which I am very grateful.

My work at the University of Eastern Finland began with a walk on ‘pitkospuut’ (duck boards) in Mekrijärvi with Ilkka Liikanen, James Scott and Jeremy Smith. Without Ilkka I probably never would have settled in Joensuu and wrote the dissertation as I did. I am grateful to Ilkka for hiring me at the Karelian Institute in 2011. I met many wonderful people at the Institute, such as, my closest colleagues Minna Piipponen and Joni Virkkunen. Minna gracefully introduced me not just to the University but also to the North Karelian way of life. I would like to thank all my colleagues from the Karelian Institute.

I continued to work on the dissertation at the Department of Social Sciences from 2014 onwards. I have been lucky to have many interesting and inspiring colleagues there. Marta Choroszewicz, who has become a close friend, has transformed me into a feminist with her own work and our daily chats. The overall atmosphere of the department led by three female professors, Eeva Jokinen, Laura Assmuth and Leena Koski, has slowly but surely instilled a feminist attitude into my whole being. I found the doctoral seminars attended by the professors and other colleagues to be very inspiring. I would like to especially thank Leena Koski for her ‘mutkaton’ (straightforward, down-to-earth) way of being and for her illuminating comments on research.

I am grateful to all colleagues and researchers from whom I have received comments on the various drafts of the monograph in different seminars and conferences over the years. Of course, many others, including my dear family and friends, have influenced the making of this dissertation. My gratitude to them extends far beyond this or any other work.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to some ‘Hemingway days’ in Brazil.

Joensuu, December 2019
Tanja Lipiäinen
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They play and make jokes and love one another.
– Hemingway
INTRODUCTION

New kinds of relations unravel through spontaneous initiative making. Transnational connections bring an African-Brazilian practice and several Russian bodies together into an intimate encounter in which neither one knows how to relate to the other. The practice struggles to adapt to Russian bodies and their socio-cultural environment. The bodies yearn for clearer directions on how to interact with the African-Brazilian practice but there are no written guidelines, no policy recommendations. The practice and the bodies have to discover new ways of relating. This dissertation is an ethnography of relations between an African-Brazilian practice and bodies in Russia.

The many answers that we as social scientists are looking for may well be found within our bodies.

Perhaps the answer we are looking for lies at hand; so near that we all too easily overlook it. For the way to what is near is always the longest and thus the hardest for us humans. (Heidegger 1966: 53)

The very self-evidence of the body often eliminates the need to explore it. Western scientists have been quicker to send bodies into space and to the bottom of the ocean than to learn to notice the body’s subtle sensations in the present moment. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche anticipated a change in Western thinking: “It learns to speak ever more honestly, this ego; and the more it learns, the more words and honors it finds for body and earth” (Nietzsche in Orlie 2010: 134). Bodies and bodily practices have been receiving increasingly subtle understandings within the social sciences in recent decades (Blackman 2008). Researchers from various disciplines have contributed to a more sensible perception of the body as feminists, anthropologists, phenomenologists, new materialists and dance researchers, among many others, have cast new light and shade onto the body. I wish to contribute to the work of body researchers in these fields.

This dissertation is an outcome of an ethnographic research process. Ethnography is a way of doing research that involves particular ways of knowing, a theory of scientific knowledge, a sequence of procedural steps and a range of solutions (Gobo 2008: 18–19). Ethnographers have traditionally been concerned with describing the culture of particular groups and communities based on long-term face-to-face encounters with specific people (Angrosino 2007: 1). Ethnographic methodology enables a researcher to study how “abstract claims about the globe” operate in everyday life (Tsing 2005: 6).

The wider cultural environment in which this research has been conducted is that of late capitalism: a globally, technologically networked, complex society that in many ways constantly “unsettles one’s orientation” (Braidotti 2013: 60; Tambornino paraphrased 2002: 139). A hundred years ago, poet T. S. Eliot candidly admitted how difficult it is to produce knowledge amidst “vast accumulations” of information:

When there is so much to be known, when there are so many fields of knowledge in which the same words are used with different meanings, when everyone knows a little about a great many things, it becomes increasingly difficult for anyone to know whether he knows what he is talking about or not. (Eliot 1920: 8)
Philosopher Martin Heidegger, like Eliot, has a critical attitude towards increase of information. Heidegger notes that real advances in the sciences do not take place through the accumulation of ever more data but in the radical revision of the basic concepts. (Heidegger 1962: 29.) Data collection is not an end in itself within ethnographic methodology but rather a means for recognising and discussing ‘real problems’, to borrow Heidegger’s phrase (Heidegger 1962: 77), and for revising basic concepts like ‘relations’ and ‘the body’. Relations between and to our bodies are worth problematising today and I wish to do that through ethnographic data concerning certain bodies and a particular practice.

To counterbalance a loaded, at times overwhelming, environment that bombards a researcher with endless information, I eventually decided to concentrate on one main research question to keep this dissertation intact. Political scientist John Tambornino notes that such a choice is common in the context of “complex, rapidly changing societies” as “in such a situation, one might adopt disciplines and tactics that limit oneself, in order to focus on select activities and experiences” (Tambornino 2002: 139). One main question serves the function of narrowing the focus of this work. The question is supplemented by many sub-questions that are found throughout the dissertation. Therefore, this ethnography also includes many side-tracks as a reflection of the wider fragmented socio-cultural context in which this research is embedded.

The main question that I ponder throughout the dissertation is: how do the African-Brazilian capoeira angola and the bodies that practise it in Russia relate to one another? This question addresses on the one hand, my empirical findings during ethnographic fieldwork in Russia and on the other hand, contemporary theoretical understandings of the body. The ethnographic study focuses on small capoeira angola groups in the Russian cities of Samara and Ufa, and to a lesser extent in St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod. Participant observation has been most consistently conducted during regular capoeira classes of these groups. The question also engages with the wider feminist attempt to re-embbody social and cultural theory by making body (instead of the ego/(hu)man/individual), practice and relations the starting points of our examination of the wider socio-cultural environment.

All of the key concepts of this work have “porous membranes, rather than fixed boundaries” (Coole 2013: 456). Terminological clarifications of the main concepts may be offered so as to narrow the focus in a given context: none of these clarifications, however, are fixed. Instead, all my terms are permeable, bound to interact with other notions and to transform with time and use. E1, one of the participants in this ethnographic study, says in his interview that “It’s impossible to say what is capoeira, not in two words, not even in... People spend their lives (trying) to understand what capoeira is”2. Researchers similarly spend their lives studying notions like body, ethnography and phenomenology. In view of this I do not offer one-line definitions of the main concepts here. Rather, I provide some outlines, sketches, of the notions included in the main research question and the title of this work. All of these concepts are ongoing processes that cannot be fully captured in a phrase or a paragraph.

A question beginning with the word ‘how’ is common in ethnography. Ethnographic mode of enquiry focuses on everyday lives of the research participants, on how they go about their daily routines (Emerson et al. 2011: 1). The mode of ethnographic

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1 Capital letters are used as the participants’ pseudonyms, more on this in chapter one.
2 All interview excerpts have been translated from Russian into English by the author.
writing is usually thoroughly descriptive. Ethnographers rarely concentrate on ‘why’ questions as the purpose of the mainly inductive methodology is not to establish direct links between certain causes and effects but rather to interpret broader socio-cultural phenomena through micro-empirical details (e.g. in Abu-Lughod 2013: 26). As body, media and culture researcher Lisa Blackman puts it, certainty ‘no longer seems tenable’ in the light of our natural and social scientific knowledge about body (Blackman 2008: 132). Both from ethnographic and transdisciplinary body studies perspectives, positivist modes of enquiry that aim to support hypotheses, establish fixed certainties, are not necessarily compatible with the messy, living materiality of bodies and practices witnessed and experienced in the empirical world. Here I use methods ‘that are not based on certainty, and which at times are attempting to render visible aspects of experiences which might usually remain silent, unnoticed and in the background’ (Blackman 2008: 132). It takes a nuanced mode of enquiry to unravel how bodies and practices relate to each other.

The term ‘relate’ in the research question is used above all to connote a fluctuating connection, an entanglement, between capoeira and bodies. I use the term ‘related to’ interchangeably with proximate terms of ‘interact’, ‘in connection to’ and ‘linked to’ throughout the dissertation. Relationality has many rich interpretations within philosophy and social sciences. For instance, from a feminist Irigarayan perspective, relations refer to co-existence, to acting together, to dialogue, to “communication between and reciprocity” (Irigaray 1996a: 125–126). Relational sociology, in turn, is interested in interaction or transaction as dynamic, unfolding and ongoing processes “rather than as static ties among inert substances” (Emirbayer 1997: 289).³ Relationality is a standpoint that allows researchers to overcome a variety of dominant dualisms such as “self-other, human-animal, nature-culture and human-world” when exploring our social world (Venn 2010: 129). I use the term ‘relate to’ and its synonyms in order to view a bodily practice and the bodies involved in it in a co-constituting light rather than from a linear perspective of a subject (be it the body or practice) acting upon an object (such as a practice or body). A focus is placed on connections between difference rather than on similarity, commonality or sameness (Pedwell 2008: 87).

The concept of ‘body’ can be approached in a variety of ways from a social scientific perspective. Western thinkers tend to begin discussions on body with reference to Cartesian dualism that separates the active, intelligent mind from the allegedly passive, primitive body (Blackman 2008: 4-5). Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that the Cartesian as well as the Kantian tradition has taught one to think that an object’s spatial limits are its essence (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 171). The overarching trend within the social sciences in the recent decades has been a movement towards a better understanding of the complexity, vitality and agency of the body, thus, moving away from a conception of the body as a fixed, passive and socially unimportant entity (Blackman 2008: 13). Long-term researcher of the body, dancer and philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, proposes the notion of ‘thinking in movement’ by which she refers to dimensions of thinking that are non-symbolic (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 493). Thinking in movement is a way of living in the world “in movement, kinetically” (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 490). Thinking itself is movement and the body itself is mindful (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 486, 493). Body-mind, movement-thinking are inseparable.

³Relational sociology is a branch of social thought with which I do not explicitly engage in this work.
With this ethnography I wish to further such observations by focusing on the lived, interactional situations in which bodies and practice intertwine.

Out of the many condensations of how a body could be verbally described, political theorist Jane Bennett’s line has struck me the most with her depiction of the body as "a cosmos of lively materiality" (Bennett 2010b: 63). Bennett is among those Western social scientists who takes matter seriously as being vibrant and alive (Bennett 2010a). Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti offers a more convoluted description of the new materialist body as being a "radically immanent ... assemblage of forces, or flows, intensities and passions that solidify in space, and consolidate in time, within the singular configuration commonly known as an 'individual' self" (Braidotti 2006: 201). Blackman also understands the body not as a thing or substance but more as a site of "potentiality, process and practice" (Blackman 2008: 5, 7). Other thinkers, like anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas see the body as "an experiencing agent" (Csordas 1994: 3). Phenomenologists also emphasise the experiential and intentional capacities of the body which is often referred to as the ‘living body’, meaning that a body is not an object (Merleau-Ponty in Klemola 1990: 51; Parviainen & Pirhonen 2017: 107–108).

The holistic emphasis on a living body emerged in phenomenology as a reaction to positivist, medical understandings of body within fields like psychology in the 1940’s (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 103–112). Phenomenologist Jennifer Bullington notes that still today "we tend to give natural-scientific descriptions of things a higher status than the world we experience through our senses" (Bullington 2013: 22). She adds that "if we only focus upon chemical, neurological processes, we miss the way in which the experience and meaning of the world unfolds for us" (Bullington 2013: 23). Many natural-scientific findings about the body can obstruct our understanding of how embodied beings live in the world. My intention is not to deny that our bodies are constituted of molecules, cells, blood circulation, muscles, the nervous system, etc., but simply to point out that the biological viewpoint on the body is just one among many ways of looking. The fact that a body is made up of atomic and subatomic particles does not make it any less a perceiving, feeling being.

There are tensions between different academic perspectives on the body as some thinkers choose to emphasise the body’s cultural, representational aspects, others focus on lived experience, and yet others pay more attention to the materiality and hybridity of bodies. Here, I will look for common ground between the various understandings of bodies and bodily practices, existing particularly within the social sciences. Throughout this ethnography, the term ‘body’ will be used in a coterminous manner with words such as human, practitioner and capoeirista. This is done so as to highlight the agentic capacities of the body by treating it not only as an object but also as a subject and process. The emphasis is placed on ‘being a body’ rather than purely ‘having a body’, to use Sheets-Johnstone’s terminology (Sheets-Johnstone 2018). The body is elusively a biological-cultural-historical-political-social multiple process-subject that moves, feels, thinks and lives human as well as non-human matter that is not clearly bounded but is constantly interacting with everything on earth and in the cosmos (Blackman 2008: 29, 52; Marshall 1996: 254). Characterisations like this do not pin the phenomenon down but illustrate that the more we know about the body, the more uncertain and flexible our assumptions about it seem to become. It is a challenge for contemporary researchers of body to study and theorise "processes that are thoroughly entangled and interdependent" (Blackman 2008: 131). What makes body studies particularly exciting as an area of interdisciplinary research is that at present it is openly perplexed and intrigued by something arguably so near to us.
This dissertation’s research question speaks of ‘practice’, a term that roots my research in the concrete, empirical actions of people’s daily lives. New materialists suggest that as a counter-balance to the earlier linguistic and cultural turn in the social sciences, a renewed appreciation of materiality should bring us closer to empirical experiences in encounters with real people and their practices (Braidotti 2013: 53, 178). Practice constitutes an important point of interest within ethnography that has traditionally examined shared rituals, behaviours and customs (Angrosino 2007: 1). "Ethnography", write anthropologist Elana Buch and researcher of social policy Karen Staller, "is a form of research that asks questions about the social and cultural practices of groups of people" (Buch & Staller 2007: 187). In a social world of increasing complexity, virtuality and globally interlinked networks, "concrete, actualized praxis" can help us approach and deal with the many new possibilities appearing this very moment (Braidotti 2013: 196). Braidotti suggests that hope-giving, affirmative, research projects are often "rooted in the ordinary micro-practices of everyday life" (Braidotti 2013: 192). Hence, rooting this research in bodily practice is a methodological attempt to concentrate on the concrete, embodied ways of being and relating in this world.

While many social scientists aim to improve the state of the world through their work, fewer perhaps aim to transform themselves through the practice of research and other bodily practices. Philosopher Timo Klemola suggests that Western philosophy today is not seen as a form of a personally transformative practice but rather as a purely theoretical discourse (Klemola 2004: 17, 22). Like Hannah Arendt, whom I will shortly introduce, Klemola also looks back at ancient Greece and Socrates for an example of a more holistic practice of philosophy. For Socrates, writes Klemola, a philosophical dialogue meant "a spiritual practice" through which a philosopher could transform oneself through better understanding (Klemola 2004: 20). Relying on his own Eastern bodily practices, ranging from karate, tai chi to Rinzai zen meditation, Klemola argues that philosophy should ideally transform a thinker through continuous bodily practice that alters one’s ethical, aesthetic and intellectual experiences (Klemola 2004: 88). Inseparability of daily practice and thought in a researcher’s life could be reflective of a more monist engagement with body-mind.

Following feminist thinker Donna Haraway, ‘capoeira angola’ could be called ‘a curious practice’ (Haraway 2015a), one that combines oceans, forests, marine and earthly creatures as well as spirits in its sounds and movements. In capoeira angola the human body moves in wavy, circular ways that embody banana trees, stingrays and zebras through the prism of an African-Brazilian heritage (see Lipiäinen forthcoming). "Examples of this circular dynamic", writes dance researcher Cristina Rosa “are round kicks, spiral moves, and dislocations across the floor’ (Rosa 2015: 117). Most research interprets the movements of capoeira as a mix of martial arts, dance, fight, play and ritual (e.g. Browning 1995: xiv; Downey 2005: 7; Lewis 1992: 1). Two Russian participants in this ethnographic study interpret capoeira angola in the following ways:

It’s a game that consists of this synthesis of martial art, dance where there are also some elements of acrobatics, ritual, music. And overall all this intertwines and you get this, this unified, interesting thing that has many different sides to it. (N)
How is everything arranged here? There is a bateria – music. It creates, well, through music and sound, some sort of atmosphere. There is a circle, there are two capoeiristas. Like that. They interact through bodily language. That is, there is linguistic language. Right? Lexicon. In capoeira it’s the same thing, only through the body. And the main thing, that I’d like to highlight is that it’s not... There is no premeditation here. That every time they come out (to play capoeira), there’s something new. They, well, communicate completely spontaneously. There is a lot of improvisation. That is very important. (O)

A game of capoeira angola played corporeally by two practitioners is not pre-choreographed. The pair moves together spontaneously which makes each game of capoeira angola unique. The game of movements relies on a tight interaction between two bodies who are constantly reacting to each other’s actions and minute gestures. Capoeira angola is a thoroughly relational form of art. In addition to movements carried out in pairs, capoeira includes collective singing in Portuguese and playing a variety of African-Brazilian instruments. Capoeira angola is a particular style of the wider practice called capoeira. It emphasises a slower, more cunning and playful game than other styles. A focus on the angola style is intentional as it is this, the least commercialised and mass-mediated type of capoeira, that is most animalistic and vegetative, and that at times offers a counter logic to that of our late capitalist context. The style of capoeira angola is practised as an experimental, non-profit activity within the Russian context. Braidotti highlights that a “non-profit, experimental approach to different practices of subjectivity is not exactly the spirit of contemporary capitalism” (Braidotti 2013: 61).

Capoeira angola is surely unfamiliar to many and it indeed can be seen as a peripheral phenomenon both globally and in Russia. A capoeira practitioner in Russia half-jokingly describes “a standard angola group of three people” when he talks about his first capoeira angola group. "Well, if not three, then maybe, well, five people. Well, the groups are not big", E says. The capoeira groups that I encountered and observed for this ethnography are small ranging from just four to some twenty active members. Many social scientists choose to study more widely known phenomena in preference to small, peripheral collectives (e.g. Aitamurto 2010: 191). However, the small numbers practising capoeira angola in Russia and worldwide do not necessarily mean that the quality of the bodily practice is weak. In fact, the contrary might be true: "Low cultural genres... are mercifully free of grandiose pretensions", writes Braidotti. She notes that better known and more self-conscious genres tend to depict contemporary culture less accurately and honestly than low genres such as, science fiction. (Braidotti 2006: 203.) Capoeira angola could be seen as a ‘low cultural practice’ not only in its transnational scale but also in its concrete, bodily expression. Capoeira angola movements tend to take place very close to the ground. Lowness in capoeira angola is considered to be an important asset as we will see later on.

The transnational practice of capoeira angola provides opportunities to study what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls "global encounters across difference" (Tsing 2005: 3). Even though the practice of capoeira angola is originally African-Brazilian, here it is explored within the contemporary Russian context. "Renewed materialism may be regarded as a timely response to – or even as an expression of – the current global
"condition" in which our ecosystem is becoming increasingly vulnerable, writes Coole (Coole 2013: 461). Environmental vulnerability is clearly visible in urban and rural Russia. One comes across plastic and other types of waste throughout Russian cities and their surroundings. There is no widely functioning system of recycling in a large country of over 140 million inhabitants (Halme 2016). Water coming from pipes into most apartment buildings in Samara and Ufa is not readily drinkable. During the Soviet period (1922–1991), due to the dominance of a heavy industry sector, Russia became very polluted to the extent that some scholars have argued that "no other industrial civilization so systematically and so long poisoned its land, air, and people" (Feshbach and Friendly 1992: 1).

Bennett wonders: "How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?" (Bennett 2010a: viii). What if the Russian authorities would recognise that the waste lying around their country is not just trash but "an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter", as Bennett notes? (Bennett 2010a: viii). There is a parallel between Russian reality and the process Tsing’s ethnography describes in an Indonesian context, where the very identity of the Indonesian state of the 1980’s "became entangled with forest destruction" (Tsing 2005: 16). The identity of the Russian state in the 2000’s and 2010’s has become entangled with oil and gas extraction, frequently to the detriment of particularly Siberia’s environment and its non-human as well as human inhabitants (e.g. on the Ob’ river, one of the largest rivers in the world, see Moskovchenko et al. 2009; Vitebsky 2006: 215). Several of the participants in this ethnographic research are indirectly working within the oil sector in Russia. For example, A is an accountant in a small business that repairs boreholes used in oil extraction.

As a socio-cultural context for an ethnographic study of bodies and practices, Russia provides a paradoxical environment, holding some of the richest natural resources in the world: yet usually governing them according to an unsustainable logic that is strictly anthropo- and elite-centric. Josephson et al. in concluding their book An Environmental History of Russia note that during the presidency of Vladimir Putin:

> Under the slogans of liberalization and privatization, the state is abolishing some of its vital duties (such as nature protection, nature monitoring, and the forestry service). The consequences of such short-sighted policies have yet to be seen… (Josephson et al. 2013: 319).

A polluted and a precarious environment necessarily impacts the bodies living in it and the ways in which they interact with practices (Bennett 2010a: 120–121). Klemola notes that a beginner’s capacity to participate in a new bodily practice is from the outset dependent on the body’s history and previous skills (Klemola 2004: 96). Our bodies are made up of the water and food that we consume, the air that we breath, the soil from which we obtain our nutrients.

The dissertation title Spontaneous Initiatives derives primarily from my reading of political theorist Hannah Arendt’s book The Human Condition and yoga practitioner Arvo Tavi’s interpretations of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. By the title I in part mean "an expression of connections that incorporate but always exceed human intentions" (Roberts 2012: 2514). The relations between capoeira angola and bodies in Russia emerge from human intentions but simultaneously exceed them. Bodies and practices are surprises to one another as much as they are to themselves.
The concept 'spontaneity' connects various methodological, empirical and theoretical orientations of this dissertation. Ethnographic and feminist research often highlights the significance of chance and unpredictability in academic work (e.g. Taussig 2011; Braidotti 2006). Spontaneous matter, molecules and bodies are recurrent themes within new materialist and other recent transdisciplinary body studies (e.g. Bennett 2010a; Black 2013; Coole & Frost 2010). For example, Bennett understands spontaneity to imply an "indefiniteness of correspondence between specific cause and specific effect" (Bennett 2010a: 76). The games of capoeira angola also occur spontaneously as it was noted earlier. During the past decades it is above all yoga that has both experientially and textually taught me about spontaneity of the body (especially Tavi 2004 and 2014). Thus, the term 'spontaneity' reflects the methodological, empirical and theoretical underpinnings of this work, as well as the daily embodied experiences of the author.

The concept of 'initiative' found in the title of this work, has been above all inspired by The Human Condition. In it, Arendt writes that "with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world" (Arendt 1958: 178). A genuinely new beginning, such as the drawing of the first breath, cannot be humanly controlled or calculated in advance. "The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability," notes Arendt. (Arendt 1958: 178.) To initiate means to begin something new, to act (Arendt 1958: 177). Tambornino argues that the ongoing theme of natality "of the unanticipated and the unprecedented" in Arendt's thinking is contrasted with the domain of bodily necessity (Tambornino 2002: 6). The themes of freedom and new beginnings are contrasted with the daily necessities of the body, that according to Arendt chain rather than free us. In contrast, I will attempt to combine into one whole the themes of spontaneous initiatives and body. One of the main assumptions of this work is that daily bodily practices are full of spontaneous initiatives. For example, breathing can be controlled by our will but it also occurs without the will's participation. Wider, socio-cultural new beginnings that are thoroughly embodied are similarly somewhat intentional and somewhat spontaneous (Bennett 2010a: 32–38).

While Arendt's thought, inspired by Western male philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, grounds this dissertation in Western patriarchal tradition that in many ways ignores or even deplores the body, Arendt's message about new beginnings suggests that new conceptions of body, practice and relations are likely to emerge also within Western thought. The theme of new and unexpected beginnings is an important one in a world that despairs at the large-scale humanly caused destruction. The ongoing destruction of the earth that is our home forces us to reconsider our bodies as supposedly well-bounded 'things' that are separate from all the rest, as earlier Western views had suggested (Bennett 2010a; Connolly 2013; Coole 2013). Here we will see how permeable bodies incorporate distant vegetation, animals and elements through practice. The ways in which bodies relate to practice transforms the practice itself through new embodiments and interpretations.

There are currently many forms of relations that are oblique, still in the process of formation in a patriarchal setting. I use the term 'patriarchy' in philosopher Luce Irigaray's sense of the word. Patriarchy is a social order or system which is dominated by the male gender and which sets the male as the model of the individual (Irigaray 1996a: 22, 122). Man represents "the entire human species in public life" of a patriarchal society (Irigaray 1996a: 22). Consequently, patriarchy "has not allowed the female as embodied subject to exist, to develop, to flourish, to have a voice" (McCarthy 2010: 73). Among the many ways of suppressing women and all types of 'others', Western
patriarchy produces "an abstract and supposedly neuter discourse" (Irigaray 1996a: 126) which is, however, deeply reflective of a heterosexual male’s needs and aims (Irigaray 1996b). The Western patriarchal discourse creates theoretical speculation that is "estranged from the body" (Irigaray 1996a: 126; Irigaray 2002a). Irigaray suggests that patriarchy separates language from life and in this way it removes all genuine dialogue (Irigaray 1996a: 122). In this dissertation I aim to avoid a formal, seemingly detached and impersonal style of writing that is characteristic to patriarchal academia.

This feminist work is written in a polyvocal manner that intentionally brings an eclectic variety of theories, thinkers and cultures together. It is important to ask questions and to engage in dialogue without domination to make discoveries about relations (Irigaray 1996a: 122–124). Rather than engaging in a monologue, room is created for conversations between research participants and theorists, poets and singers from different socio-cultural backgrounds. This is reflected in the many, at times prolonged, citations that are included in the text. Interview excerpts, song lyrics, direct quotations of many authors all play a central role in this work. They express relationality between beings and practices, the importance of which feminists have been emphasising for decades (see Irigaray; Jennings 2016: 11). Occasionally, I appropriate the words of an ‘other’ and put them in an originally unintended context. This is done to create new linkages between seemingly distant phenomena and beings. My aim is to observe, describe, analyse and to create new kinds of relations with this work.

Sheets-Johnstone supports Irigaray’s claim that Western patriarchy dictates a particular way of knowing and communicating. Sheets-Johnstone describes how the foundations of thinking in bodily movement have been neglected in the West (Sheets-Johnstone 1999). Instead, Western epistemology has created forms of knowledge that are often at odds with experience (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 493). Klemola writes that in Japanese thinking practical skills and the rest of life are not usually seen to be separate spheres, as practising a skill is seen to be an existential experience that transforms one’s whole being (Klemola 2004: 126). Asian thought has traditionally viewed body and mind from a monist rather than a dualist perspective, not assuming that body and mind are separate entities in practical life (Klemola 2004: 87–88).

Philosopher Erin McCarthy, who follows Irigaray’s work, notes that in a Western patriarchal setting "female subjectivity, not to mention non-Western philosophical voices, have been left out of the dialogue because of a search for sameness and a silencing of difference" (McCarthy 2010: 76). African, Chinese, Indian and Japanese practical philosophies, among others, have a great deal to tell and experientially to pass on to Western social scientists about bodies and about practice. "An interpretative method which is, if not ‘universal’, at least widely applicable, cannot be elaborated on the basis of the suggestions originating from a single cultural milieu", notes a researcher of Indian philosophy, Federico Squarcini (Squarcini 2011: 13). For social scientific thought on relations, bodies and practices to be widely relevant today, there is a need to explore bodily practices from different cultural milieux.

The wide categories of West and the rest are certainly anything but subtle. In practice, East, North, South and West are internally fragmented, constituted of multiplicities of beings, values and ongoing practices. Here I am not suggesting that general categories such as East or West are ever homogenous, fixed entities in practice. However, most authors who write about the body from a cultural perspective tend to use the terms East and West to clarify certain intellectual traditions and to make broad distinctions between various cultural heritages (e.g. Holliday & Elfving-Hwang
2012; Irigaray 2002a). Here I will follow thinkers like Irigaray, Klemola and dance researcher Eeva Anttila in using the category 'Western' primarily for reflective self-critique, while acknowledging with Irigaray from the outset that “it is not always easy, in effect, to distinguish what comes from one source and what comes from another” (Anttila 2008; Irigaray 2002a: 49). Our cultural understandings of body are not pure but a mix of various influences. General categories, such as West, nation or gender, serve throughout this work primarily as heuristic devices, rather than as accurate descriptions of empirical reality.

Irigaray has written extensively on intersubjective relations from a feminist viewpoint. Irigarayan intersubjectivity means retaining one's unique identity that is nevertheless always partial and relational. It is the recognition that we are simultaneously separate from others and co-constitutive with others. Intersubjective relations, therefore, imply subjects who are different yet reciprocal. Different subjects interact without hierarchies in Irigarayan intersubjective relations. (e.g. Irigaray 1996a; 1996b; 2017: 52.) According to Irigaray, intersubjectivity can in part emerge through bodily practice. As we cultivate relations to our own bodies, we simultaneously alter our relations to the world. (Irigaray 2002a: 1–20; Irigaray 2017: 46-51.) With this ethnography I will explore the extent to which relations between capoeira angola and bodies in Russia might be considered intersubjective.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter one outlines the ethnographic methodology and the theoretical framework of this work. Following the logic of the methodology and the main theoretical orientations, chapter two focuses on how bodies and practice interact during capoeira angola classes in Russia. After a thick description of capoeira classes, chapter three moves on to look at bodies' and practice's relationality from a wider, global socio-cultural context in which the relations are embedded. Chapter four continues to explore the global context through its dominant, authoritative voices that regulate how bodies and practices interact. The final chapter draws on all of the preceding sections in order to reflect on the alternative ways that bodies and practices may have of relating in the world today.
1 БЕЗДЕЛЬНИЦА

This chapter will look at how relations between bodies and practice became the central question of this dissertation and how it has been approached. What kind of methodology has led me to the question and its various answers? I will begin by explaining the title of this chapter. I will then focus on feminist ethnography as the research approach of this work. Thereafter, I will describe where the fieldwork as well as other research has been conducted. After that I will introduce the practice of capoeira angola. The position of the researcher will also be considered. The theoretical frame of this work will then be discussed. Lastly, I will conclude with reflections on exiting the ethnographic field.

Picture 1. Fieldnotes in a capoeira angola class.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{5} All photos have been taken by the author.
"The System is working", T spoke sarcastically as we were driving to Inors. "There is another prison nearby and even a third one not too far. So everything is in order here", he continued. While authorities of the Russian state aim to convince its people with the repetitive statement that "the System is working" ("sistema rabotaet") in the top-down organising of the country’s security and economy, a local young man’s words and his home surroundings contradicted such assertions. (Fieldnotes 26.3.2014.) Anthropologist Sherry Ortner notes that the proliferation of prisons can be a mark of "violence by the state against its own citizenry" (Ortner 2016: 56). Moreover, the aesthetics of the prison can take over the architecture of living quarters to the extent that "buildings and homes are becoming more prison-like" (Ortner 2016: 56–57). The road leading from relatively central Ufa to its peripheral neighbourhood, Inors, was in a poor spring condition and many of the surrounding buildings, including the prison mentioned by T, were grey, Soviet era concrete buildings, in a very run-down state.

After another capoeira class, the group’s main organiser was behind the wheel of his sister’s car and T, another capoeira practitioner and a children’s capoeira instructor, was sitting in the front on the right side of the driver. The two men were occasionally telling me about this part of the city on our way to the ten storey apartment building in which they both live. They mentioned that Inors used to be a separate industrial area developed in the Soviet times, but by now has merged into the city of Ufa. It is a long way to the residential area of Inors from the capoeira training place. At times the men would chat among themselves in the front and I would look out the window from the backseat, in peaceful solitude. (Fieldnotes 26.3.2014.)

Heidegger notes that "it is one thing to have heard and read something, that is, merely to take notice; it is another thing to understand what we have heard and read, that is, to ponder" (Heidegger 1966: 52). Ethnographers do not only collect information in the form of participation, observations, fieldnotes and interviews but they also process that information. Quite often the processing does not happen in isolation back at the university office but also during short moments of respite, perhaps sitting alone in the backseat of a car or walking around without purposeful activity.

An ethnographer, simultaneously social and solitary, can be characterised in many ways. She or he could be seen as "The Passenger": "riding through the city’s backside", "seeing things from under glass" (Iggy Pop and Gardiner 1977), being the observer from a protective car that quickly passes by. A passenger is a person in transit who does not linger in one place for long. More often an ethnographer is depicted in the more stationary role of a stranger (e.g. Agar 1996; Assmuth 1997: 59; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 8–9). "The wanderer who comes today and stays tomorrow", as philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel famously characterises the stranger (Simmel 1971: 143). Unlike the passenger who is constantly in motion, a stranger comes from the outside to a locality and lingers there for a while. The stranger is freer than the locals because she or he has the opportunity to be mobile, is both near to and far from others at the same time (Simmel 1971: 146–148). The character of the stranger captures well the much discussed binary of ‘insider versus outsider’ or ‘observer versus participant’ in ethnographic fieldwork (e.g. Emerson et al. 2011: 24–29; Robben & Sluka 2012; Spradley 1980: 56–57).

Particularly in urban settings an ethnographer could also be described as a flâneur that is, an individual who idly strolls around the city’s streets without a clear purpose or a sense of rush (Arendt 1968: 20–21). The person out of place, who picks and observes "individual genre scenes", writes philosopher and critic, Walter Benjamin,
who is famously associated with the term flâneur (Arendt 1968: 21; Benjamin 1968: 172–173). Indeed, a flâneur, like the ethnographer, observes what many others pass by without noticing. According to Eliot, the writing of poetry is also:

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a \text{a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation (Eliot 1920: 48)}.
\]

Eliot’s words suggest that there is a certain spontaneity to the process of condensing one’s experiences and impressions into a literary work. The figure of a flâneur is similarly attentive to subtle details in the urban scenes that are spontaneously combined into creative patterns. Heidegger describes pondering as also a rather unpredictable process that can lead to surprises: "meditative thinking demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all" (Heidegger 1966: 53). Relations between capoeira angola and Russian bodies at first sight do not go together at all. There can be plenty of spontaneous initiatives in ethnographer’s work, be it in the field or in the office.

From the perspective of young capoeira practitioners in Russia, my presence in the field was often bewildering: a young female from Finland travelling all on her own, all the way to places like Samara and Ufa, all because she decided to study small capoeira angola groups – and actually getting a salary from the university to do so! The participants usually found it difficult to believe that my university was paying for my travel expenses so that I could just observe their capoeira classes, make some notes and take some photographs. Although the word 'idler' was never explicitly used to describe me, the reactions of many capoeiristas towards my ethnographic fieldwork, frequently implied the noun. In the view of many of the participants what I was doing in the field seemed too flexible, too light and unmonitored to be a real job. One capoeira practitioner, G, mentioned an identical reaction to his occupation as a starting professional, full-time, capoeira teacher and an organiser of a wider Brazilian cultural centre in his city. Because he would not have fixed working hours, in a fixed office, G said that he easily appeared as an idler to those having a more conventional working rhythm. G’s wife allegedly complained that he did nothing in between capoeira class teaching, until she stayed home for her maternity leave and noticed how many organisational, indeterminate things G handled from home in between his teaching.

Labour, according to Arendt’s interpretation, means being enslaved by necessity (Arendt 1958: 83–84). A labourer incessantly produces objects that are needed to sustain human existence, through gruelling, repetitive processes. In Arendt’s The Human Condition, a jobholders’ society is the last stage of the animal laborans. It is a society in which we are increasingly left “with the rather distressing alternative between productive slavery and unproductive freedom” (Arendt 1958: 105). The word ‘idler’ connotes precisely ‘unproductive freedom’ in our jobholders’ perspective as we can hardly imagine how one can be free and productive at the same time. Like Heidegger and Benjamin, among others, Arendt critiques a mass society and its many harms. If one wants to be a full-fledged member of a jobholding society one must produce incessantly, "one cannot stop or think", as Eliot puts it (Arendt 1958; Eliot 2002: 54).
Feminist researcher of culture and media, Christina Scharff, notes how significant it is for a neoliberal subject to remain constantly active. She writes that this need “ties in with a neoliberal philosophy of time where being idle is to be avoided” (Scharff 2016: 112). Incessant activity is also reflective of patriarchal logic according to which constant domination of self and others is a core motivation (Irigaray e.g. 1996a: 43–44). Bodies today “do not know how to rest”, often requiring special training in relaxation (Ala-Kivimäki 2016). "One older mestre6 joked in an interview that it was ironic practitioners now "trained" at something that was once called vadiação, "idle-ness" or "vagrancy””, notes Downey about the practice of capoeira today (Downey 2008: 206). Idleness is becoming an increasingly important skill for a capitalist jobholder’s body. From this perspective, I would suggest that the idler can in fact be productively free by simply stopping and calmly pondering the observed. A calm body leads to the calming and clearing up of the emotions and mind (Klemola 2004: 72–73; 260; Tavi 2014: 61). The idler is in a good position to notice some “off-the-beaten-path practices”, as Haraway puts it (Haraway 2015a: 6).

Arendt makes a distinction between utility and meaningfulness. According to her, a worker (whom she distinguishes from a labourer) is focused on creating something useful without ever stopping to understand what the meaning of that usefulness is. We produce and create without understanding meaning both as labouring jobholders and as artistic workers. (Arendt 1958.) ‘An idle ethnographer’ in the field has the chance to wonder about meaning rather than being immediately useful and productive. She has the chance to go beyond patriarchal interpretations of utility. In her ethnography on international humanitarianism, anthropologist Liisa Malkki reflects on what kinds of subjects are seen to be useful or useless. For example, elderly women knitting in solitude blankets for comfort can be seen as performing an act of “the mere” rather than something of “real” significance. “Why are we so quick to disparage or despise these acts of care that simultaneously ease the often abject neediness of their socially isolated makers (and give them pleasure), and, in the case of the blankets, provide warmth to people who may need it?” Malkki questions. (Malkki 2015: 204.) Reflections like these, through concrete empirical examples, offer plenty of food for thought as to what and who is valued in a patriarchal society, and why?

There is a song by a famous St. Petersburg rock band Kino that was recorded in 1982, several years before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this song the leading singer Viktor Tsoi describes the life of a loner, who walks around the city without goals or knowledge and in the chorus repetitively laments to his mother about being an idler. The name of the song is Безделник (Bezdel’nik7) – a male idler in Russian.

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6 A master of capoeira.

Гуляю.
Я один гуляю.
Что дальше делать, я не знаю.
Нет дома
Никого нет дома.
Я лишний, словно куча лома...
Я бездельник, о-о, мама, мама...
В толпе я
Как иголка в сене.
Я снова человек без цели.
Болтаюсь,
Целый день гуляю.
Не знаю, я ничего не знаю, у-у.

As a female ethnographer, I have paraphrased the name of Kino’s song as Бездельница (Bezdelʹnitsa) for the title of this chapter which means a female idler. Russian, an East Slavonic language, is heavily gendered; not only are the nouns and adjectives divided into the feminine, masculine and neuter forms but also the verb’s past tense, participles and numerals are gendered (Akhutina et al. 1999: 695–697; Chirsheva 2009: 68). This means, among other things, that the translated interview excerpts found throughout this work do not carry the full gendered meanings they have in their original language. Whenever, for instance, the interviewees talk about a human they use the Russian word ‘человек’ which is a masculine word, therefore participants always use the word ‘он’ (he) when referring to a human being in general. Braidotti notes that the concept of ”the human‘ was colonized by phallogocentrism, it has come to be identified with male, white, heterosexual, Christian, property-owning, standard-language-speaking citizens” (Braidotti 2010: 208). The Russian language clearly suggests who is primarily considered to be human in terms of gender. The racial and gendered perceptions of ‘proper Russians’ will be considered more in chapters three and four.

1.1 RASPBERRY JUICE ON A TRAM

This dissertation is an ethnography. The word ‘ethnography’ refers to an overall approach to research as well as to the end product of the research in the form of a monograph (Assmuth 2015). Particularly the way in which Laura Assmuth, the main supervisor of this work, has introduced ethnography to me has made me see the practice as “energetic work of holding open the possibility that surprises are in store, that something interesting is about to happen, but only if one cultivates the virtue of letting those one visits intra-actively shape what occurs” (Haraway 2015a: 6). Ethnographic research can be full of surprising beginnings if the ethnographer learns to surrender to the field, the literature and their many unexpected currents, rather than trying to control them with premade hypotheses and schedules.

Ethnographic research is usually, or ideally, conducted in a spiral-like manner whereby one begins with some social scientific readings and questions, goes into the field to gather some general, preliminary data, returns to the office to go through one’s findings to then once again return to the field with clearer questions and observation
tasks in mind. The research process becomes increasingly focused with time. (Spradley 1980.) Therefore, ethnographic research ideally requires plenty of time both at the university and in the field in order to mature in a longitudinal manner that gradually narrows down to a specific theme emerging from the field rather than purely from theoretical texts. New materialist proponents urge researchers to conduct more "detailed analyses of our daily interactions" which is what ethnographers have been doing for over a hundred years (Coole & Frost 2010: 3; Emerson et al. 2011: 1; Gobo 2008: 2). Ethnographers tend to focus on specific empirical examples from the field and through them discuss wider social issues.

It is especially the method of participant observation that makes ethnography a unique methodology within the social sciences. An ethnographer observes and holistically participates in the everyday lives of those in whom she or he is most interested (Gobo 2008: 12; Van Maanen 2011: 2). In this respect, participant observation as a method is more than collection of particular type of data, be it textual, visual or sensual, as it involves embedding one's daily life in a new, often unfamiliar, environment. Participant observation enables a researcher to feel, witness and discuss aspects of social reality that most other social scientific methods overlook either due to their short-term commitment and/or to their physical distance from the communities or phenomena being studied (Gobo 2008: 12). By coming to the participants, an ethnographer observes without uprooting the participants from their daily environment (paraphrasing Irigaray 1996a: 24).

Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod points out that "the first principle of ethnography, which involves participating in daily life over a long period, is to listen and watch" (Abu-Lughod 2013: 8). Particularly at the early stages of ethnographic fieldwork this often means, to use Heidegger's words out of their intended context, waiting "for something without knowing for what" (Heidegger 1966: 68). Ethnographers tend to study what is near yet what is left unnoticed, for instance, by the media and the wider public. Daily bodily practices are precisely that. During participant observation in Russia, I would observe how the bodies of the participants "are enacted and performed in specific ways" (Blackman 2008: 125) in capoeira angola classes.

Out of the many types of ethnography, such as critical ethnography, autoethnography, virtual ethnography, my approach to ethnography lies closest to feminist ethnography. The very focus of this dissertation, the body, is a traditionally feminist topic of interest (e.g. Braidotti on Haraway 2006: 198; Braidotti 2013: 191). For Braidotti, feminism exemplifies "transformative politics" which in part means the dislodging of male-centric narratives and their "culturally hegemonic positions" (Braidotti 2006: 201). In this ethnography, I wish to question dominant hegemonic narratives with notions like 'the idler' that challenge the current labour-centric narrative in social sciences. Sociologist Beverley Skeggs also sees feminism to signify a political stance (Skeggs 2001: 426). She notes that ethnography has been used by feminists within four broad areas of research: anthropology, sociology, education and cultural studies (Skeggs 2001: 427).

According to Buch and Staller, "the forms of feminist ethnography are nearly as diverse as feminist ethnographers themselves" (Buch & Staller 2007: 187). In that respect, as with the theoretical portion of this chapter later on, it is not easy to sum up the general qualities of feminist ethnography. Buch and Staller, nevertheless, suggest that some defining features of most work that could be characterised as feminist ethnography are the following: "an ethnographic focus on women's lives; ethnography informed by feminist theories and ethics; special attention paid to
gender in ethnography as well as to "other forms of power and difference" (Buch & Staller 2007: 190). Throughout this ethnography, I use thoughts of feminist and female theorists such as Irigaray, Braidotti, Sheets-Johnstone, Parviainen, Arendt, among many others. I also focus on gender issues within the practice of capoeira, particularly in chapter four that focuses on power relations.

I began working on this ethnography in 2012 with the initial idea of studying civil society and grassroots initiatives in Russia through the example of capoeira angola groups. Youth studies, civil society and social movement theories helped me enter the field of young Russian capoeiristas (e.g. Alapuro, Liikanen & Lonkila 2004; Scott 1985; Yurchak 2005). This dissertation describes the initiatives made by bodies who are mainly in their twenties and thirties. "Whereas researchers in the social sciences meticulously document how youth 'go bad' in the face of daunting social-structural conditions and cultural pathologies, this empirical study suggests how certain youth consciously choose an 'alternative' subculture...", writes sociologist Michael Atkinson in relation to his ethnographic study of 'Straightedge bodies', an ascetic movement that he explores in Canada (Atkinson 2006: 89). In this work the focus is also placed not on how youth "go bad" but rather on how their bodies begin something new. There have been numerous recent studies of Russian youth consuming drugs, suffering from HIV and AIDS, engaging in nationalistic movements, or participating in racist, skinhead and other criminal activity (e.g. Hemment 2012; Omel'chenko 2006; Pilkington 2007, 2010; Shashkin 2008). As a counterbalance to these valuable studies it is also important to describe how Russian youth engages in initiatives that are not deleterious to their own or others' health and well-being.

Two pilot studies were carried out in St. Petersburg in summer and autumn of 2012. Thereafter, I spent one month in Samara in the summer of 2013, one month in Nizhnii Novgorod, Ufa and Samara in November and December of 2013 and one month in Ufa in March 2014. A break of two years followed during which I transcribed twenty interviews, went through all of my field data and wrote a first draft of the ethnography (in addition to two other publications: Lipiäinen 2015a and 2015b). I returned once again to the field in spring and summer of 2016 by visiting St. Petersburg, Samara and Ufa over a six-week period. Aitamurto points out the benefits of doing fieldwork in several distinct periods rather than in one long go. She notes that a researcher who repeatedly goes to and from the field has the opportunity to distance herself from the fieldwork and to analyse the events, emotions, in peace before going back. In her case, Aitamurto was capable of taking in racist and anti-feminist comments from her participants in Russia calmed by the knowledge that she would be able to leave and process the negative comments without getting into conflicts with the participants. (Aitamurto 2010: 195.)

Overall, I have spent approximately five months in Russia conducting fieldwork, almost four years working full-time on the ethnography (2014–2017) and two preparatory years working part-time on the early stages of the dissertation and part-time on other projects at the university (2012–2013). The final draft of the ethnography was prepared in 2019 as I was on maternity leave from 2017 until 2018. In sum, I have had seven years to gradually develop this ethnography.

The empirical data that was collected during my fieldwork includes, different types of fieldnotes, photographs and videos, audio recordings and various artefacts like capoeira groups’ brochures or museum booklets from Samara, Ufa and St. Petersburg. Ethnographic research has been traditionally led by fieldnotes that are taken in a variety of forms (Emerson et al. 2011; Sanjek 1990). The main sources of
field data have been capoeira angola classes during which I have consistently taken descriptive notes, structured according to main categories. The categories structuring my notes were open and general, like 'Place', 'Time', 'Actors' during the first periods of fieldwork (Spradley 1980; Lipiäinen 2015a) and they became increasingly more focused on bodily aspects of the practice by the end of the fieldwork with categories like 'Movements', 'Sounds', 'Gestures' structuring my final notes (see Appendices A and B). Capoeira angola classes usually last between one and two hours. During the classes, I have occasionally participated in the physical training and musical learning but most often I have been taking descriptive notes as well as photographs and videos on my phone throughout the class. At times, I have recorded parts of the classes on a voice recorder.

Outside of the capoeira classes, I would make daily notes of my overall impressions of the surroundings, specific experiences and casual conversations with capoeiristas and other people whom I encountered. The notes would be made either in a diary form, written by hand, or typed up on a laptop, as well as some cue words written on the phone or a tiny notebook. As important as the recorded experiences are, the holistic feelings and impressions in the field have strongly remained with me also without any written records, such as the sensation of summer heat in Samara, the heavy thunder storms there and the effect of this climate (familiar from my early childhood in Saratov) on my whole being. "Anthropologist Simon Ottenberg believes that the headnotes – what you do not write down but keep inside your head – are "always more important than the fieldnotes”, writes anthropologist Michael Taussig, to which I would add that field experiences are not stored in isolation "in the head" but they saturate our whole body and being like any other lived experience (Taussig 2011: 18). Embodied perceptions are not purely verbal but are holistically kinaesthetic, proprioceptive, emotional, as phenomenologists and other body studies researchers so frequently point out (Game 2001; Klemola 2004: 139–141).

Ethnographic research frequently engages in the technique of triangulation whereby comparison is made between data related to the same phenomenon, but obtained using different methods. Ethnographers' views differ as to how far triangulation may increase the validity of ethnographic research (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 231 – con; Gobo 2008: 263 – pro). During my fieldwork in Russia I found it very useful to apply different methods, notably: participant observation, visual and audio data collection as well as interviewing, in order to compare and contrast the various data. Between 2012 and 2016, I carried out interviews with twenty-five capoeiristas. All of the interviews took place in Russian and were recorded onto a voice recorder with the permission of each interviewee. All of the participants were given written forms of informed consent in Russian (see Appendix C) that they could read and sign if they so wanted. Some of the participants signed the document and others just read through it and kept it. According to the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, verbal and unsigned informed consent is as valid as a signed written consent form (TENK 2019: 51, 2009: 5). I also verbally informed all of the interviewees of my research, its broad topic and planned schedule. The participants were always given the chance to ask me questions about the research. The interviews were necessary in addition to all of the other field data in order to find out about the experiences of the bodies practising capoeira that could not be observed with certainty during capoeira classes. How the Russian bodies came to interact with the practice of capoeira in the first place also had to be discussed with the participants. In addition, personal backgrounds of capoeiristas and their opinions
about capoeira could not always be observed during the capoeira classes or outside of them, during casual conversations.

I will be quoting extensively from interviews throughout the ethnography in order to let capoeiristas express their relationality to capoeira angola in their own words (even though these have been translated into English). The interview excerpts will be constantly complemented by other field data as I remain sceptical about using interview data on its own. It is widely acknowledged in social sciences that interviews primarily reveal how individuals or groups want to be perceived by the interviewer and the wider public (e.g. in Gobo 2008: 5–6). On many occasions I would observe how an individual would present an opinion during the interview but act contrary to it in capoeira classes or outside of them. As an example, when I would ask some male capoeiristas about the role of women in capoeira, as a female researcher I would receive answers about the equality of women in capoeira but when I would observe their daily conduct, I could easily spot condescending attitudes towards women in some of the men’s gestures or words. In this respect, I find one unique strength of an ethnographic approach to research to lie in its long-term presence in the field. If my research were to rely solely on interview data, it would surely provide a very different description of the capoeira angola groups in Russia.

During all of the interviews I had asked the participant’s full name, age, place of birth, education, profession and hobbies other than capoeira. Beyond these questions, interview templates varied according to person and to the stage of research (see Appendix D for an example of an interview template from 2016). Two interviews were taken with two capoeiristas answering my questions together while all the other twenty-one interviews were taken one-on-one. Three teachers of capoeira were interviewed twice, once in the beginning of the fieldwork and once in 2016. Twelve interviews took place in Ufa, nine in Samara, four in St. Petersburg and one in Nizhni Novgorod. All of the interviews have been transcribed but only the excerpts used in this dissertation have been translated from Russian into English.

In total, fourteen females and eleven males were interviewed with their median age being 27 years and four years being their median time of experience in capoeira angola. The table on the next page lists the ages, gender and time of experience in capoeira angola of the twenty-five interviewees. In addition to these twenty-five interviewees, other capoeiristas have been observed in capoeira classes, especially during the pilot studies and the last fieldwork period. But because I have not interviewed them and not given them forms of informed consent, such participants will not be described or cited here.
Table 1. Participants in Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age(^8)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Experience in capoeira angola</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 B</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 C</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4 months</td>
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<td>4 D</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
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<td>5 E</td>
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<td>10+ years</td>
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<td>6 F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>7 G</td>
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<td>8 H</td>
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<td>3 years</td>
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<td>9 I(^9)</td>
<td>27-30(^10)</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>10 J</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 K</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 L</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,5 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 M</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
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<td>14 N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6 years</td>
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<td>15 O</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>16 P</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>5,5 years</td>
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<td>18 R</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>19 S</td>
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<td>20 T</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Z</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The gender distribution of the participants is rather equal with female bodies being the slight majority. This is reflective of the wider gender distribution of capoeira angola practitioners in Russia. Most classes and events that I have observed included similar amounts of women and men practitioners. In some groups the number of women exceeds that of men and vice versa in other groups. When one of the angola groups changed their style to practise capoeira contemporânea (the style will be discussed later in this chapter), the number of female participants vividly decreased as male practitioners became the clear majority of most classes. While the number of women participants in capoeira angola is high all over the world, their numbers in

\(^8\) At the time of the first interview.

\(^9\) ‘I’ stands both for the Interviewer, and for the researcher, the ‘I’ ego of this dissertation.

\(^10\) My age during the interviews.
the leading positions within the angola hierarchy are low in comparison to that of men as we will see later in chapter four. Aitamurto writes that it is common also for religious organisations and communities to have a membership consisting mainly of women who nevertheless do not usually gain access to the leading, decision-making, positions within the communities (Aitamurto 2010: 199).

Many other features describing the participants, such as profession or education could be listed in the table above. Many of the participants tend to work in fields completely other than what they had studied for. For example, one female who trained to be a pastry chef is working as a journalist. "Well, it's probably not a secret to you anymore that in Russia people do not study according to their calling (in life)", says F as he describes her own education and current profession:

"Considering that at the age of 18 a child just doesn't understand what he wants to do, I wanted to get a degree in history. I completed a school of a 'young historian', I went there for two years, I was reading, going on archeological expeditions. But my parents decided that a worthy higher education for me will be in economics. Because it's prestigious, because I will be making lots of money. So I completed a degree in economics. Not one day did I spend working as an economist. As soon as I graduated, I went to an International Market Institute (laughs) and got an education in Human Resource Management. (F)"

F portrays an educational and an early career path that is applicable to many other interviewees. Several degrees are often completed to reach a bachelor's or a master's degree level, after which a job that might have little to do with any of the degrees is secured for a brief period until moving on to the next occupation. E also has several degrees:

"My first degree is from a technical college and then from a university of technology and design. I had a mixed profession... And I now have a masters in economics... Now my profession is 'chief of everything'. Well, that is, I'm a manager in sales, director of the renewable energy strand. (E)"

While the collected data enables me to describe in detail the personal backgrounds and lives of the practitioners, this is not the purpose of the ethnography. The focus is placed on relations rather than on the subjects. Moreover, vast categories like profession, ethnicity and gender often disemboby the person from her or his subtler unique ways of being in the world. For instance, being a female accountant tells us very little of Q's talkative, extroverted personality and her unique ways of gesturing, of making facial impressions and sounds. A gender studies scholar Bente Rosenbeck notes that national as well as gender identities "are not observable in their essence; they are just modes of discourse and myths, owing their effect in part to their intrinsic tinge of universality." It is "through their pervasive effect" that "these constructions become reality", according to Rosenbeck. (Rosenbeck 1998: 344.) Later on she notes that we do not merely confirm imagined entities but we also keep changing them (Rosenbeck 1998: 349). Gender, nationality and other such broad categorisations are constructed processes that are undergoing constant renewal.

Coming up with appropriate pseudonyms for the participants has been challenging. Firstly, for example, sociologist Suvi Salmenniemi uses Russian names such as, Svetlana Denisovna or Aleksandr Antonovich as pseudonyms for participants in
her ethnography (Salmenniemi 2008). In the case of my study, more than a third of the participants have Tatar, Chuvash or names of other ethnicities that are not stereotypically associated with Russian Slavic names. The capoeira practitioners have Azerbaijani, Bashkir, Chuvash, Jewish, Korean, Mari, Tatar, Ukrainian and Uzbeki ethnic roots, in addition to something that we could call Slavic Russian. Therefore, the pseudonyms would have to reflect the ethnic background of each interviewee. Secondly, several of the participants have capoeira nicknames (apelido in Portuguese) that are so widely used within the capoeira community, both offline and online, that I occasionally did not know the participant’s real name until the interview. Most of the capoeira nicknames are Portuguese but some are also Russian. The pseudonym would have to reflect these nuances also.

Many of the capoeiristas wanted me to either use their real names or to come up with a ‘cool apelido’ as a pseudonym. However, I decided to fully commit to the anonymity promised to participants in their informed consent forms and I was hesitant as to what would be viewed as a favourable capoeira nickname in the case of each participant. In the end, I decided to use capital latin letters to refer to each individual as the most neutral and least harmful of options. Whereas the use of numbers could dehumanise participants, letters have less negative connotations. At least in my imagination capital letters are given as names to such characters as K in Franz Kafka’s The Castle or M and Q in the James Bond films. Using capital letters as pseudonyms also has the positive effect of presenting the participants as post-gendered, post-national, post-ethnic and even post-human bodies. There are 26 letters in the English Latin alphabet (unlike the 33 letters in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet that I would have alternatively used if I had more participants) and 25 interviewed participants. Thus, I had just enough Latin letters for pseudonyms and one leftover letter ‘I’ for myself.

The Russian cities where fieldwork has been carried out are referred to by their real names. In order to make the connections of particular individuals to specific capoeira groups and cities less evident to protect the participants’ anonymity, I mainly treat all of the capoeira groups as one whole without overly distinguishing which capoeira group, in which city, is being described.

In total, I have attended 42 adults’ capoeira classes and nine capoeira events, such as performances outdoors and indoors. I have attended three Portuguese classes and 20 children’s capoeira classes. No informed consent has been given to the parents and therefore, I will not discuss the children attending capoeira classes here. One exception is a girl whom I will mention in chapter five and whose mother has received a letter of informed consent. The main reason for attending the children’s classes was to observe the adult capoeira instructors who are the participants in my study and all of whom I have interviewed.

Studying relations between bodies and practice using ethnographic methodology has been a good fit. As Tambornino notes “understanding resides in practices and thus is implicit in our activity” (Tambornino 2002: 58). The body’s modes of relation to a particular physical practice are themselves forms of understanding and can be insightfully revealed by observing and participating in that practice over a long period. The phenomenological tradition emphasises the “existential immediacy” of the lived experience that is not only mediated in language (Csordas 1994: 10–11). An ethnographic approach to research allows us precisely to experience and theoretically explore the existential immediacy of empirical situations and to do so over a long duration so as to notice certain empirical recurrences and patterns (Emerson et al. 2011: 28–29; Spradley 1980: 141–142).
‘Malina’ means raspberry in Russian and ‘malinovyi sok’ means raspberry juice. One hundred years ago, in 1917, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski "took a tram and bought raspberry juice" during his stay in Melbourne as he was carrying out fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1989: 108). In his book on drawings in fieldwork notebooks, anthropologist Michael Taussig discusses the creative process of discovery in the field. One experience or a drawing in a notebook can give rise to many associations that can be abstracted to discuss wider socio-political issues, as Taussig does with his drawing of homeless people in Medellin which is turned into a wider discussion about the displacement of peasants by the paramilitaries in Colombia. "I saw all this in the three seconds or less it took my taxi to speed past", writes Taussig about his observation of two homeless people in white nylon bags in front of a motorway tunnel. (Taussig 2011: xi–7.) It is the concrete, often very small and quick, details that are experienced, witnessed and recorded in the field that serve as the foundation for written ethnographies. It is a minor detail that Malinowski notes in his diary about taking a tram and buying raspberry juice but it immediately gives a concrete feel and image to his body and surroundings sitting in leisurely fashion on a probably rather slow tram in 1917, later drinking delicious, not the most ordinary, juice from red raspberries. Through details like these, one engages with an ethnography with all bodily senses.

1.2 NOVEMBER IN NIZHNII NOVGOROD

This ethnography has been mainly worked on in a small town, Joensuu, in Eastern Finland, where nature is more dominant than the urban space. Trees, a river, many lakes and ponds, large and small, forests and the open sky are everywhere. Irigaray writes that it is necessary "to go for walks or to remain a moment each day in the vegetal world in order to continue to breathe and to live outside of the surrounding social exploitation" (Irigaray 2002a: 50). Living in a small university town in Eastern Finland offers plenty of daily opportunities to go for walks in the vegetal world.

From my university office window, in addition to the red brick walls of the university buildings I see the sky, birches, pine and other coniferous trees. The infrastructure is functional, undecorated and simple. Once in St. Petersburg a capoeira practitioner and I were chatting in a café about Joensuu. He had been to Finland several times but had not yet visited Joensuu and he imagined what the small town is like by joking that in the centre of the town there are probably wild animals moving around in leisurely fashion. His depiction is not too far from the truth. There are indeed many birds, squirrels, hares and hedgehogs moving around also the central parts of the town. The capoeirista joked that if a brown hare were to cross a street in central Joensuu, the cars would respectfully stop and let the hare calmly pass. He said this as an obvious contrast to the Russian urban scene where, for instance, stray dogs are not infrequently driven over by fast cars and their dead bodies are left lying around on the sides of the roads. (Fieldnotes 28.4.2016.)

The urban sites of the fieldwork in Samara, St. Petersburg, Ufa and Nizhnii Novgorod are quite different to the small Finnish town as well as amongst themselves. The populations of the four Russian cities are all above one million inhabitants with a population of at least 5,2 million in St. Petersburg. The population of Finland as a whole is 5,5 million, having therefore approximately the equivalent number of inhabitants to Russia’s second largest city. From the perspective of a small Finnish
town, Samara, St. Petersburg, Ufa and Nizhnii Novgorod are large and busy places where human constructions and constructs dominate over nature. While I spent more time working on the dissertation in Finland, within the premises of the university, the empirical data was collected in Russia, and it is this environment that I focus on in this ethnography rather than that of Finland. However, the Finnish surroundings, through my everyday life here have had a significant impact on this dissertation.

In Finnish public discourse, it is frequently emphasised that Finland is a European country, guided by European values and ideals (e.g. Niinistö 2017). Russia, on the other hand, in the mainstream Finnish imagination, is frequently seen as the Eastern ‘other’: not quite European – i.e. not as developed and progressive as ‘us’ (e.g. Nyström 2016; Tolvanen 2016). Capoeiristas in Russia are often hesitant themselves about the extent to which Russia can be considered a Western state. For example, F says "Well, it's difficult to call Russia a Western country, yeah?". The Russian state, its leaders and at times even its people have been variously vilified in Western academic and media accounts throughout the Cold War and also more recently after the Russian government annexed Crimea in 2014 (e.g. Mankoff 2014; Marcus 2014). In this work, following the footsteps of ethnographers more closely than those of political scientists, I am above all interested in the "actual circumstances" (Malkki 2015: 199) of the capoeira practitioners whom I have encountered in Russia, rather than in the ongoing state-centric political contestations.

In his interview with a Thai Buddhist monk, Heidegger says that Thailand, with its continuous rich traditions and customs, in his view, is more developed than the United States with its new atomic weapons and other technology (Heidegger 1963). I agree with Heidegger's relativisation of the concept 'development', and therefore, in this text I will not be treating Russia as somehow less developed or lagging behind the Western world. Anthropologists tend to emphasise as well as critique cultural relativism in our ways of perceiving human practices and environments (e.g. Abu-Lughdon 2002). To my body that is accustomed to Finnish forests, Ufa appeared to be urban, full of traffic and long roads. But one of the capoeiristas whom I encountered there described Ufa as follows: "Here, here it's very green. In the city itself, inside (of it).", said C who had earlier lived in another Russian city in the southern Urals, called Cheliabinsk. In comparison to Cheliabinsk, Ufa is a green city while in comparison to Joensuu, it may seem to be less so.

The geographic choice of carrying out fieldwork in Russia originates from my own background. I was born in the Russian city of Saratov. Due to my father's Finnish family roots, our family migrated to Finland in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, when I was eight years old. Russian is my mother tongue and when I was studying at the university, during the master's studies of International Relations, I chose to concentrate on Russian politics and society. I also spent one year doing another master's programme of Russian Studies in St. Petersburg. For all these reasons, as I began doctoral studies in Finland in 2012, I chose an ethnographic study that would involve doing fieldwork in Russia.

I wanted to avoid Moscow and St. Petersburg in my study. Unlike most other cities and places in Russia these cities are frequently researched as well as discussed by the media and social scientists. I wanted to conduct fieldwork in places like my birth town of Saratov, smaller and less noticed than the two capitals. However, I could not completely avoid carrying out fieldwork in St. Petersburg. Due to practical financial reasons I began doing fieldwork in St. Petersburg with two brief pilot studies because of the city's proximity to the Finnish border. Later I got the funding to conduct
fieldwork also in the cities of Samara, Ufa and Nizhnii Novgorod that are further away from Finland than St. Petersburg. It is from the classes of capoeira angola in Samara and Ufa that the majority of my participant observation data comes from.

"All is bare and beautiful", I wrote on a train, nearing Bugulma station on the way from Nizhnii Novgorod to Ufa. It was November and the cold air had caused the deciduous trees to drop their leaves and reveal their trunks and branches. I had spent one week in Nizhnii Novgorod in order to meet a young woman who had moved there from Ufa and was starting to teach her own capoeira angola group in the city. I attended two of her capoeira classes and conducted an interview with her in a sushi café.

Nizhnii Novgorod is an old city built at the intersection of the Oka and the Volga rivers. The origins of the city lie in the early 13th century and its remaining kremlin (fortress) buildings on a hill date from the 15th century (DeHaan 2013: 20; Evtuhov 2011: 47).

Well, I just got into town about an hour ago
Took a look around, see which way the wind blow
(The Doors 1971)

On a Tuesday as I had time during the day to have a look around the city that I had never visited before, I climbed up the steep hill to the old kremlin. There was quiet emptiness in the air as most locals seemed to be at work and November is not a particularly touristic time for visiting the fortress. There were "unmarked, almost hidden, entrances to the kremlin" through the thick brick walls. As I rose to the top of the hill, standing next to the high walls of the fortress a vast grey view opened up from the hill onto the rivers and the city. I could see quite a few golden, or blue with white stars, domed Orthodox churches from the hill. The view onto the Volga and Soviet-Russian architecture was simultaneously familiar and new to me in the specificity of this particular city. (Fieldnotes 12.11.2013.) This is one kind of cultural environment in which the bodies of the Russian capoeira practitioners find themselves. An environment that has layers of medieval Russia, the tsarist and the Soviet legacies combined with postmodern sushi cafés of today, all in a huge geographical setting marked by ethnic mixtures such as the tatar name of the train station Bugulma suggests.

One morning, as I had arrived to Ufa from Samara by train, I got some take-away coffee and a 'tvorozhnaia sloika' (a kind of 'pain au cottage cheese') from a bakery for breakfast. I wrote that the pastry "tasted different" in Ufa than in Samara as "the tvorog" in it wasn't the kind – in small grains with a sour-y taste – that you'd find in Saratov or Samara." Rather it was "larger grained and even slightly salty" tasting (fieldnotes 7.5.2016). The differences in urban settings are not only describable in quantifiable differences in population, area sizes or other numerical figures, but are also very importantly lived in our bodies like in the distinct tastes and smells of a pastry. "The really good looking bakery" in Ufa "didn't have that distinct sweet smell around it as the bakery close to the Chernyshevskogo metro station had in St. Petersburg" earlier during my trip (fieldnotes 7.5.2016).

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11 Russian quark or cottage cheese.
In some ways the Russian context breathes a life of its own where the meanings given to bodies are not always the ones given elsewhere. As an example, one spring afternoon, two female capoeiristas and I were in F’s kitchen getting ready to eat the chicken and the salad that she had prepared for us. As I was sitting down in front of the table, F gasped that she should give us knives in addition to the forks that were already by the plates. F assumed that as a person living in Europe I eat with knife and fork rather than only with the fork as many Russians eat at home. F then told us the story of how a German man once visited her parents’ place. He was surprised that the family did not eat with forks and knives, and did not even possess knives for eating. F was very embarrassed by the European man’s reaction and it was there and then that she decided that in her own future home she would always have knives for the guests. So there we were in her and her husband’s newly acquired kitchen, eating the chicken not just with forks but also using knives. (Fieldnotes 5.5.2016.) Everyday ways of using the body, its fingers and mouth, for eating can be different in Russia and Europe as the understandings of what is proper for the body differ in these cultural contexts.

The capoeira angola practitioners in Samara, St. Petersburg, Ufa and Nizhnii Novgorod in multiple ways participate in the making of the collective imagining of an entity called ‘the Russian nation state’. They often do this by daily embodying certain cultural practices. Most of the capoeira practitioners whom I met do indeed drink lots of tea; they have a certain way of greeting guests in their homes by preparing meals for them; all of the participants speak the Russian language and therefore they embody its sounds and expressions. In this way Russianness is a very concrete, bodily feature. However, in equally many ways the bodies of the observed capoeiristas are also influenced by non-Slavic Russian cultural habits that are both local as well as global. The practitioners order sushi home on a Sunday as they stay in in their pyjamas, surfing online, buying furniture from Ikea, speaking dialects (particularly in the countryside, and especially with the elderly) and eating Russian pirozhki (pies) as much as they eat Tatar belesh (savoury pastry). Their lifestyles are inextricably marked by global, local and national linkages.

Treating Russia as a homogenous cultural context is problematic. As already mentioned, the vast geographic entity called Russia is still home to many ethnicities, even though the Soviet and Russian states have not helped many of the ethnic minorities to survive, let alone to preserve their languages among other ethnic practices (Humphrey 2002b; Vitebsky 2006: 186). Capoeiristas in Samara and Ufa would eat chak-chak, sweets made out of fried dough soaked in honey or syrup, something I never tasted during my childhood in Saratov. Some of the capoeira practitioners in Russia know Chuvash or Tatar languages and songs. Some have a Muslim background and would at least occasionally visit a mosque. Russia’s culture (contrary to the way it is frequently portrayed) extends far beyond the stereotypical Slavic images of golden-domed Orthodox churches and old Rus fortresses like the one in Nizhnii Novgorod. While many general descriptions can be and repeatedly are made about the nation state of Russia, here I will settle for more specific, local and momentary descriptions of scenes in some streets, kitchens and dance studios where the capoeiristas’ bodies practice their daily lives.

As G, T and I arrived at Inors it took a while to find a parking lot next to their new high-rise apartment building. G and T used to live in the same building, in separate staircases until T left his wife with two children and moved out. There were no visible parking lots in the deep, messy snow in front of their apartment building that evening. There were just many cars creatively parked by the side of the passage.
It took G several rounds around the large building before finding an inconvenient parking spot in the snow (photo 28.3.2014). Lock relates how anthropologist Taussig “deplores previous analyses of healing rituals that have focused exclusively on the restoration of order… and (he) talks instead of the mingling of chaos, humor, and danger – a disorder that can also be liberating and healing” (Lock 1993: 144). The way a car is parked in front of G and T’s house could be seen as disorderly or inconvenient but on the other hand it could also be taken as a flexible, free and creative way to park.

Taussig’s observations capture well the dissonance in perception that often exists between Western ethnographers studying individuals in Russia and the way the participants themselves view reality. While some Western scholars of civil society aim to find ways and avenues through which the Russian society could become more orderly (e.g. Gibson 2001; Hendley 2006), they rarely appreciate a perception that a disorderly society can be of worth and as Taussig so well puts it: “a source of liberation and healing”. While chaos and danger are perceived as negative characteristics within some Western research, Taussig rightly makes us reconsider whether these could not also be elevating, enlivening features of life.

From Ufa’s spring snow, let’s take a few steps on a street in late June Samara. It is hot in the continental steppe climate, there is white poplar fluff all over the ground. A beer kiosk on the first floor of a Khrushchevka (a type of apartment buildings constructed in the 1960’s all over the Soviet Union) has its loyal clientele standing in the front, cars are parked anywhere they can. The street blocks are long and it takes a while to carry the five litre water container from the water kiosk, and a shopping bag from the Perekrëstok shop (a chain of grocery shops called ‘The Crossing’), to the apartment on the fifth floor of an old building with no elevator.

In both Samara and Ufa, cars, colourful adverts, kiosks are everywhere. Having grown used to Finnish cleanliness, order and simplicity, I experienced some street scenes in Samara and Ufa as poverty-ridden and chaotic, but also as atmospheric and exciting, precisely because of the unplanned messiness – because of the ‘letting be’ to borrow Heidegger’s expression. Were the ethnographer to have come from larger cities, say in India or Brazil, her or his perception of the Russian context would surely be different to mine. What matters in ethnography is not only where a researcher carries out fieldwork but also from where one is coming there.

While the ethnographer chooses a certain community and or place that constitute ‘the field’ and in this way constructs it, the chosen field impacts and transforms the ethnographer through her or his daily presence there (Amit 2000). The ethnographer and the field are relational as they co-construct each other (Amit 2000: 11–12).

1.3 IDLE ANGOLEIROS

Capoeira is a practice that is believed by many to be of African and Brazilian origins (Assunção 2005: 2; Lewis 1992: 18–21). It involves collectively playing various musical instruments, singing in Portuguese and moving in pairs in ways that usually involve attacks, defenses and some neutral, dance-like, transitions. Rosa points out that many ethnographies have been written about capoeira in the past twenty years, most of which aim to cover all of the main aspects of the practice – its history, musicality, rituals and movements (Rosa 2015: 5). In this ethnography, I am focusing on the bodily aspects of the practice and specifically of its movements.
Today various styles of capoeira exist worldwide although the boundaries between different schools are flexible (Assunção 2005). The style that I examine in this dissertation is called capoeira angola. A capoeirista is a practitioner of capoeira as a whole while an angoleiro is a practitioner of the style of capoeira angola. The three groups that I studied in Samara, St. Petersburg and Ufa all practised the angola style when I began the research, however in 2016 as I was carrying out the last segment of the fieldwork, one group was in a period of transition from the angola style into contemporânea. Nevertheless, this dissertation is primarily about the angola style.

I used to practise capoeira angola for three years (2006–2009) while studying in London. As I was beginning this research it seemed fitting to study small capoeira initiatives as the dissertation was at first meant to be a study of a nascent civil society and grassroots initiatives in today’s Russia. But with time the topic of the ethnography became more empirically grounded as the focus gradually moved to the bodily aspects of capoeira as it is a thoroughly physical, kinaesthetic form of practice. The classes of capoeira angola therefore provide plenty of rich material on bodies’ relations with a practice.

Capoeira prior to the establishment of academies and different styles has a long history most likely originating from West and Central Africa, slave trade from there to urban criminality in Brazil (Assunção 2005: 7; Aula 2008: 37; Browning 1995: 93–94; Griffith 2010: 17–18; Lewis 1992: 23–29, 45–47). Capoeira was transmitted corporally and orally until the 1940’s and it is therefore difficult to make assertions about its distant past, particularly in this non-historiographical work (Taylor 2007: 82). "African cultures were primarily oral; and since African languages were not written and could not be seen, they were rendered invisible by a print-oriented and limited western perspective", writes postcolonial feminist researcher Ketu Katrak (Katrak 2006: 27). The background and the cultural mixing of capoeira will be discussed more in chapter three. For now, I will merely introduce the various styles of capoeira so that the much repeated term ‘capoeira angola’ will be clear.

Currently there are, very broadly speaking, three main styles of capoeira: angola, regional and contemporânea. The style of capoeira angola traces its norms and rules of practice to African-Brazilian mestre (master and teacher in Portuguese) Pastinha who created the first academy of capoeira angola in the 1940’s as a reaction to another style of capoeira created by mestre Bimba in the 1930’s (Assunção 2005). Bimba’s style is called regional and his was the first attempt to systematise capoeira teaching by creating an academy that was seen, by some, as an attempt to modernise and whiten capoeira (Downey 2005: 183–184). Mestre Bimba created movement sequences carried out to the sound of berimbaus and pandeiros (Assunção 2005: 137) – musical instruments that will be described in the next chapter. Ethnomusicologist Ulla Silvennoinen writes that Bimba’s style transformed the game of capoeira to become more aggressive and acrobatic, as the rhythm of the music also became faster (Silvennoinen 2007: 49).

*Mestre Bimba took a playful pastime, a spontaneous activity of men who were idle on streets and beaches and therefore, maligned by mainstream society, and altered it into a more respectable sport and martial art (Almeida et al. 2013: 1347).*

Pastinha’s aim of establishing an academy of capoeira angola in the 1940’s was to preserve African elements of ritual, play, slowness, groundedness and cunningness in a game of capoeira that he and later on “Afrocentric traditionalists” especially in

*Capoeira angola it’s not just to sway your leg around, to hit someone in the face. Yes, it can be like that but firstly, well, if capoeira contemporânea yeah it’s more about show or sports then capoeira angola it’s this, well like a cultural well like, a cultural side of Brazil. (E)*

Capoeira contemporânea is the latest style, or series of styles, to emerge in Brazil during the 1960’s and 1970’s. It mixes elements of capoeira regional and angola and produces what historian Matthias Röhrig Assunção calls a hybrid (Assunção 2005: 199). It is schools of capoeira regional and contemporânea that today have formal events called *batizados*, the so called ‘baptism ceremonies’, where practitioners may receive belts of initiation and thereafter, belts of graduation (Aceti 2013: 148; Lewis 1992: 69–70; Stephens & Delamont 2006b). Contemporânea styles of capoeira are often downplayed by the practitioners of angola as the more commercial, hierarchical forms of the game (e.g. in Aceti 2013: 153). “If, for example, looking at it from an entrepreneurial perspective, yeah? Then capoeira angola it’s just a failure. It’s a minus. Minus. And on the other hand: (there is) contemporânea” says O. He suggests that the style of capoeira angola is not economically profitable for its organisers and instructors, in alleged contrast to the contemporânea style. It is the fast, acrobatic and combative capoeira that is usually seen in global adverts, computer games and films.

Capoeira angola could be characterised as the more subversive style of capoeira in the face of dominant global hegemonies. The somewhat idle style of capoeira angola is often linked to myths and stories of cool capoeiristas ‘back in the days’. Capoeira players in the early twentieth century Brazil, were above all "non-white men historically associated with violence, roguery, or idleness” (Rosa 2015: 133). Downey writes that capoeira in the 1920’s state of Bahia in Brazil was described as the activity of “vadiar” (vagrancy or idleness, Downey 2005: 132–133) when the local authorities were persecuting the practitioners. Rosa, in turn, notes that it is only "until very recently" that "events and activities relating to capoeira” have become associated with profitable work rather than with "roguery and idleness” (Rosa 2015: 100).

The verb ‘vadiar’ means to idle or to hang out and it was applied to capoeiristas "possibly because of players' loose swaying" in a game of capoeira, specifically in the movement called ginga that will be described in the next chapter (Downey 2005: 59–60, 180). There is a certain "gratuity of the game", as researcher of comparative literature, Camille Dumoulié, puts it, in the way that angoleiros' bodies carry themselves in capoeira movements (Dumoulié 2010: 14). Downey notes, following Marcel Mauss' work, that the posture of a body shapes a practitioner’s overall character in the long run (Downey 2005: 131). In the case of capoeira angola, Downey suggests that a practitioner gradually becomes "more cunning, treacherous, playful, supple, artistic, quick witted, and aware of the body" (Downey 2005: 131). Rather than merely developing a muscular, fit or slim body, capoeira angola contributes to the overall transformation of the body’s character. The idle capoeiristas can be perceived as being oppositional bodies to achievement centred sports as well as jobholding (Silvennoinen 2007: 50; Capoeira 2002: 198).

The style of capoeira angola is perhaps much too idle to be a global success story in a fast-paced, efficient and competitive social environment. Borrowing Heidegger’s terminology, I would describe regional and contemporânea styles of
Capoeira as more calculative and less meditative bodily practices. When talking about thought, Heidegger writes that "calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself" (Heidegger 1966: 46). The styles of capoeira regional and contemporânea do not allow their players physically to stop, to collect themselves during a game, for instance, by suspending their bodies in a handstand or playfully pausing in a less demanding posture. Capoeira angola, in contrast, enables a body to engage in non-combative behavior as it has room for playfulness and clumsiness, room to take one's time and room for bodily simplicity and groundedness. "Meditative thinking", writes Heidegger "demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas" (Heidegger 1966: 53). Angoleiros are often taught to see different options of movements in a physical game so that they can spontaneously react in various cunning, unexpected ways to an attack, rather than learn a 'one-track course' of movement.

Like Arendt and the idle ethnographer who challenge the ideals of speed, efficiency, incessant productivity, capoeira angola too offers an embodied, artistic critique of society. "The metaphorical revelation of capoeira is to show that the supposedly civilized, moral and policed world is a permanent state of warfare in which cunning and might-is-right prevail. Capoeira reveals what society hypocritically hides." (Dumoulié 2010: 18.) From this perspective, to borrow phenomenologist body scholar Jaana Parviainen's phrase related to choreographies of resistance, capoeira angola bodies "interrogate the embodied moral limits of our society" (Parviainen 2010: 325).

Musicality, and at times also spirituality, play an intrinsic role in capoeira angola. There is more emphasis on oral history and tradition in angola compared to regional and contemporânea styles. (Assunção 2005: 196–208; Lewis 1992: 103–115.) However, my aim is not to idealise any one style of capoeira above others. At times, capoeira regional is referred to as pure martial art in a derogatory manner by angoleiros. But of course, martial art as a category is not uniform and does not always imply overt competition (Channon & Jennings on the varieties of martial arts, 2014: 774). Just as the other styles of capoeira are not uni-dimensional and homogenous so is angola full of contradictions of its own. The style of capoeira angola will be critically reflected upon throughout the next chapters.

Capoeira angola is an unevenly spread transnational practice that has what anthropologist Eriksen refers to as "a selective cultural geography" (Eriksen 2007b: 157). According to sociologists Sara Delamont and Neil Stephens, capoeira began to spread worldwide in the 1970's as Brazilians were "relocating to the rest of the world" (Delamont & Stephens 2008: 60). Today, capoeira angola can be found in places like Maputo, Tel Aviv, Tokyo and Xalapa (Rosa 2015: 100).

In Russia the first group of capoeira angola emerged in Moscow around 2002. As a practitioner in Brazil I encountered angoleiros from Moscow but I have not included the Moscow group into this research in order to focus on bodies found outside of the Russian capital. N describes how capoeira angola began in Russia:

*N: As far as I understand, probably everything began after all in Moscow and it all began with one female.
...She has lived in Brazil for five or six years now. And I’ve talked with her there many times, she told me about it but I just don’t remember anymore.
...I: When did she begin to practise angola in Moscow?*

*N: ... I think somewhere around the year 2002, something like that.*
The capoeira groups in Samara and St. Petersburg were especially aided by an instructor from Moscow who visited them and gave capoeira angola classes. According to N, he was the female initiator’s student in Moscow. I had met this rather well-known Russian angola instructor once in Brazil in 2007 during a capoeira angola seminar, not suspecting that I would be mentioning him in a dissertation ten years later. E tells how this instructor helped their group in its early stages:

*He truly really, really, helped us, our group. He just provided invaluable help for our development. … And when we would say to him “Come over to visit us, give us a workshop”, he would say: “OK, guys, I’ll come over, you just pay for my train and that’s it, I don’t need anything else.” Well, we’d ask “What, maybe we should buy you a gift?” He’d say “No need. Just the train and somewhere to crash for the night.”* (E)

Unlike most transnational instructors of capoeira angola who tend to charge their participants for workshops, the instructor from Moscow taught a couple of groups of angola in other Russian cities free of charge.

*Oh God, how it was! I’m remembering now, it was, it… It was THE MOST non-commercial enterprise from all the possible ones in the world. It was free training, in some tiny hall. Tiny hall, small. It was such a completely – without any separation, like instructor – none. Everything was on friendly basis, communication.* (O)

Angoleiros in Russia fit the role of a free-spirited vagabond especially prior to settling down with a family. Many of the participants, particularly during their student years, would spend time outdoors hiking or going for picnics when not studying. E talks about how he would spend his free time prior to becoming a father and also thereafter:

*I used to love doing lots of different things before. For example, going hiking and doing tourism by walking. That is, when you go out, walking, walking, then depending on how many days you’re walking, you can also spend a night somewhere. Like, campfire, special atmosphere, guitar, tea under spruces. What else? I also like to construct lego … Yes, now with my son, he inherited my love (for it) and now we have loads of lego. … Well, I love to spend time with my family in general.* (E)

Many of the participants would tell tales of idle travels and the adventures of their student days, frequently positioning them in opposition to their current family or working lives, as E does in his quote. In their daily home routines, the angoleiros whom I observed, can hardly be characterised as idlers. They tend to wake up early in the mornings to have a speedy breakfast and leave to work where they spend the entire day as busy jobholders. It was particularly the few capoeiristas at whose apartments I was staying during fieldwork whose everyday lives I could observe and participate in.

Global interconnectedness has ushered the Russian angoleiros in Samara and Ufa into something new and unknown since 2006 and 2007. L is one of the youngest capoeiristas whom I encountered in the field. She has Mari ethnic roots, pretty, curly hair and a very slim figure:
I: What new has capoeira brought into your life during the past year and a half?
L: I became much more self-confident, I started speaking louder. (laughter) Well, I gained weight ... finally gained some mass... I found friends. Finally. Because before, I used to be a loner. Well, I couldn’t interact with same aged people as myself.

L studies very hard in order to pass school exams and to secure a good place in higher education. She was still undecided about going to medical school when I met her for the last time. She is no idler but she is a loner like many other capoeira angola practitioners seem to be: "In fact, before practising capoeira, I was such a pretty closed off person”, says another female, S, whom I will describe in more detail in chapter four. A male angoleiro also describes the difficulties he had socialising verbally when younger:

That I can now easily interact here with you, in front of a recorder, that’s a big progress for me. When I went to capoeira for the first time, when I was fourteen, I was completely clenched up. I would face others with difficulty, especially persons of the opposite sex. That I would talk to someone, well just to talk to someone for me, well, it just didn’t work out. (Y)

Like dance, capoeira is a practice that does not require much talking. Instead, it is music and bodily movements that guide the practice. The capoeiristas do however need to learn how to sing in Portuguese which is a challenge for many of the Russian practitioners as we will see in chapter three.

Capoeira angola groups in Russia could be seen as informal collectives. We very rarely spoke about politics with the participants in the field but when we did the typical attitude towards the state and its authorities was indifference or cynicism. One angoleiro told me over tea that the representatives of the Russian state "there in Moscow" have an outdated mentality to which this young man could not relate. He considered the mentality to be a trace of the Soviet past which continues into the present through Russian elites, most of whom have connections to the intelligence services and a deeply ingrained sense of militaristic paranoia. The capoeirista was of the opinion that it is futile to engage with or to actively resist individuals with such an archaic way of thinking. (Fieldnotes 31.5.2016.) Capoeira angola practitioners seem to focus on their own initiatives without interacting with local authorities in whom they, like the majority of the Russian population, appear to have little trust (Ledeneva 2006: 187, 191). The potential social resistance of Russian angoleiros will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

1.4 SOLITARY SOCIAL SCIENTIST

Participant observation is an aspect of the ethnographic methodology that I especially enjoy: sitting on the side, taking notes and thinking in peace, rather than being the focus of attention myself. Equally, I enjoy interviewing others as I can pose questions, sit back and listen to what another person has to say. "As a rule, people with less privilege are more reflexive about their actions that are those with more privilege. Thus, because women occupy a subordinate status, they may be more reflexive about gender." (Martin 2003: 357.) Similarly, it could be argued that more extroverted
individuals enjoy a privileged status in a globalised networked society whereas more introverted people are in a subordinated status. If we follow sociologist Patricia Yancey Martin’s logic, the subordination of introverts could partly explain why I as a more introverted researcher am especially reflexive of this feature. In addition, I am also a white woman and during the research process I have been reflexive of gender and race both in the field and outside of it.

My own gender, race, as well as many other qualities, have certainly played a role during the fieldwork in how I was perceived and approached by female and male practitioners of capoeira. On a very daily, bodily level, men in Samara and Ufa would often greet each other by shaking hands but it would be very unusual for a female to shake the hand of a man in an informal encounter. As I read feminist texts outside of and in the field, I became increasingly aware of such mundane gestures and their potential wider social meanings.

With time and many diverse readings, I gradually also became more attentive to whose texts I was reading – both from the viewpoint of gender and culture. While I began my ethnographic research with works written predominantly by white European or American men, with time I began intentionally reading more works written by women and whenever possible, those written by non-Anglo-Saxon female authors in a search for subordinate and alternative academic voices.

Despite the English language of this dissertation my cultural background is that of the southern Volga where I was born, to a Russian mother and a father of Finnish origins. Since our family’s move to Finland in 1994, I have been thoroughly Westernised, in my bodily-emotional-mental conduct.

*The west is the best*
*The west is the best*
*Get here, and we’ll do the rest*
*(The Doors 1967)*

With the development of this ethnography I have become increasingly critical of my own Western subjectivity in dealing with cultures found in Russia, Africa and Brazil.

As with the perceived idleness of an ethnographer in the field, I have tried to see introversion, being a female of some ‘peripheral’ cultures (to use Hannerz’s jargon e.g. in Hannerz 1989) as assets that challenge the Western patriarchal structures with white, European-American, often extroverted, males being at the top of the hierarchy at least if measured in economic wealth and political influence. Tsing notes that from a perspective of a world divided into centre-periphery relations, proposed by thinkers like anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, the study of peripheral places and phenomena can be hamstrung (Tsing 2005: 3). She writes that “if world centers provide the dynamic impetus for global change, why even study more peripheral places?” (Tsing 2005: 3). Capoeiristas in Russia often express the impression that they live in peripheral places in comparison to, for example, Europeans. N says that it is important for a practitioner to be known in the wider transnational community of capoeira:

*In Europe, there everything is probably much closer and there people (from different capoeira groups) manage to see each other more often. But we here, we’re a bit isolated, that’s why we need to be known in Brazil, for example. (N)*
While European capoeiristas have the advantage of living densely, near many other angola groups, N like some other angoleiros, sees that Russian groups are spread out very thinly over a huge territory.

A research topic is a political and an ethical choice (Skeggs 2001: 434). It shows which phenomena and places a researcher wishes to highlight. Here I intentionally bring to the fore beings and phenomena that are subjugated in a Western patriarchal setting. Anthropologist Malkki recommends that we should not be "too quick to suppose that we know" what certain practices do. She also encourages researchers to let go of the "urge to dismiss, to trivialise" (Malkki 2015: 202). Such insights orient an ethnographer to be as open-minded as possible towards her or his encounters and experiences, sensitively to consider different views and ways of being instead of immediately dismissing them. This implies a respectful and a somewhat reserved attitude on the part of the ethnographer towards the topic she or he decides to explore. Aitamurto notes that a researcher often has to consider how to combine a respectful attitude towards the participants with a critical academic perspective (Aitamurto 2010: 200). This tension also defined my fieldwork in Russia related for instance, to discussions on gender with the participants.

According to feminist philosopher, Elizabeth Grosz, "the question of what is to be done" is the hallmark of ethics (Grosz 2017: 1). Issues related to research ethics arise throughout a research process. As researchers of public health Sarah Bernays and Tim Rhodes note, research ethics is a "process of negotiation in context" (Rhodes & Bernays 2014: 137). Each new study with its unique combination of methods, empirical and theoretical focuses, time and place, poses unique ethical dilemmas. Existing ethical codes of conduct rarely answer directly how each and every phase of research should be ideally conducted (Gobo 2008: 136; Kelman 1982: 91). Instead of being absolute, ethical principles in research are constantly being negotiated and reflected upon (Kimmel 1988: 35).

The methodology of ethnography, in its dominant mode of participant observation, necessarily infringes upon the privacy of the participants in a study, due to the nature of the researcher's involvement in their daily lives. Respect for participants' privacy is among the cornerstones of research ethics (Kelman 1982: 48). However, understandings of privacy are culturally specific (Kelman 1982: 60). During fieldwork in Russia I would occasionally live with some of the participants and at other times I would stay in a hostel. Both types of accommodation posed challenges to my relations with the participants. On the one hand, living in what was usually a small apartment alongside one or two capoeiristas meant influencing their daily routines in a way that could be disturbing for the participants in my research, particularly in the context of longer stays lasting over a week. On the other hand, the Russian participants usually had a very strong sense of hospitality and felt the need to accommodate their guests. By sometimes opting to stay in a hostel I challenged the participants' habit of giving shelter to other angoleiros, as they seemed to count me as one of the capoeiristas (while noting that I was there to research their practice).

I have also been challenged by other central principles and practices of research ethics. Confidentiality and anonymity posed problems like those mentioned earlier in the case of pseudonyms, the difficulty involved in coming up with the optimal names that would preserve the participants' anonymity. It was also not always easy to preserve the confidentiality of all field data during the fieldwork partly due to cultural factors. Many of the interviewees did not mind their capoeira friends staying around for an interview to listen to our discussions. Participants would often casually come up to me
during a capoeira class to look at my notes (also in Delamont 2005: 315). Sometimes I would be directly asked what others have said about particular topics during their interviews or informal discussions with me. I have tried to avoid all possible rumours and talking behind other capoeiristas’ backs while aiming at the same time to be as open as possible when talking to the participants. Despite all the attempts not to cause direct or indirect harm to any of the participants, like any research, my fieldwork presence has certainly caused inconveniences to the participants.

Consumption of the participants’ time is perhaps the most recurring inconvenience for the capoeiristas involved in my research. Both in the field and outside of it, via the Internet, I have taken up the participants’ valuable time to answer my questions, to discuss issues that are primarily of importance for my research rather than for their immediate daily lives. Many of the participants have very little free time as they are overworked, often returning home very late in the evenings. As the research progressed, an increasing number of capoeiristas also began to have children, thus, having even less personal time.

Once my presence in the field caused unexpected stress to one of the participants in a capoeira class. It was a children’s class and one of the little girls got scared of me sitting on the side just watching them. She started crying and left the room to go to her mother or grandmother. Later on I found out that the girl had stopped attending capoeira classes altogether after the incident. Kelman notes that the mere presence of an uninvolved observer can cause stress, and therefore harm, to some of the participants (Kelman 1982: 81). The teacher of the children’s class many times thereafter reassured me that there was not much that we could have done to avert the situation of the little girl getting scared of me. “Kids are just like that sometimes”, he would say, as a father himself of a four-year-old daughter.

An ethnographer’s presence in the field can also bring benefits to the participants. One benefit of talking with the participants and of carrying out interviews with them is that the participants get to tell their story. Some of the more talkative capoeiristas particularly seemed to enjoy having the chance to give an interview where someone would listen to them and ask them questions. One capoeirista was in fact so talkative during the interview that approximately forty minutes into the conversation we were still discussing themes that were among the first of many on my list. This is the exceptional interview that I have not transcribed in full because particularly its first half was spent on childhood stories of the interviewee rather than on the topic of capoeira. F recognised her own talkativeness as she noted “I can talk like this for long. I just need the opportunity to talk”. She works in a bank interviewing potential future employees. Thus, F’s daily tasks include asking others all sorts of questions: “It's just that usually I ask questions and I always so want for someone to ask me (laughs).” Participants like F rarely have the chance to discuss their childhood, youth and impressions about their lives for an hour or two. A listening ethnographer’s presence in the field enables for stories not only to be told but also to be heard.

When pondering how a researcher might methodologically approach the topic of vibrant matter, Bennett suggests that “what seems to be needed is a certain willingness to appear naïve or foolish” (Bennett 2010a: xiii). Ethnographers traditionally go into the field in order to learn from their participants in research (Spradley 1980: 3). This learning process often involves asking many questions about the meaning of the most basic concepts and practices, thus, frequently making the researcher appear naïve in the eyes of the participants (Spradley 1980: 4). An ethnographer constantly asks what anthropologist Jean Briggs calls “idiotic Kapluna questions” in reference
to her fieldwork with the Inuit who referred to her as Kapluna or "white" (Briggs in Visweswaran 1994: 23). When I asked participant K why someone would deliberately burn down the decorative (yet usually very run down) wooden houses in Samara’s Old Town, K gave me an almost incredulous look, as if he could not understand my question. The reason for the burning of old houses was to build new, large apartment blocks instead, to replace the small old homes that take up expensive square meters right in the city’s centre. When I continued to ask how could the houses be intentionally burnt at night when there are (often elderly) people sleeping in them, K’s disbelief continued. "No one cares here," he said. Strangers’ – perhaps especially old, poor people’s – lives do not matter, money does. This was so obvious in K’s view that he was amazed at my naiveté. (Fieldnotes 10.7.2013.) In order to learn, to find out, ethnographers often appear foolish in the field.

The presence of a Western researcher in a non-Western environment has been the traditional set up within ethnography since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gobo 2008: 7–8). Even though I have been born in Russia and raised in a Russian family, my moving to Finland at the age of eight was often interpreted as me being an outsider, 'the foreign other' in Russia, both by most participants and other people whom I encountered in the field. Regardless of the inconveniences posed by my, outsider’s, presence in the field to some of the participants, I was very warmly and kindly received by everyone. Aitamurto reflects that a good reception in the field can often be attributed to the kinds of groups that are being studied. In the case of her work, she studied religious radnoverie collectives in Russia that according to Aitamurto are “marginal, even stigmatized” groups which makes their participants allegedly particularly willing to talk to someone, like a researcher, in order to explain their movement, to express and clarify their worldview that is at times misunderstood by the wider public. (Aitamurto 2010: 194.) Capoeira angola groups in Russia are similarly small and marginal.

Throughout the ethnographic research process, I struggled to clearly explain why I chose to study specifically capoeira angola groups in Russia. To my own surprise, I found quite a concise answer to this question in my own diary reflections, written while carrying out fieldwork in Russia, in response to Vered Amit’s book Constructing the Field:

*On a personal level, I so much enjoy their company… They are so relaxed, humble and funny! Not at all egoistic or competitive. I wish I could be friends with them on regular basis. Already when I met them for the first time when living in St. Petersburg, I really liked them, the atmosphere of their group. In a way they inspired me to study capoeira angola groups in Russia. (30.4.2016).*

It was several Russian practitioners of capoeira angola whose way of being appealed to me so much so that I decided to write an ethnography of "their kind". Feeling "visceral empathy" with others, as Downey calls it (Downey 2005: 211). Thus, the motivation for choosing the example of capoeira angola in Russia, as an ethnographic case, derives primarily from feelings of affection. In retrospect, I can come up with no better reason for studying something.

Certainly feelings of affection or empathy towards some participants can raise questions about the accuracy of ethnographic research. However, the capoeira angola group that inspired me to carry out the research is the group that I researched the least for this ethnography. I only conducted pilot studies in St. Petersburg while my main fieldwork took place in the cities of Samara and Ufa where I encountered
capoeira practitioners whom I had never met before and towards whom I had no pre-existing affections or aversions. Nevertheless, ethnographic research is never fully objective and the researcher as a living being always has preferences towards some places, events and participants (Gobo 2008: 142). Ethnographies provide what could be termed as 'situated knowledge', that is "the understanding that all knowledge is partial, local, temporal and historically specific" (following Haraway in Salmenniemi 2008: 26–27). An ethnographer is never an impartial observer (Salmenniemi 2008: 29).

In today's academia "the body itself has increasingly become 'an instrument of research'' (Paterson 2013: 128). Ethnographers with direct participation in the field describe their own bodily experiences, for instance, in capoeira classes (e.g. Browning 1995, Downey 2005, Griffith 2010, Lewis 1992, Reis 2005). I too participated in some capoeira classes in Russia and experienced the arduous training with my own muscles, emotions, skin and breathing, which in turn influenced my fieldnotes and ideas about the research. At times when the physical training of capoeira became too tough for me I would jump from a participant’s role into that of a researcher. On one occasion the class was instructed first to perform a handstand and then to walk across the floor on the palms of their hands. "She takes photos when she doesn’t want to participate!", said a female capoeirista jokingly to the group, as I tried to get out of this exercise. (Fieldnotes 14.11.2013.) In this sense, I was more genuinely a researcher, the outsider, during the fieldwork than a participant and an insider.

1.5 FOLDING THE PAGES

Circular movement is not only characteristic to ethnography and capoeira but also to social theorising that turns and returns to corporeality in a movement that is revealing of how "our embodied existence" has been "submerged and forgotten" in social theory even though it has never been submerged in practice (Blackman 2008: 53). This is to say that trends in social sciences are spiral-like, gradually returning to what is near to then once again venture out into the distance, constantly oscillating between the micro and the macro.

The body accompanies the researcher both into the field and into the office as "the body is never simply left behind within academic study" (Blackman 2008: 6). Reading and engaging in theoretical thought is as embodied a practice as doing fieldwork. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed describes the bodily work of a researcher: "In repeating the work of typing, my body comes to feel a certain way. My neck gets sore, and I stretch to ease the discomfort. I pull my shoulders back every now and then..." (Ahmed 2010: 247). Typing work is a bodily practice that involves its own peculiarities like the sore neck mentioned by Ahmed. Practices like capoeira angola are certainly especially physical as they involve tough bodily movements as well as communication through movement, but this does not make an acrobatic practice more bodily than the practice of sitting in front of a computer. They merely involve different uses of the body. As sociologist Marcel Mauss famously notes, every way in which our body is in this world is a technique (Mauss 1973: 71–72).

When I read texts I tend to fold their page corners so that the corner points at the sentence that I found especially interesting. Many articles and chapters I read for this dissertation have only a few corners folded while some books have the majority of pages folded in some direction. At the later stages of this research, it has mainly been anthropological, phenomenological and new materialist writings on
the body that have caught my attention and suffered most from page-folding at my hands. Moreover, I began to pay increasing attention to postcolonialist and feminist critiques of social theories and practices as the ethnography developed.

For a feminist ethnography to challenge patriarchal ways of doing research, it is important to highlight relationality not only in the research question and style of writing but also in theoretical choices. Instead of using one theoretical perspective on body, I build a conversation between different kinds of theorists so as to highlight that our knowledge of body is situated, multiple and divergent. Distinct theorists of body challenge and complement each other’s work. In a feminist move I do not prioritise one theoretical viewpoint over another. Relations in-between theories are treated horizontally rather than hierarchically (Irigaray on betweenness e.g. 1996a: 130–133; 2001).

None of the theoretical perspectives discussed in this section are monoliths. Each theoretical strand is sustained by unique thinkers who leave particular traces on social scientific and philosophical thought. As with the broad notions of East and West, I use notions like anthropology of dance, phenomenology of body and new materialism as facilitating devices rather than as unchanging descriptions of theoretical realities. A theoretician like Hannah Arendt or Rosi Braidotti is not fixedly a philosopher, a political theorist, a feminist or a new materialist but interchangeably an embodiment of many different, inter-woven, strands of thought.

Sociologist Bryan Turner has noted that "both the German tradition of philosophical anthropology and Merleau-Ponty’s work, grounded in Husserlian philosophy point toward a phenomenology of embodiment that is relevant to the social sciences" (in Lock 1993: 137). Discussing Turner’s views, anthropologist Margaret Lock writes that phenomenological theory in anthropology has been used to challenge the existing cognitive and linguistic interpretations of bodily experience in the discipline (Lock 1993: 137). Anthropological, phenomenological as well as other theoretical views on the body can be thoroughly intertwined in their concepts, assumptions and methods.

Transdisciplinary and Inter-Cultural Perspectives

Throughout this research process, my thinking has been influenced by a variety of transdisciplinary theories such as texts on cultural creolisation, transnationalism and globalisation (e.g. Eriksen 2003 and 2007; Maffesoli 1996; Tsing 2005; see Lipiäinen 2015b). Postcolonial thinker Ania Loomba writes that "postcolonial studies have been preoccupied with issues of hybridity, creolisation, mestizaje, in-betweenness, diasporas and liminality, with the mobility and cross-overs of ideas and identities generated by colonialism" (Loomba 1998: 173). This ethnography has been influenced by many of the theoretical concepts identified by Loomba, in one way or another, as we will see particularly in chapter three.

As my research progressed I became increasingly interested in the body. Transdisciplinary area of body studies includes anthropology, cultural studies, philosophy, psychology, somatics and sociology (Blackman 2008: 7). Out of these disciplines, I will most extensively focus on anthropological, new materialist as well as phenomenological and proprioceptive interpretations of the body. According to Blackman, the turn to the body has encouraged social and cultural theorists to focus on "bodily practices such as physical exercise, meditation, sexuality, and eating" (Bennett 2010a: xi), among other things. I have become particularly interested in inter-cultural bodily practice.
Anthropological and sociological literature on capoeira, Russian and Brazilian societies, outside of the bodily focus, is also significant for this work as it provides both empirical and theoretical insights into the practice and the socio-cultural contexts of this ethnography. Out of the increasingly rich literature on capoeira, I will especially use anthropologist Greg Downey’s work as an important reference point throughout this ethnography, on both an empirical and a theoretical level. Downey discusses bodily experiences in capoeira in several of his texts and he deals with these from a phenomenological perspective. Downey is also an active practitioner of capoeira, unlike myself, which allows him to provide a valuable phenomenological bodily perspective on capoeira “from the inside out” as he puts it (Downey 2005: 20).

In his book Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art Downey notes at the outset that he is not examining the “meaning or social importance” of capoeira as a cultural practice (Downey 2005: 19). He understands meaning to be “references, symbolic significance, or discursive sense”. Downey does not believe that extending anthropological sense of meaning to embodied experiences is particularly helpful, and leaving meaning aside he prefers to focus phenomenologically on “the things themselves”, or the essences, as philosopher Edmund Husserl advocates. (Downey 2005: 18–19.) The essences of capoeira for Downey are the “cartwheels, kicks, rhythms, songs, exercises, and rituals” (Downey 2005: 19). In this text, less emphasis is placed on essences and more on how the participants’ bodies relate to the cartwheels, kicks, rhythms, songs, exercises, and rituals.

Downey importantly argues that it is not only our interpretations of bodily experiences or their meanings that vary with cultural “techniques of the body” (Mauss 1973). Our very experiences – prior to any articulation – vary across cultures and between individuals engaged in different practices (Downey 2005: 33). It is crucial to consider influences of culture and practice not only in our empirical investigations but equally, or perhaps even more importantly, in our theoretical investigations. Anthropologists like Henrietta Moore remind us that our very building blocks in research – the thoughts and words that we use – “derive from Western society, and, as such […] are the products of a particular intellectual tradition and of a specific historical trajectory”. Theoretical thought stems from bodily experiences. Fundamental concepts within the Western imagination like ‘nature’, ‘culture’, ‘woman’, ‘man’, are culturally specific ways of imagining and categorising social reality. (Moore 1988: 19.) Of course, colonisation and thereafter Westernisation of much of the world has meant that many vocabularies and understandings have been transformed under Western influences (Moore on the transformation of gender relations 2010: 33).

While phenomenology of body has been a predominantly European tradition of thought I use thinkers like Klemola as well as various anthropologists and hybrid social scientists who consider the body from various cultural perspectives. Csordas is among the thinkers who aims to combine anthropological and phenomenological thinking about the body in what he calls ‘cultural phenomenology of body’, something that involves “an analysis of culture and self from the standpoint of embodiment” (Csordas 1999: 105). Despite the attempts here to be culturally sensitive and not to impose Western subjectivities onto African, Brazilian or Russian contexts too strongly, this work is nevertheless primarily a Western one. The text is written in English and uses Western concepts in order to analyse social reality. Non-Western texts and thinkers are unfortunately used here primarily in “juxtaposition to, or offering a critique of, European works”, to paraphrase Loomba, rather than in their own right (Loomba 1998: xv). Most of the authors that I refer to are Westerners or of mixed Western-
Restern origins, so-called 'halfies' (Abu-Lughod 1993: 39–40) like myself. Nonetheless, following transdisciplinary works on postcolonialism and 'the subaltern', I want to also recover "the perspectives of marginalised people", "be they women, non-whites, non-Europeans, the lower classes" (Loomba 1998: 231), introverts or practitioners of unusual practices in seemingly peripheral locations.

Phenomenology of Body

Phenomenological research "usually takes as its starting point the lived experience of particular individuals" (Rouhiainen 2015: 11). According to sociologist Jack Katz and Csordas, "anthropology and philosophy often ask the same questions, though the former insists on engaging them in light of the empirical data of ethnography" (Katz & Csordas 2003: 278). While ethnographic research concentrates on lived experiences of individuals, groups and communities in the field, phenomenology of body provides the theoretical discussion for considering empirical experiences from a broader, more abstract, perspective. For instance, Klemola discusses many specific, grounded examples of bodily practices in his works informed by phenomenological and existential philosophy (Klemola 1990, 1998, 2004). Parviainen suggests that "phenomenologists have developed a theory of the experiential body, the body as we experience it" (Parviainen 1998: 33).

Phenomenology is also, writes Sheets-Johnstone, a "methodological practice and discipline" (Sheets-Johnstone 2014: 202). It is a rather recent branch of Western philosophy that through thinkers like Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty has emphasised the importance of studying immediate, lived, experience in philosophy from the early twentieth century onwards. However, it is worth considering the remark of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

Phenomenology has been practiced, with or without the name, for many centuries. When Hindu and Buddhist philosophers reflected on states of consciousness achieved in a variety of meditative states, they were practising phenomenology. When Descartes, Hume and Kant characterised states of perception, thought and imagination, they were practising phenomenology. (SEP 2013: 6.)

Eastern bodily practices and philosophy have from their early beginnings been based on immediate bodily experience (Klemola 2004: 88). Whether such theories-practices can be called 'phenomenology', as the encyclopedia suggests, is an open question.

Merleau-Ponty was the first of the Western phenomenologists to discuss the connection of body and mind thoroughly while Husserl only briefly touched upon the issue and Heidegger explicitly dealt very little with the body (Aho 2005; Carman 1999; Klemola 2004: 89; Parkes 1987: 11–12). However, a key social theorist of the body, Turner, argues that "twentieth-century interest in the body in philosophy, cultural studies and sociology cannot be addressed without recognition of the impact of Martin Heidegger's Being and Time of 1926" (Turner 2008: 227). Heidegger's thinking, in addition to being a modified continuation of Husserl's phenomenology, is often portrayed as one of the early bridges between Western and Eastern philosophies (Parkes 1987: 1–2). Although Heidegger almost never explicitly refers to Buddhism and Taoism in his texts, his thinking has arguably been influenced by them, especially during the latter part of his career (Parkes 1987). Indeed, themes like spontaneity, the
way or path and letting be are central and recurrent in Heidegger's late thinking as they are, for example, in the key Taoist text *Tao Te Ching*. Heidegger's student Arendt in turn has focused on the topic of new beginnings or initiatives that she also sees as arising spontaneously (Arendt 1958: 177–178).

From a postcolonialist perspective it may seem bewildering that thorough thinkers like Heidegger would not consult non-Western works in their phenomenological research. However, Heidegger's generation of thinkers was often not comfortable with discussing and quoting texts (e.g. *Tao Te Ching* which Heidegger began to translate into German with Hsiao) that were written in a language that the European thinkers themselves did not master (Parkes 1987: 12–13). It is precisely due to his desire for thoroughness and accuracy that Heidegger has not made his thinking more explicitly linked to Taoism or Buddhism – so as not to misinterpret the ancient texts. My insistence on at least mentioning and keeping non-Western works constantly in mind is an effort "to expand the boundaries of what is usually accepted as theory" in the Western context (Katrak 2006: 5). The use of authors like Lao-Tzu and Klemola throughout this dissertation can serve this purpose in my view.

Phenomenologists are interested in how we experience the world and what kinds of meanings we assign to phenomena or as Bullington puts it: "how human beings perceive, understand and live the world" (Bullington 2013: 20; also Heidegger 1962: 57–60). According to Bullington, "phenomenology does not study the objective world as such but rather the subjective foundations for being able to experience the world" (Bullington 2013: 19). In this respect, the emergence of phenomenology provided an alternative epistemology to the objectivistic point of view that had dominated Western academia (Bullington 2013: 20). "The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation", states Heidegger (1962: 61). This is also a key method within much of ethnographic description (Spradley 1980: 72). The phenomenological focus is placed on the individual, rather than the masses, and on the interpretation of her or his own, personal experiences. Here, ethnographic focus on groups and communities slightly parts ways from a more individualistic phenomenological focus.

Merleau-Ponty's work has strongly influenced contemporary researchers' understanding of the human body. His phenomenology of the body argues for "the return to experience" and he suggests that bodily experiences cannot be studied objectively as the human body is not a purely material object (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 103–111). As Bullington succinctly puts it, Merleau-Ponty does not investigate, nor describe "the objective body, in its materiality, but the subjective, lived body, in its constant 'dialogue' with the world" (Bullington 2013: 26). Merleau-Ponty criticises the scientists of his time, like psychologists, for trying to study the human body by reducing it to an object like a pen or an ashtray (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Phenomenologists therefore, propose that we focus on our direct, subjective, experiences of the world, prior to their representation or so called objectification.

Klemola cautions those who work in the phenomenological tradition of the risk of overwriting things, of 'discovering' more in an experience than it contains in the embodied practice (Klemola 2004: 11). This has to be particularly taken into account in ethnographic research where the observed actions of others are filtered through the fieldworker's interpretations. Interviews help the researcher to better understand the embodied experiences of the participants. Klemola, who discusses early phenomenologists' work with the benefit of hindsight, critiques Western phenomenology of the body for its roughness, for the way it examines the everyday body as if it is static, without paying much attention to what Klemola calls the
'contemplative body', the body that senses proprioceptively, consisting ultimately of energy. The relationship of body-mind is dynamic, according to Klemola, and can be developed with practice. (Klemola 2004: 51.) Such phenomenological views on the body are closely in line with the most recent new materialist works on the topic.

**New Materialism**

New materialism builds upon previous materialist, linguistic and cultural understandings of the body in a revised, transdisciplinary understanding of matter. For thinkers associated with the new materialist turn, such as Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Bruno Latour, "matter is lively, vibrant, dynamic". Material is therefore seen not as solid or inert but on the contrary as a self-organising process or force with "its own energies" and transformation. (Coole 2013: 453, 456.) Such an understanding of matter has significant implications for how new materialist thinkers envision the body. It suggests that everything in and around us (if this distinction can even be made) is living. Not only plants, animals and humans but also minerals like metal are full of vitality according to philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (in Coole 2013: 457; Bennett 2010a). Not only are our bodies living, agentic organisms or ecosystems, but they are permeable to all forms of life. This kind of understanding of body-phenomena can quite drastically open our minds to imagining new kinds of intersubjective relations. "New materialism recognises agency as being distributed across a far greater range of entities and processes than had formerly been imagined," as it involves the exploration of "a true intermeshing" of phenomena-matter (Coole 2013: 457). Unlike phenomenology, new materialism aims to overcome the primacy of human-centric subjectivity (Coole 2013: 458).

Coole writes that the new materialist ontology "recognises the way concepts and experience, meaning and matter, emerge historically and reciprocally as embodied actors immerse themselves in and engage with/within material and social environments" and in this way "it reopens the real to social scientific inquiry" (Coole 2013: 455). Since new materialists are intrigued by "real phenomena", the consideration of ethno-socio-eco-logical details plays an important role in their research (Coole 2013: 454). In this way, ethnography as an embodied, participatory research approach is well-suited to the new materialist agenda.

Real phenomena are seen as unstable, indeterminate assemblages and hybrids (Coole 2013: 454–455). New materialism is tied closely to the legacy of vitalist thinkers such as Henri Bergson, Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. in Åsberg & Rönnblom 2016) whose ideas are often combined with current natural scientific findings in recent works on body. Frequently this means further recognition of the complexity of matter and bodies, as "for post-classical physics matter has become considerably more elusive (one might even say more immaterial) and complex" (Coole & Frost 2010: 5).

New materialist perspectives aim to avoid dualisms such as human/nonhuman, social/natural or subject/object, and rather concentrate on the "entwining of phenomena that have historically been classified as distinct" (Coole 2013: 454). Coole’s term ‘historical’ seems to suggest ‘Western’, as not all cultures have engaged in dualist ways of thinking. Braidotti notes that the social constructivist approach has for example, been based on a clear distinction between the given (nature) and the humanly constructed (culture) (Braidotti 2013: 2). New materialists aim to think beyond such distinctions. Many other scholarly traditions have also discussed and
critiqued dualistic thinking prior to the new materialist turn. As just one example, feminist thinkers like Moore, have in detail discussed dualisms like culture versus nature in relation to gender formation, challenging assumptions that women are, for instance, more 'natural' than the allegedly more 'cultural' men (Moore 1988: 13–21).

Some thinkers see bodily experience as important for new materialist sensitivities and call for "a more phenomenological approach to embodiment" within new materialism (Coole & Frost 2010: 19, 29). For example, political theorist William E. Connolly transports the central phenomenological concept of experience into new materialist explorations of the body (Connolly 2010). Therefore, phenomenological and new materialist approaches to body and practice do not need to be treated as antagonistic or incompatible. On the contrary, I will allow both strands of thinking about bodies and bodily practices to run through this ethnography, occasionally intertwining with each other.

Unlike some new materialists who aim to engage with various discourses on the body, philosopher Bruno Latour is critical of phenomenological views. According to Latour, phenomenology reproduces the "usual discussions about dualism and holism" by adopting the view of "subjective embodiment", thus taking one side of the discussion, in opposition to the positivist scientific attitude (Latour 2004: 206, 208). Latour suggests that instead of focusing either on the physiological or on the phenomenological body we should theorise the body in a new way. He proposes looking at our bodies as "learning to be affected" through the introduction of new experiences, which make the body increasingly aware of differences in the surrounding world (Latour 2004: 209). Latour gives the example of training courses in the perfume industry where individuals' noses learn to distinguish increasingly subtle differences in chemical odours. Our perception of the world becomes increasingly differentiated through the body's "learning to be affected". In this way Latour combines both empirical examples and bodily experiences without reducing his scientific focus to either one. (Latour 2004.)

Latour argues that "there is nothing especially interesting, deep, profound, worthwhile in a subject 'by itself'". It is rather through interaction with others and our ever more sophisticated technology that our bodies become increasingly sensitive and full of meanings. (Latour 2004: 210.) This expresses a relational point of view on the body's becoming. Latour's interactionist view on what is "especially interesting, deep and profound" runs somewhat contrary to both Eastern and Western thought on contemplation as a self-sufficient, worthwhile activity (e.g. Arendt 1971: 6–8; Heidegger 1966: 46–47; Klemola 2004; Lao-Tzu 1993). As Arendt puts it "the silent dialogue of me with myself, is sheer activity of the mind combined with complete immobility of the body" and then she quotes Cato "never am I more active than when I do nothing" (Arendt 1971: 122–123).

To the accounts praising silent contemplation without words, Latour replies: "Really? Why do you wish to be dead? For myself, I want to be alive and thus I want more words, more controversies, more artificial settings, more instruments, so as to become sensitive to even more differences." (Latour 2004: 211–212.) Latour's desire for 'more' seems problematic in a global environment that suffers from ecological unsustainability. Latour praises 'becoming more' in the following way: 'no subjectivity, no introspection, no native feeling can be any match for the fabulous proliferation of affects and effects that a body learns when being processed by a hospital (Pignarre, 1995). Far from being less, you become more." (Latour 2004: 227.) In contrast, I build my thinking on the body following predominantly the ideas of thinkers like sociologist
Ann Game, Heidegger, Klemola and Lao-Tzu, all of whom emphasise becoming less, in terms of ego, ambitions and desires. This certainly does not mean being dead in their views: quite the contrary. By treating the body as "an unreliable, wavering and limited human apparatus" (Latour 2004: 2008, in reference to the nose), I wonder if Latour overlooks the unlimited capacities of the body that thinkers like Bennett view to be "a cosmos of lively materiality".

Many phenomenologists and feminist new materialist thinkers provide sensitive accounts of the body through a non-anthropocentric orientation that "conceives of matter itself as lively and exhibiting agency" (e.g. Coole & Frost 2010: 7; also Klemola 2004). A post-anthropocentric perspective is a distinguishing feature of new materialist theory in comparison to historical materialism (Bennett 2010a: xvi). Bennett is curious about the human and non-human relational capacities in her much discussed *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010). What kinds of relations are available to us in our "post-human present"? Braidotti also asks (Braidotti 2006: 203). The emergence of new types of relations is an important topic for material feminists, as it is also for this ethnography.

There are many ways of embracing non-anthropocentrism within new materialist thinking. Haraway for example, argues that "we are compost, not posthuman" as she refers to beings as 'critters' that "compose and decompose each other" (Haraway 2015b: vii). Waste, its management and agentic capacities are important themes in neo materialist thought that is concerned about the current state of the environment (e.g. Bennett 2010a; Parikka 2012). It seems important to participate in recent discussions that address some of our basic assumptions about the human subject so as to critique them in a constructive manner (Roberts 2012: 2514). Descartes' binary between the human subject who is creative and material objects that can allegedly be freely mastered by humans has "fuelled an unsustainable anthropocentrism culminating in unparalleled consumption and the uncertainties of global environmental change" (Roberts 2012: 2514). If our understanding of matter transforms into a less anthropocentric direction, then perhaps our relations to matter, including our bodies, will become less destructive.

Braidotti critically points out that our current conception of rights is constructed around the human species (Braidotti 2013: 1). "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (UDHR Article I). The opening of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a good example of a human-centric account of rights that emphasises reason above other bodily faculties and that focuses on male-centric understanding of humanity in the form of brotherhood. The environmentally unsustainable state of the world today suggests that our understanding of universal rights ought to be extended beyond humans to include not only all animals but also vegetative and mineral matter. Certainly the universal conception of a human must also go beyond mind and male-centric understandings. According to Haraway, our sense of community must be enlarged, in order to include not only humans but also "animals, plants, cells, bacteria and the earth as a whole" (Braidotti 2006: 200). A non-anthropocentric perspective does not imply indifference towards, much less the dehumanisation of, humans. Rather, it expands our sense of community and belonging. (Braidotti 2013: 190–191.)

A non-anthropocentric view is not necessarily that new. For example, the basis of Buddhist ethics is non-anthropocentric as it takes all feeling beings to be capable of suffering (Klemola 2004: 244). Hemmingway’s quotation that opens this dissertation is a reference to porpoises, not humans. In *The Old Man and the Sea* Hemingway
(patriarchically) describes a porpoise couple: ""They are good,"" he said. ""They play and make jokes and love one another. They are our brothers like the flying fish."" (Hemingway 2004: 35.) In very concrete terms we are relatives to and related to animals and all of our surroundings. Our bodies can learn a great deal from the bodies of 'other' creatures and elements by engaging in practices, like capoeira angola, that bring us closer to the animalistic and vegetative worlds (Lipiäinen forthcoming).

**Proprioceptive Practices**

Many social scientific studies on the body focus on violence, sickness, pain and other types of suffering as well as on sexuality and looks of the body (Lipiäinen 2017). This can be seen as part of what Ortner calls a 'dark turn' in (for instance) anthropological research, meaning a tendency to fetishise suffering (Ortner 2016: 58). Negative portrayals of the body reveal only some aspects, albeit certainly important ones, of what is experienced and practised by the body. We also have daily experiences both of positive bodily emotions and sensations, and also of many undramatic, neutral sensations. Most of our bodily experiences are in fact so quiet that we rarely pay any attention to them (Klemola 2004: 86–87; Shusterman 2008: 6–7). The waking of the body, the cultural rituals involved in morning grooming (e.g. Miner’s study of 'Nacirema' 1956), our sitting postures during the day, our gestures and facial expressions while talking, are all usually left unnoticed in much of social research. Focusing on mundane features of the body is precisely the work for an ethnographer who studies the everyday details that go unnoticed by most, rather than the special events that are noticed and discussed by many.

Merleau-Ponty writes about the body that "to say that it is always near me, always there for me, is to say that it is never really in front of me" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 104). We see our own bodies in full only by means of reflections or images. In this respect, even in an autoethnography, a researcher can never directly, visually, observe her or his own body (paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty 2002: 104). However, we can feel our bodies in their entirety without mediations like a mirror or thought. Proprioception refers to "our own bodily sense of self" (Downey 2005: 45). Philosopher Thomas Hanna refers to a body that is perceived from a first-person perspective as 'soma' whereas he suggests that a body perceived from a third-person perspective can be referred to as the 'body' (Hanna 1991: 31). Philosopher and author on body consciousness, Richard Shusterman, understands soma to mean "a living, feeling, sentient body rather than a mere physical body that could be devoid of life and sensation" (Shusterman 2008: 1). Such an understanding of soma is very similar to phenomenological conceptions of body.

Klemola suggests that Shusterman aims to re-introduce practical bodily exercises into philosophy in order to assist the researcher to take care of her- or himself as well as to understand, to know her- or himself better (Klemola 2004: 278). Concepts and theories can only take us so far in a study of bodily experiences (Klemola 2004: 290). This is why ethnographic data is crucial, as it allows us to access bodily experiences not only through text but also through particular moments in time when bodily practice has been directly witnessed or even experienced by the ethnographer. Klemola's work is helpful firstly in bridging some of the East – West divides in current thought about the body, and secondly as a mode of thought thoroughly embodied in practice. Klemola himself is a practitioner of various Eastern as well as culturally hybrid (e.g. asahi) bodily practices.
and he allows these to colour his academic interpretations of the body (Klemola 1998, 2004). This is why I find Klemola’s phenomenological insights to be especially fitting for transdisciplinary body studies in a time of technological global interconnectedness, as his narrative is both sensitive to culture and lived bodily practices.

Blackman notes that one focus of research on the somatically felt body is “on forgotten thinkers or forgotten ideas in the work of thinkers that have taken up a place in social theory” (Blackman 2008: 52, 54). In addition to forgotten European thinkers, there are whole non-Western traditions and philosophies that have not received much attention in Western-centric thinking about the body. I specifically have ancient texts like Tao Te Ching and The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali here in mind. Such works are too quickly relegated to being ‘spiritual’ or ‘mystical’ texts that have no relevance for Western social theory and body studies. However, upon close examination, such non-Western texts are highly relevant to today’s theorising of body as a multiple process. There are some Western body scholars who use concepts derived from Buddhism, like Game in her study on horse-human relations, where she draws on Buddhist thinking in order to “develop a kind of ‘sensitive feel’ where you can connect in very subtle ways with those around you” (cited in Blackman 2008: 9; Game 2001). This is a wonderful approach to relations and bodies that serves as one theoretical inspiration in this ethnography.

Discourses on the somatically felt body, as one area of body theory, have a bottom-up approach to the body that attempt to experientially ground it. This approach tends to start with “lived felt experience and then attempt to tie the production of our lived materiality to broader cultural and scientific narratives and practices”. (Blackman 2008: 103.) I will attempt to develop this ethnography in a similar manner, beginning first with the lived experiences of capoeira angola and thereafter discussing the broader socio-cultural narratives of the practice. Tambornino believes that “confining oneself to a single dimension of corporeality, without tracing its relations to other dimensions – is insufficient” (Tambornino 2002: 136). This is why I will not only focus on the immediate bodily sensations experienced in capoeira angola classes, discussed in chapter two, but will also consider the wider socio-cultural context of these sensations and their authoritative voices in chapters three and four respectively. The aim is to provide a contextualised narrative of body-practice relations of capoeira angola in Russia.

### 1.6 HOMESICK

In his fieldwork diary, Malinowski constantly oscillates from “feeling marvellous” and planning to settle in the South Seas to feeling rotten, “all morning I dozed and read obscure stories”, and wanting to go back home to Europe (Malinowski 1989: 22, 79, 93).

> I’m just an animal looking for a home...
> Home is where I want to be
> Pick me up and turn me around
> (Talking Heads 1983)

Anthropologist Thorsten Gieser writes that in order to answer certain questions "we must forsake the philosopher’s armchair for the ethnographer’s field" (Gieser 2008: 314). The armchair has mainly negative connotations for anthropologists (e.g. in Sera-Shriar 2014; Tedlock 1991: 82). Being home is also something reprehensible from the perspective of a jobholders’ society, just like idleness. An efficient, neoliberal, jobholder is always out and about promoting her- or himself like an enterprise (Scharff
Not only ethnographers but academics in general are expected to be transnationally mobile these days, leaving their homes, potentially their families, for lengthy periods of time.

Capoeiristas too are compelled to be globally mobile. Sociologist Sara Delamont describes how practitioners are encouraged by their teachers to attend capoeira workshops and conferences around the world and to act Brazilian in their capoeira encounters (Delamont 2005: 311, 315).

As an antithesis to early anthropologists, who travelled far, Lao-Tzu remarks: "The further you travel, the less you know" (Lao-Tzu 1993: 47). He advocates staying put instead, ensuring that one's home and daily habits are in order (Lao-Tzu 1993: 80). I am not suggesting that all global mobility is excessive but rather that the problem with a mass society, as Arendt, Heidegger and Benjamin call it, is that it does not allow for individuals to develop into their unique selves but forces certain trends upon everyone with disregard to individual differences. Paradoxically the society that praises individualism formally, on a mass level, in reality aims to create uniform subjects (Arendt 1958: 41, 58).

In the field, an ethnographer often waits for a concrete return home. Spending one month away from home was almost unbearable for me at the end of some fieldwork periods as all I could think about was home and the familiar people, practices and places there. Patiently waiting is a recurring theme in Heidegger's later work (Heidegger 1966; Klemola 2004: 29; Pattison 2013: 5). It is a waiting for nothing in specific, perhaps some sort of a return as Lao-Tzu and Tavi put it (Lao-Tzu 1993: 16; Tavi 2004: 45; Tavi 2014: 141–142). At times, an ethnographer who is seemingly far away from home can find a home in her or his body, while sitting, contemplating from the backseat of a car.

Home, is where I want to be
But I guess I'm already there
(Talking Heads 1983)

Assmuth, notes that "the ethnographic approach entails a slow, long-term, engaged, complicated and personal research work" (Assmuth 2015), emphasising the gradualness of the research process. Reflecting the long-term slowness and the continual hesitations involved in an ethnographic research process I have drifted (rather than explicitly decided) into structuring this text into five rather long chapters. "My possibilities at any moment in the ongoing present are not explicit", writes Sheets-Johnstone, "and neither is my choosing" (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 487). Instead of producing many short sections that offer easily consumable reading, this dissertation is perhaps tedious. It was neither written quickly, nor intended for rapid consumption. This text intentionally engages in "slow circling around the events", in a rounded, soft structure (Bahri 2003: 207). In the next three chapters I will address the question of how capoeira angola practice relates to the bodies of its practitioners in Russia by focusing on capoeira classes, their wider transnational environment and the mechanisms of bodily control that are dominant in this environment. The last chapter of the ethnography will pull the strings together in an attempt to draw some conclusions.
The practice of capoeira angola and the bodies engaged in it in Russia coalesce above all in weekly capoeira classes. The regular classes as well as the less regular capoeira events bring several Russian bodies and the African-Brazilian practice physically together. This is why the classes that have been observed in several Russian cities will be described in detail in this chapter. The detailed description is also presented so as not to treat culture only "from the neck up" (Blackman 2008: 7). The nuances of how the classes are structured, and the varieties of bodily movements and interactions involved in them, are revealing of how the bodies and the practice interact with each other on a micro-level.

Prior to describing the capoeira classes, the bodily aspects of capoeira angola will be introduced from the perspective of anthropology of body and dance as well as other transdisciplinary body studies. From these theoretical perspectives we will notice how capoeira angola classes combine unlikely bodies and practice in a way that poses challenges for both. The bodies of practitioners in Russia are not always easily compatible with the capoeira angola movements, their logic and aesthetics. Grounding this chapter also in a post-anthropocentric ontology (Coole & Frost 2010: 20), I begin it by discussing the 'natural' environments of this ethnography.
Samara and Ufa are landlocked cities. Both are located next to rivers, Ufa by the Belaia\(^{12}\) and Ufa rivers and Samara on the bank of the Volga. I spent my early childhood summers in our family dacha (summer cottage) right by the beautiful Volga. Rivers, unlike oceans and seas, do not have the same constant waves. Many movements of capoeira angola imitate the ocean's endless waves and creatures. Ginga is the most fundamental movement in capoeira. (Lewis 1992: 97; Willson 2001: 22.) In it the body sways like a wave: back and forth, from side to side, relaxed, soft, yet treacherous and powerful. Much like the first ocean wave that I encountered on a beach in Rio de Janeiro – it knocked me off my feet. It may look fun but it is no joke. "This moment of contact with an element," write sociologists and anthropologists Andrew Metcalfe and Ann Game as their interviewees discuss the feel of sand and ocean waves, leads to "a change in bodily being" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 304).

The initiators of capoeira were variously familiar with the ocean waves: in their homes on the coasts of West and South Africa, in slave ships that carried them across the Atlantic to ports such as Salvador da Bahia (Assunção 2005: 38–43, 96–98; Browning 1995: 92; Lewis 1992: 22–23, 54). Philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel describes how:

> The sight of the sea frees us inwardly, not in spite of but because of the fact that in its rushing up only to recede, its receding only to rise again, in the play and counterplay of its waves, the whole of life is stylised to the simplest expression of its dynamic, quite free from all reality which one may experience and from all the baggage of individual fate, whose final meaning seems nevertheless to flow into this stark picture.
> (Simmel 1971: 140)

Perhaps the sight and memories of the sea freed African slaves inwardly as they developed the art of capoeira amidst their confinement in Portuguese plantations (Assunção 2005: 37; Capoeira 2002: 113). Many capoeira songs are about the sea and its various symbolisms: "Sailor, sailor, who taught you to swim? Was it the plunging of a ship? Or was it the rolling of the sea?", say the lyrics of a capoeira song called Marinheiro Só ('Lonely Sailor', Lewis 1992: 97). "I am an arm of the sea but I am the sea without end", say the lyrics of another popular song called Paraná É (Lewis 1992: 182). Today capoeira classes, like the sight of the sea, take one's mind off at least some "baggage of individual fate":

> Sometimes when you are in a bad mood you remember the sea. You feel better knowing that the sea is out there, that somewhere is better and that you can leave all this... Capoeira was and is for me also something I can come to and forget everything, at least for one hour. Occasionally there is some mess, confusion, or difficulties at work, at home. Well, something like that. You arrive (at the class): music, friends, everyone smiling, lifting your mood. (Q)

The practice of capoeira angola is not only full of "maritime connotations" (Dumoulié 2010: 10; Lewis 1992: 97) but also references to tropical vegetation and animal life. In fact, most movements in capoeira imitate nature in one form or another. There is a "tireless harnessing of nature" in capoeira, as Dumoulié puts it (Dumoulié 2010: 5). One stands with one's hands on the ground, feet dangling in the air and in capoeira this is

\(^{12}\)Feminine form for ‘white’ in Russian.
interpreted as a banana tree. "Fixed like a tree in the sky”, to borrow a phrase from the Upanishads (Max-Muller & Navlakha 2000: 64). One of the most repeated movements in capoeira angola is the circular kick called rabo de arraia meaning stingray’s tail (Assunção 2005: 110; Lewis 1992: 117). There are no naturally growing banana trees in Samara and Ufa, no stingrays in the Volga and Belaia rivers. Natural environments surrounding capoeira’s origins and its contemporary practitioners in urban Russia are very different starting literally from the bottom of the rivers and seas. "Nature and culture are not two separate distinct entities, but rather exist in a complex relationality that is contingent and mutable", writes Blackman (Blackman 2008: 34). In this way, "material practices such as the ways we labor on, exploit, and interact with nature" are dependant on the physical type of nature that surrounds us (Coole & Frost 2010: 4).

The differences in natural surroundings are noticeable in the ways Russian capoeiristas perceive the practice. One capoeirista describes how a Brazilian mestre moves in a game of capoeira, based on videos seen of him online: "he shrinks into a, well I don’t know, a hedgehog and then turns into a huge bear", J says. Instead of referring to snakes and zebras, J describes Brazilian movements in terms of quintessentially Russian animal heroes that are instilled into the Russian imagination through early childhood fairy tales of bears, foxes, wolves and hedgehogs. The hedgehog and his bear friend are, for instance, the heroes of a wonderful Soviet cartoon "Hedgehog in the Fog". Within the new materialist turn, the mind is considered "to be a property of systems – vegetative, animal, human, ecological" (Coole 2013: 459). While a Brazilian mestre might be imitating snakes, stingrays and banana trees in his movements, a Russian practitioner perceives bears and hedgehogs in them.

In the time of global interconnectedness, geographical distances and environmental distinctions no longer prevent landlocked and maritime people from imitating one another (Eriksen 2007a: 69–71; Hannerz 1990: 237). Capoeiristas in urban Russia move in African-Brazilian ways even though their bodies may never have swum in the ocean or walked through a rainforest. This is reminiscent of Katrak’s narrative of her Indian-English childhood when she and her female classmates in Bombay had to rhapsodise over "Wordsworth’s daffodils, or Keats’ nightingale without ever having seen or heard either one" (Katrak 2006: xiv). In this respect, Russian practitioners' environments, histories and bodies fit uneasily with capoeira angola movements. Yet even in the unlikely contexts of today’s Samara and Ufa, capoeira angola classes transform individuals participating in them, starting from their bodies.

2.1 INTERPRETING THE MOVEMENTS OF CAPOEIRA

Distant cultural influences hurtle not only into our phone or computer screens but also into our bodies (Eriksen 2007a; Harvey 1989; Tsing 2005). What is it like to experience a new cultural practice in one’s body and how do those who participate in a new practice interpret its movements?

Well, obviously, I liked how my body just began developing. The strength that appeared, strength, flexibility… It’s the coolest thing when you know in the winter that if you fall, you’ll fall into a negativa. (J)

An African-Brazilian negativa helps a young male avoid injury as he slips on ice amidst cold Russian winter. A negativa is a defensive position in capoeira angola whereby one
side of the body lies close to the ground with the entire body weight resting on arms and legs, while hips and head do not touch the ground (see Picture 3). It is meant to protect a capoeirista from a kick, not from slippery ice, but Russian bodies accustomed to cold winters spontaneously adapt the *negativa* also to other purposes.

Capoeiristas as well as researchers tend to define the practice of capoeira as a mixture of dance, martial art, ritual, fight, game, among other elements (Assunção 2005: 211; Downey 2005: 7; Lewis 1992: 1; Willson 2001: 20). Because of the eclectic mix, particularly culturally sensitive anthropological writings on dance and body are relevant for understanding the movements of capoeira angola in a holistic way. Since anthropology’s starting point is the study of humans and human cultures, anthropologists of dance take it as a given that dance as a patterned, non-verbal system of movement varies greatly across cultures (Hanna 1987: 22; Kaeppler 1999: 15; Royce 2002; Sklar 2008: 86–87). What may be categorised as dance in one context can be interpreted as work, game or fight in another (Hanna 1987: 18–19, 180–181). This is highly relevant for the globalising practice of capoeira angola.

Dance anthropologists tend to view dance through the prism of cultural relativism (Kaeppler 1999: 15, 17–18; Sklar 2001: 30–32) while in capoeira classes in Russia dance is usually understood in narrower terms. When asked what he would like Russian beginners to understand better about capoeira angola, one Russian practitioner, X, hopes that people would see that “capoeira is not some ritualistic, strange dancing”. In X’s view ritualistic dancing has negative connotations. Many more participants in Russia note that capoeira does not fit into the category of dance that they are familiar with. "I, personally I, capoeira like a dance – I don’t see it like a dance", says W, and in another interview Q ponders: "Many will say ‘Is capoeira really a dance?’ Dancers for example."

A local flamenco or a hip hop dancer coming to a capoeira class in Ufa or Samara may indeed be bewildered as to where the dance elements of capoeira are hidden.

Although the language of capoeira is Portuguese, the contexts from which capoeira received its main influences in movements were not European. It is therefore unsurprising if the game of capoeira defies Western categories such as dance (Lewis 1992: 18). Rosa refers to capoeira as a "playful war dance" (Rosa 2015: 100). Dumoulié states that "capoeira is, first-off, a dance, like the African war dances", and he continues to describe it as "a synthesis of fight and dance; the gesture of combat is always one of dance, and vice versa" (Dumoulié 2010: 13). What is categorised as fight in Western terms could well be part of dance in some African collectives (Hanna 1987: 136–137). What is seen by Westerners as specialised movement could well be a continuation of everyday life in some African or African-Brazilian contexts (Hanna on Nigerian Igbo people 1987: 34). Downey points out that the movements of capoeira carried out with head on the floor "will be experienced quite differently in a population that habitually carries heavy loads atop the head" (Downey 2011: 70). We interpret the body’s practices from a certain cultural context and its many daily habits.

The head as the site for mental activity, sight and speech is a central part of the body in the patriarchal Western tradition (Blackman 2008: 85; Glenn 2004: xii; Jenks 1995). Jobholders today whose lives are dependent on the Internet could indeed be seen as talking heads and typing fingers that are not very aware of their bodies. But the head-centric view of the human is not a temporally, nor a culturally, universal perception of the body. For instance, in Japanese culture the stomach is widely seen as not only the physical but also the spiritual centre of the body, one that should be nurtured and focused on, for example, during conscious breathing in the practice of zazen (Klemola 2004: 150–151).
There is controversy concerning the origins of capoeira (Capoeira 2003: 3; Downey 2005: 8–9; Lewis 1992: 18; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 151–158). There are scholars and capoeira practitioners who stress the African roots of the practice and there are those who argue that capoeira only emerged in Brazil, albeit with diverse cultural influences (Assunção 2005: 5–7). Most authors on capoeira refer to the practice as African-Brazilian, particularly those researching the style of capoeira angola (Assunção 2005; Browning 1995; Downey 2005; Lewis 1992; Willson 2001: 20). The historical background of capoeira will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Even if capoeira as we know it today only took form in Brazil, the practice embodies many African influences. The main musical instrument of capoeira today, *berimbau*, is a single string "gourd-resonated musical bow" that is widely believed to derive from West, Central and South African cultures, undergoing transformation in Brazil (Assunção 2005: 7–8; Downey 2005: 88–89; Galm 2010: 9).

It’s first of all, an odd instrument that – that already is appealing. You want to try it and you see that it doesn’t work. But you want it to work. And then when it starts to work and you begin to play right – it’s just that when you play the berimbau right, then your awareness (/perception) changes. (E)

E goes on to compare how the change of awareness that accompanies good *berimbau* playing is similar to being inebriated. After having a beer or two, one’s perception of people, of the surroundings also alters, according to E, as one may for example, feel less inhibited in socialisation with new acquaintances. This suggests that skilful *berimbau* playing can relax the player, reducing her or his mundane inhibitions.

Anthropologists have variously contrasted so called Western systems of movement to those of African practices. Dance scholar Kariamu Welsh-Asante suggests that in comparison to Western postural and symmetrical form of movement, "African dance is polyrhythmic, polycentric, and holistic" (Welsh-Asante 2001: 144–145). Dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar writes that "African cultures emphasize auditory and proprioceptive values rather than visual ones" (Sklar 2008: 88). In capoeira a practitioner is taught above all to listen to the *berimbau* and to follow its rhythm during a game of capoeira (Downey 2005: 87). Anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce contrasts the immobile torso and pelvic area of the Scottish-Irish dance tradition to the "articulated torso and hips" in African-derived movement (Royce 2002: xvii). The torso and hips are openly visible in capoeira as the practitioners rest their hands and head on the floor, buttocks up in the air (see Picture 5). Of course so-called 'African' systems of movement are no more uniform than 'Western' systems. For instance, dance anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna notes that dance encompasses drums in some African groups, while others heavily criticise the use of drumming (Hanna 1987: 18).

While in dance anthropology, hands on the floor, slow motions in pairs, singing and drumming can be understood as a dance, in the daily Russian environment more categories are needed to describe such a practice. For a Russian body, dance, fight and drumming may seem as separate categories of bodily practice, but dance anthropologists show us that in some cultures what constitutes dancing inextricably also includes elements such as drumming or fighting. From Western or Russian perspectives, the definition of capoeira angola with notions such as fight, dance, martial art, game may give a fragmented and a messy impression of the practice, while in another cultural context, the practice of capoeira is understood holistically. This is perhaps why some *mestres* of capoeira are only able to define capoeira as capoeira – a
category in its own right (Downey 2005: 111). Practitioners in Russia are compelled to
give more fragmented definitions to the practice to make it comprehensible to others,
since capoeira as a category has little meaning in their cultural context.

Throughout this ethnography I refer to capoeira angola predominantly as a
practice, and occasionally as an art-form or a game, because these terms are more
open and neutral than dance in the English language and in the Western, as well as
Russian, imagination. Nonetheless, the theoretical framework for discussing capoeira
movements in this chapter lies primarily in anthropological literature on dance in
addition to proprioceptive, phenomenological and new materialist approaches to body.

2.2 THE AFRICAN-BRAZILIAN-RUSSIAN BODY

I’d like to use my body fully, 100 percent fully. Well, maybe it’s just this boyish desire,
maybe, I don’t know. But well, why not? Who wouldn’t want to do a somersault? It is
beautiful! You watch it and it captivates you! It’s cool when you can move like a snake,
to play around, well like angola… (Y)

One crucial contribution of capoeira angola classes in Russia is that they transform
the bodies of the practitioners. N notes that she “has never been in control of her
body” as she is now after practising capoeira for six years. Bodily changes are
significant in that they holistically transform an individual, beyond just building up
muscles or developing a better sense of balance (Shusterman 2008: 89–90). There is
an immense “richness of the affective and tactile-kinesthetic body” notes Blackman
(Blackman 2008: 53) and body scholar Jaana Parviainen and anthropologist Johanna
Aromaa write that kinaesthetic experiences act as important “sources of knowledge”
(Parviainen & Aromaa 2015: 2). We are not transformed primarily through new
thoughts but through bodily movement (Sheets-Johnstone 1999). Klemola talks about
the contemplative body that can through practice overcome bodily numbness so as to
become increasingly aware of bodily posture, movements and the body’s relationality
to gravity (Klemola 2014: 90). Emotions, perceptions of the body are all engaged in,
and potentially changed by, a practice.

It is common for body researchers to begin their work by noting that Western
(patriarchal) academia traditionally belittles the body and praises the mind (Anttila
2006: 64, 74; Kaeppler 1999: 13; Paterson 2013: 115, 128; Shusterman 2008: 3, 6, 10;
Sklar 2008: 87). Sklar writes that ”Aristotle divided the ”intellectual” or distanced
senses (sight and hearing) from the affective and proximate ones (smell, taste, touch)”,
thus creating the ground for the still dominant prioritisation of sight and hearing in
Western art (Sklar 2008: 87). It is specifically in the Western context that “vision and
hearing (aurality) are considered to be the higher […] senses, most closely aligned with
reason, thought and reflection” (Blackman 2008: 85). There is no universal prioritisation
of the senses, as different cultural traditions have different views on the very number
of bodily senses. Western thought prioritises five: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch
– above inner, proprioceptive senses (Klemola 2004: 91). Relations between bodies and
practice are influenced by these kinds of categorisations that impact how we interpret
and exercise our own bodies and their capabilities.

Shusterman, like many others, notes that the Western tradition has excessively
contrasted human mental life to bodily experiences, as if the two functioned separately
(Shusterman 2008: 3). For instance, kinaesthesia – the ”sense of movement within our
own bodies” has not been treated as a ‘sophisticated’ sense in the Western tradition when compared to aurality (Sklar 2008: 87). However, contemporary researchers, including many Western thinkers, strongly disagree with the restricted understanding of the body that prioritises the mind as well as aurality at the expense of all other bodily capabilities (e.g. Downey 2005; Merleau-Ponty 2002; Shusterman 2008). As an example, postcolonial thinker Gayatri Spivak rightly challenges the dualism of Western thought about the body by asking “where does body stop and mind begin?” (Spivak 2012: 241). Following Sheets-Johnstone’s work we could reply that the body and mind are indeed thoroughly interwoven and therefore, they are inseparable. Sheets-Johnstone writes that “there is no "mind-doing" that is separate from a "body-doing"” (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 487). The body and mind are an indivisible whole.

The way we understand and treat our bodies tells a lot about our wider social and cultural values (Malnig 2001: 271–273). Shusterman argues that:

> The dominant forms in which our culture heightens body awareness serve largely to maximise corporate profits (for the massive cosmetics, dieting, fashion, and other "body-look" industries) while reinforcing social domination and inflicting multitudes with self-aversion. (Shusterman 2008: 6).

An almost global collective concern today is how our bodies look rather than how they feel (Grogan 2008; Turner 1997: 36–37). Sklar makes a similar point to Shusterman: “In America, as perhaps in western Europe, "body consciousness" has come to refer not to somatic awareness but to creating ourselves as images, often enhanced by cosmetics, fashions, and body-shaping classes” (Sklar 2008: 88). Many Russian participants are at first attracted to capoeira classes precisely because they give them a chance to get into a better physical shape: “I decided to start taking care of myself in 2009 when I realised that it is necessary to dedicate some time to my physical form”, says T. His desire to get into good shape can be seen as a part of a wider contemporary project of constantly working on oneself, as an ongoing activity (Scharff 2016: 112). Bodies and practices interact underneath the umbrella of such wider projects.

Braidotti points out that “our era has turned visualization into the ultimate form of control” as vision has triumphed over all the other senses (Braidotti 2006: 204). Many visually impressive aspects of capoeira have been widely discussed by researchers (e.g. Delamont 2005; Downey 2011; 2012; Joseph 2008; Stephens & Delamont 2006a & 2006b; 2013). Ethnographers often pay more attention to movements of capoeira teachers and advanced students than to the beginners and their bodily experiences of the practice (e.g. Downey 2005; Lewis 1992). The photographs accompanying Downey’s and Lewis’ much-quoted books are almost exclusively of proficient male capoeira practitioners: only rarely does the visual record find a place for women or beginners in the practice (Downey 2005; Lewis 1992).

In Russia, the majority of angoleiros are at the early stages of learning capoeira, not having practised the art for more than ten years. Therefore, I will not be describing highly experienced practitioners’ capoeira bodies here. I will also intentionally pay more attention to simple and defensive movements of capoeira angola than to the showy attacks that have been dealt with elsewhere (e.g. Assunção 2005: 110; Capoeira 2003; Lewis 1992: 89–96; Stephens & Delamont 2010). While many bodies cannot do a perfect handstand or other impressive acrobatics, they nonetheless play beautiful capoeira angola games by using just a few basic movements. One mestre told us during a capoeira workshop in Rio de Janeiro in 2007 that it is far preferable for a beginner to
know three or four movements well, but to be able to carry them out with precision
than to know a bit of everything but to lack quality in every move. Therefore, instead
of describing sensationalist aspects of capoeira movements, I would like to focus
on the "subtle streams of deep delight" that "initiate radical transformations, often
burgeoning into experiences of intensely exhilarating, yet quiet, joy" (Shusterman
2008: 9) within the bodily practice of capoeira angola.

Metcalfe and Game suggest that some ritual practices do not necessarily have clear
purposes as the practice can be an end in itself (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 302). Authors
on body consciousness, movement and dance tend to disagree on whether patterned
physical activities carried out together are ordinary or eventful. Is a class of African-
Brazilian capoeira in Samara and Ufa an unusual event or a mundane routine? In the
context of a global jobholders' society where fast mental work and a static body is too
often taken as a given, any kind of movement and bodily focused activity can be seen
as an event. "Dance provides pleasure, allows a special kind of license prohibited in
everyday life", writes Hanna (Hanna 1979: 100). Somatic pleasures can also include
everyday experiences of simply "breathing, stretching and walking" (Shusterman
2008: 37). A class of capoeira angola may provide the time and space to actively notice
how the body stretches and moves. In this respect, "turning awareness inward to 'feel' one's body" is indeed to go beyond an office worker's routine (Sklar 2008: 91). A
capoeira class thus perhaps constitutes a quiet event – an hour or two that break the
routine of sitting and working but not in an extravagant manner.

By studying different systems of movement, anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler
argues that we can "learn about the social structure, politics, economics, literature, art,
philosophy, aesthetics" of a socio-cultural context (Kaeppler 1999: 17). By examining
how bodies practice capoeira in Russia, we can learn about the wider context in
which these bodies are located. Since the mind and body do not function separately,
"aesthetic dimensions of movement provide clues to differences in the way different
cultural communities structure thinking" (Sklar 2008: 98). As we study the movements
and aesthetics of Russian capoeira bodies we may notice how their wider communities
structure thinking as well as daily bodily practice. After all, we tend to renew cultural
habits with our bodies (Anttila 2006: 64). As an example, Hanna compares two different
contexts through their dance preparations: "In contrast with the diffuse kind of
movement socialization to dance in rural Ubakala, dance training in the industrialized,
technological American culture tends to be, as with our other activities, relatively
segmented and specialized" (Hanna 1979: 34). It is part of ethnographic research to tie
the observed details in the field to the wider social tendencies that cannot be observed
in their entirety, like the segmented social activities mentioned by Hanna.

Bodies increasingly move through the whole world (Browning 2010: 83; Casanova
& Jafar 2013: ix), thus challenging many of the existing "historical dance hierarchies"
(Daniel 2011: 183). Capoeira angola at once challenges some of the European-centric
dance hierarchies and also reproduces hierarchies of its own, a topic that will be
discussed in chapter four. Browning contemplates "what's proper to bodies and how
they sometimes move beyond what is ostensibly proper to them" (Browning 2010:
83). Such questions are especially relevant for bodies that are mediating inter-cultural
physical practices. Movements of capoeira angola variously challenge the propriety
of an ideal or a 'civilised' Russian body. A white Russian female moving in African-
Brazilian ways that are mainly taught by black Brazilian men may seem out of place
both in Brazil and in Russia. Is a proper body the one that fits closest to one's national
imagination? (Daniel 2011: 92).
According to Blackman’s interpretation the term "civilised body" connotes "the ways in which the body in Western societies is 'highly individualised in that it is strongly demarcated from its social and natural environments’” (Blackman 2008: 51). Japanese philosopher Yasuo Yuasa’s interpretation of “the civilised body”, in turn, suggests bodily self-cultivation (Yuasa in Shusterman 2008: 17-18). Irigaray notes that an Eastern understanding of "becoming cultivated" corresponds to "becoming spiritual through the practice of breathing" (Irigaray 2002a: 8). There is no global monopoly on the meaning of ‘civilisation’. The Western understanding of civilised often assumes that an individual is a rational being who engages in reflection rather than someone who is “swept away by smell, taste or touch” (Blackman 2008: 85). A civilised Western subject thus attempts to control her or his body – managing the body with the mind rather than letting the body guide one's behaviour, for instance, in the form of breathing.

In many respects, capoeira angola classes deconstruct Western-centric bodily ideals. Dumoulié describes the individual as "in a very vulnerable position – ass in the air – as opposed to in an upright 'rational' and 'civilized' position" during much of the practice (Dumoulié 2010: 5). Movements of capoeira angola may challenge a Western understanding of dignified and cultivated behaviour (Downey 2005: 130). The "taken-for-granted ways (i.e. habits) of experiencing, utilizing and interpreting ... bodies" (Atkinson 2003: 8) are often problematised in the encounter of capoeira angola and its practitioners in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod. It is interesting that the Russian perception of civilised behaviour is rather Western when compared to African-Brazilian aesthetics, despite the current rhetoric and formal political divide between the Russian state and the West.

Different cultural knowledge and values are negotiated through movement (Sklar 2008: 88). Even bodily movements that seem 'natural', such as birthing, are highly technical and show great variation across contexts (Browning 2010: 82). Likewise, as a socio-cultural context impacts our movement, imported movement practices influence new contexts as "we are not free from the values embedded in the movement we practice" (Kolcio 2010: 97). Russian capoeiristas' bodies are stuck somewhere in-between African-Brazilian, transnational and Russian values during classes of capoeira in Samara, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod. Their bodily conduct does not stem from any one cultural context but is rather a mediation between various cultural uses of the body. Capoeira researchers Almeida et al. suggest the possibility of a post-nationalistic body that possesses a 'kinaesthetic citizenship', meaning "an embodied connection to another nation/culture" (Almeida et al. 2013: 1354). Russian angoleiros have an embodied connection to African-Brazilian culture that is expressed most fluently through movement rather than words.

It is difficult for many Russian practitioners to describe capoeira verbally:

It is this kind of … compromise between dance and some sort of fight. Somehow like that; all blurry. I just don’t have for myself that kind of precise … more likely it is a kind of a fight but a very loyal kind, very... soft in my view. Although if you won’t dodge there … (Z)

Z hesitates to put in words what she understands capoeira to be. On the one hand, it is loyal but on the other hand, one can never trust one’s partner (also in Höfling 2006). But when asked about what attracts her to capoeira classes Z’s body-mind has no difficulty in immediately responding that something she enormously enjoys about
the classes is jumping. Unlike the culturally specific verbal categories of dance and fight, loyalty and treachery, which can be contradictory and confusing, the jumping of one’s own body is personally concrete and experiential. Z may not be verbally certain what capoeira is but she is corporeally certain that she enjoys jumping. This is why it is important to look in detail at the lived bodily experiences of the practitioners in capoeira angola classes as they are often the most revealing aspects of how bodies and practice interact.

2.3 A CLASS OF CAPOEIRA ANGOLA

I was going to go there but then last minute I got all nervous and didn’t go because I thought that I won’t be able to do anything and how will I be then? I never practised anything (physical) before and there you have to stand on your hands. (N)

N’s words suggest that she expected capoeira to demand a physically strong and an acrobatic body, the kind that N did not believe that she had or even could have. Before attending capoeira angola classes, N felt that her body “won’t be able to do anything”. Klemola writes that a participation in a certain bodily practice is in itself an ethical choice that tells us something about the participant’s preferences and worldview (Klemola 2004: 15). Since the groups of capoeira angola are very small in Russia, we could assume that not many Russians today make the choice of trying this African-Brazilian practice, a fact that already suggests something about the ethical choices that Russian youth make today.

Awful trainings (laughs)... I just came automatically and completely didn’t pay any attention to any emotions, (I just) did what others were doing. ... You have to well, suffer for one hour. And you just need to be patient and then go home and relax (laughs). (U)

U was going through a difficult period in her life when she began capoeira and it was the tough physical training that brought her relief. U was feeling “psychologically bad and when you also feel physically bad then not so, not so bad psychologically”, she says. Bodily effort seems to distract one’s thoughts. E’s bodily experiences in capoeira angola classes are in some ways opposite to those of U, thus, illustrating the wide range of bodily reactions to the practice:

I feel comfortable, like I already said, during training I feel myself comfortable. ... I feel that my body tells me "E, everything is good. Right now, everything is good with me. Before it was bad but now it’s good." ... When I have a headache – well, after all, I work in front of a computer – so I come to class, I go into a handstand and my headache goes away! (E)

Some angoleiros experience outright suffering during capoeira classes while others get immense enjoyment. In the case of both U and E, capoeira classes serve a therapeutic function in that they remedy either physiological or psychological pains and tensions through intense bodily movement.

Capoeira classes and games usually begin with the sound of the main instrument, berimbau, which Browning describes as "an eerie twang" that has “something deeply
sad and mysterious” about it (Browning 1995: 113). The instrument sets the rhythm and the overall tone of capoeira. “The centre of capoeira is where the main berimbau is”, says M. It is arguable that the usage of the berimbau in capoeira began only in the 19th century prior to which a drum was likely used to musically accompany capoeira movements (Assunção 2005: 7; Brito 2012: 104, 107). Even though it is difficult to establish the longevity of particular instruments used in capoeira, music nonetheless plays a paramount role in the practice. Music is usually played during class, either on speakers or live by the practitioners. Without music there is “emptiness in the air” as I once described a portion of capoeira class that was carried out without any music (fieldnotes 31.5.2016).

Ethnographies of capoeira tend to dedicate at least a chapter or a longer section solely to musical aspects of the practice (e.g. Downey 2005; Lewis 1992; Willson 2010). In my fieldnotes some of the most repeated keywords are indeed music-related and in many interviews music was a central topic. Several of the practitioners in Russia emphasise the music of capoeira angola as being the most pleasant or interesting aspect of the practice for them: “I came for the music – I didn’t come for the movements. That is, I see that the guys are doing something but like the key moment for me was precisely tied to the drums.”, says F. She used to play a variety of African drums prior to discovering capoeira contemporânea and it was the sound of the familiar instrument (the atabaque in capoeira) that attracted her above all to capoeira. While learning capoeira angola movements was an agony for O, he immensely enjoyed learning the songs and instrument playing from the beginning: “I began to quickly learn to play berimbau, the rhythm, singing. It was all very easy for me. It was very interesting.”, he says.

In this ethnography, I have decided to lightly include music into all of the chapters rather than heavily dedicate any one separate section to capoeira music. Tambornino notes about the treatment of the body for instance in Nietzsche’s and Arendt’s works as not being “confined neatly in their thinking” but rather being “pervasive” (Tambornino 2002: 5). So here musical aspects of capoeira angola will be pervasive, rather than confined neatly to any one part of the text. The focus of this ethnography is on bodily movement and relations so when describing capoeira classes in this chapter I concentrate primarily on physical movements of the practice that usually take up only half of a class. Most classes I observed included learning songs and instrument playing but for the present purpose I will not discuss these portions in detail. The classes of capoeira angola will be described in a chronological order of an ordinary class. Firstly, I will describe the stretching. Thereafter, the movements, sequences and playing of capoeira in pairs will be discussed.

### Stretching on the Soviet Encyclopaedia

A class of capoeira begins what Dumoulié refers to as “the physical revolution” of an individual (Dumoulié 2010: 16). It is frequently stretching that concretely begins this revolution in capoeira angola classes. The body of a Russian capoeirista begins to change as it gradually becomes more flexible. A female instructor, S, observes that “even minimal physical effort, with our contemporary sitting lifestyle, is very difficult” for beginners in capoeira angola. Beginners often lack flexibility of muscles and joints: “I am wooden”, says one beginner in class, implying that she is stiff (fieldnotes 13.3.2014). “You start to realise that you have muscles even on your back. So that you
didn't even suspect that but just here the muscles of the whole body [are involved]”, U notes. Klemola's work supports U’s words as he writes that particularly the back area of the body is not easily felt in exercises of body consciousness (Klemola 2004: 90). Relationality of capoeira angola and bodies enables the latter to become more aware of oneself.

Many of the classes I observed in Russia begin and end with warm-up and/or stretching. "The last ten minutes of class, as always, we'll have stretching", an instructor would often say (fieldnotes 11.3.2014). The word ‘razminka’ used by capoeiristas in Russian means both stretching and warming up. English speaking researchers tend to separate stretching and warm-up as having different functions and effects in sports. In a clinical study by Thacker et al. the authors conclude that stretching is useful for increasing flexibility but not necessarily for preventing injuries. Only extreme inflexibility or hyperflexibility increases the risk of injury. (Thacker et al. 2004: 375.) Researchers of sports medicine Safran et al. argue that warming up of the muscles can prevent physical injuries (Safran et al. 1989). Another sports medicine scholar, Duane Knudson, notes that stretching is most beneficial at the cool-down phase of a work-out (Knudson 1999: 25–26).

Reasons for dedicating a good deal of time for warm-up are variously explained by capoeiristas in Russia. In some classes we would stretch hands "to improve circulation in them", according to the teacher (fieldnotes 23.11.2013). Many capoeira moves are done with the palms placed on the floor with full or partial body weight resting on them. Given the versatile physical demands of capoeira, stretching, in addition to warm-up, is important for increasing the bodies' range of motility. During a pilot study in St. Petersburg I wrote in my notes: "I tried to do a ponte across the floor, got a back ache. It's difficult to just jump in during cold weather. Need to warm up first." (Fieldnotes 10.10.2012.) Ponte is Portuguese for bridge referring to the position where one is on all fours with hips in the air and stomach facing upwards. In many capoeira classes, the rolling from the bridge into an inverted position on all fours with stomach facing downwards is used to move from one end of the room to the other. The notes were taken in October when it begins to get cold in Russia and it is then particularly important to warm-up the muscles. In the Northern context, the body needs to be treated differently, according to the seasons, unlike in the more constantly warm-hot Brazil.

In one interview, as we were looking through photos of Russian capoeira groups with a more experienced practitioner, Q commented: "They are not warmed-up, there is no energy", looking at a picture of capoeiristas standing in a loose circle listening to an instructor. Warmed up bodies are associated with energy by Q. I also once wrote about an angoleiro that "his mood is slowly warming up with his body" (fieldnotes 13.3.2014) as I noticed that the participant became more cheerful during the class, the more he moved. Hence, stretching and warming up serve many different functions in a capoeira angola class, including the releasing of the body's energy and improving one's mood. The body changes not only with the seasons in Russia but also throughout the one or two-hour capoeira classes, where movement makes the body warmer, and at times more energetic.

Demanding capoeira movements and their performance in pairs make the practice prone to injuries, at least in the Westernised Russian bodies that are used to sitting in a 'civilised', undiversified manner. During one observed class a beginner broke her arm as she was playing with a male in what appeared to be a calm game. Many other participants mentioned various injuries they got during capoeira classes: "I came in
2008, I trained for about a year and a half and then in March-April I broke my leg”, says K. One female had had an injured knee for over two years when we met during my last fieldwork visit and she was wearing a large black knee pad to classes. Most angoleiros suffer from occasional injuries that, although minor, nevertheless prevent them from attending classes: "I had some breaks for a month or two when I had injuries”, N mentions.

After all, in reality we go (to capoeira) for better health! In addition to socialising and interest. So the first principle is 'not to hurt one's dear self'. I still have to live in this body (laughs) for some time. And it would be nice if I wouldn't hit my knees just on the spur of the moment, then walking with a limp afterwards and considering it my trademark. Like "It's my capoeirista trademark! All our guys are like this!" (laughs) (F)

In a typically animated, joking fashion, F discusses the importance of not injuring oneself in capoeira. Her reference to having a limp as a capoeira trademark is linked to the heroic stories that are occasionally recounted among practitioners about their victories and injuries in games of capoeira (Joseph 2008: 201). As a careful player, according to her own words, F prefers to avoid all injuries rather than having extreme stories to tell to others about injured knees or other body parts. Based on the quote, F values her own body and health more than her reputation as a fearless capoeirista. Because many capoeira movements can feel unusual to the body and difficult to imitate for a non-Brazilian beginner (Stephens & Delamont 2007; Downey 2008: 208; 2011: 73), the more familiar and immediately accessible warm-up moves offer an entrance point for some participants. The earlier mentioned Z describes how she was initially attracted to capoeira because of the warm-up movements:

And we started jumping. For me jumps during training, I don’t know, I really love to jump. And so that kind of caught me. I got such inexpressible pleasure from it. (Z)

Many of my fieldnotes mention various jumping movements done in capoeira groups: "Jumps in a circle, warming up", followed by a short walk in a circle, the so-called volta ao mundo meaning 'around the world' in Portuguese (fieldnotes 28.11.2013).

Circles and circular movements saturate everything in capoeira (Browning 1995: 89; Dumoulié 2010: 5; Lewis 1992: xxiii), including the stretching. Often stretching is done "sitting in a circle, trying to reach the toes" (fieldnotes 25.3.2014). When a dance studio or gym hall is small in size, the circle of angoleiros is tight. One such tight circle on a cold November evening included a warm-up exercise with one foot bent in front, sole of the foot on the floor, palms on the floor next to it, the other leg stretching at the back with its knee on the floor. Spinal twists followed from this position, one hand going up into the air, the head and the eyes following it. (Video 28.11.2013.) At other times there would be no sitting arrangement for the stretching movements at all: "in no order, sitting and stretching – not quite a circle, nor a check pattern” (fieldnotes 26.11.2013). The learning of capoeira angola movements is usually not rigidly nor systematically organised (to the dismay of many participants as we shall see later) in the groups studied in Russia. The thought that capoeira angola classes provide some sort of 'space of freedom' will be discussed in chapter five.

For some practitioners stretching is among the most important parts of capoeira classes: "Firstly, exactly this some kind of warming up, this change in physical activity", replies Z as to why she attends capoeira classes. This type of perception of capoeira
classes raises questions about how globalised capoeira transforms the African-Brazilian art (Aceti 2013; Assunção 2005: 209–214). Anthropologist Katya Wesolowski questions whether capoeira is becoming increasingly institutionalised as a work-out rather than an art-form? (Wesolowski 2012). Particularly when there is no Brazilian mestre to teach the subtle symbolism of the practice, as is the case in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod, classes may in fact turn into physical exercises at the expense of capoeira’s musical, ritualistic and spiritual aspects. One instructor in Russia who is attempting to professionalise his teaching of capoeira gives private classes that more than anything else offer a work-out to attendees. I once participated in one of his private classes, attended by a middle-aged businesswoman who had never been to group capoeira classes because she has no time to attend them. During the personal class, stretching took the majority of the less than one hour’s slot (fieldnotes 21.3.2014). It felt more like personal fitness training than a capoeira angola class.

C describes her motivation for attending one-on-one capoeira classes:

* I go for the personal training because there (you receive) more attention. Really, all the moves, he really looks (at) how is the leg there, are the toes stretched, how is the heel… (C)

C appreciates accurate and focused feedback on her own performance of each capoeira movement.

* Honestly speaking, I went to capoeira because of acrobatics. Because I felt that my body is already… I had gone to the gym but then, that is, I had a one-year break. And so I felt that “that’s it, I need movement”, so that everything would be stretched. (C)

It was her bodily sensations that seem to have brought C to capoeira as one year without any bodily exercises left C feeling, rather than thinking, that her body needs stretching and movement in the form of acrobatics.

Stretching takes place to capoeira music played in the background, increasingly from smartphones attached to speakers. Therefore, stretching too is led by the rhythm of berimbau, pandeirões (distinctive capoeira tambourines), the African-Brazilian drum atabaque, as well as the smaller agogô and reco-reco instruments. Female and male voices sing capoeira songs in Portuguese to the sound of these instruments. One angoleiro had moved to another Russian city where there were no capoeira angola groups. She trained for a while with a contemporânea styled capoeira group but eventually decided to start her own angola group in the city. The first few classes that she organised had no attendees and S describes how she trained on her own in the fitness studio:

* When I came alone I went through the complete training session on my own – meaning warm-up, movements... Before that I trained for a long time with guys from another group and to another kind of music. …

* … When I just come to the studio I turn on the music, that music that I love, of those masters that I like, familiar songs… (S)

Warm-up alone without capoeira angola music in the background would not be sufficient to most practitioners whose bodies are used to their movements being
accompanied by the distinct sound of the berimbau and the voices of Brazilian teachers singing (Lewis 1992: 133–134).

Stretching in classes is at times done alone, facing a mirror: "being with oneself in the mirror", without speaking to others, with eyes occasionally closed (fieldnotes 27.3.2014). There would be classes that would begin without much energy on the part of the instructor and the participants, many of whom were visibly tired after work or studies. "Same stretching sequence as always, foot rotations to the same highly monotonous beat, all are quiet", I wrote, being bored myself of observing the same scene over and over again (fieldnotes 25.3.2014). The warm-up parts of the class can sometimes seem repetitive and dull thus confirming what was earlier said about a capoeira class being a 'quiet event'. "Music is low, quiet, no talk, all looking down (heads down) in a split, stretching" (fieldnotes 18.3.2014). Following the work of dancer Ervi Sirén, Parviainen writes that boredom and frustration are essential for the revelation of new insights and genuine creativity in a bodily practice. When a body faces a dead-end, she or he has to find new directions or ways of movement. (Parviainen 2006: 232.) This is also concretely the case in the games of capoeira angola as we will see later in this chapter.

Stretching can also be a time for chatting and joking, especially when doing exercises in pairs. While in a game of capoeira angola direct physical contact is usually avoided, during stretching contact can be of use. One exercise carried out in pairs that I often observed involved two people sitting on the floor opposite each other with their legs widely spread, holding each other's hands. One person would first pull the other so that she or he would bend forward and thus stretch the lower back and inner thighs; they would then switch roles. Once there was an interesting exercise of moving one's hands around a person, partly outlining the body but occasionally doing a 'pocking' move with the hand that the other had to escape by moving the torso away, avoiding direct contact (fieldnotes 27.3.2014), "like the stream that flows round the rock" (Dumoulié 2010: 2). It is an important skill for an angoleiro to flow round rather than crash into the partner's body. The importance of evasion becomes clear once the bodies begin to play capoeira in pairs.

The way a body stretches is not uniform, nor constant, in capoeira angola classes. Yet the development in stretching is usually more easily observable than improvement in the holistic art of capoeira. K is worried that he has recently not seen development in his capoeira playing. Stretching as a performance is easier to monitor: "it's visible that today I have stretched a couple of centimetres more, went into a split better than last time", he says. It is not possible to measure development in capoeira movements and musical skills in centimetres. Although, as one group changed their style from angola to contemporânea their instructor began to measure the endurance of the participants' bodies quantitatively, for instance in the amount of seconds that a body could remain in a handstand next to a wall.

The warm-up routines are not limited to capoeira classes as some participants take them home into their everyday lives. "Physical exercises should be practised constantly and should be practised not only in the studio. So one should practice also at home," notes D. W describes how he gets 'cold turkey' if he does not practice capoeira for a while, for example, if he is at home with a flu: "I so want to move and I'm already, and I realise that I'm ill but like I [still] do ginga, standing in... And well, I stretch..." says W. A body gets addicted to movement and yearns for it when it is gone.
Leg splits were practised quite frequently in one of the group’s classes (fieldnotes 18.3.2014). A participant of the group described how he had his own stretching routine at home where he tried to improve his split:

So to put it roughly, I would set my leg on the TV, just stand there and wait for the leg to stretch. Or then I tried it three times, to take the encyclopaedia, a big Soviet Encyclopaedia, I would put five volumes on the table, throw my leg (on them) and stand. (K)

Practising capoeira angola does not only transform the meanings capoeiristas give to their bodies but also the meanings that they attribute to their surroundings, including objects like the Soviet Encyclopaedia. The young capoeiristas of the Wikipedia age seem to value the many volumes of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia more for their form than their content.

Moving in Mysterious Ways

Capoeira angola movements seem bewildering to a Russian newcomer or they do not evoke any response at all. Most participants mention that their first encounters with capoeira angola completely pass them untouched as though the movements defy existing capacities to comprehend and to retain the performance in memory. "I can’t remember anything of what was happening there at all, I mean what they were actually doing there", says H. Another male agrees: "Well when I saw angola for the first time I utterly... I utterly didn’t understand anything." The brain is unable to capture, to categorise the seen. The practice of capoeira angola cannot be fully grasped with the sense of sight alone as a more holistic bodily immersion appears to be needed. Phenomenologist and dancer Leena Rouhiainen suggests that also other types of embodied practices, such as breath awareness, need to "be experienced in order to be concretely understood". To comprehend how the cultivation of breath "can offer a means to construct interiority, integrity, and autonomy for the subject", one has to do the "breath work". (Rouhiainen 2015: 17.)

Interviewees describe how hesitant they were to try the movements of capoeira angola: "...thinking that I won’t be able to do that. Well, for example to do a cartwheel or something else", notes Q. Many observers are inhibited from trying capoeira angola movements based on impressions formed by aurality alone (Downey 2011: 75). Those who do venture out to try them are usually equally bewildered: "I couldn’t remember all these moves!" Q exclaims. "Somehow I was used to being able to move well but here... an element of shyness was present because the dance here in some ways is difficult to capture", remarks T, who used to practise ballroom dancing.

Some bodies hesitated as to how to approach capoeira angola movements as a whole:

I remember how I came out to play to this angola music ... and I couldn’t understand how I should move. I just tried to move slowly. Everyone just, everyone thought that we need to move slowly. (J)

H mentions how despite all uncertainties he immediately grasped that capoeira movements should be carried out to the rhythm of music. The music guided his body.
"Who thinks less with their head, kind of feels, yes... The skill to occasionally turn off the brain, is very useful", says H in a very explicit statement about how it is desirable, and easier, to learn capoeira with the feeling body rather than by relying solely on thoughts. H's words suggest that the interaction of capoeira angola and bodies is most fluent when it is not mediated by thoughts.

What makes the movements of capoeira angola so challenging and strange to the Russian bodies-minds? Partly it is the expectations that newcomers have about capoeira that are not necessarily met in a capoeira angola class. Most Russian participants come to an angola class after seeing a Hollywood film portraying capoeira of other styles or short videos of capoeira regional or contemporânea online. These portrayals often focus on the fast paced acrobatics of capoeira, carried out by exceptionally experienced or talented practitioners who move in visually impressive ways. "Somehow I wasn't impressed with angola. At first everyone is usually attracted to, I guess, regional where there are all those high kicks", Z notes. Others support this view by saying: "Cordão de Ouro caught me with its beauty of movement", says H. Cordão de Ouro is one of the largest and best known worldwide capoeira contemporânea groups (Assunção 2005: 206) and it is the group that one of the angola groups in Russia eventually joined.

Instructors are convinced that no outsider is attracted to the style of angola before attending the classes: "I have not seen yet a single person, well here in Russia, who probably came after seeing capoeira angola and said: "This is what I want". That just doesn't exist", G argues. A female instructor concurs:

*Capoeira angola is more peculiar because... it is tougher for people to grasp this, this unspectacular appearance. After all, people come to capoeira primarily because of its exoticism, because of its... this some sort of cool acrobatics. Everyone wants to learn to do a somersault, wants to practise something cool like that. "I practice capoeira, I can do that, that and that." But capoeira angola is more... it has a different philosophy.* (S)

The search for 'cool moves' attracts many to come to a capoeira class and some also to remain in capoeira. After five years of training angola, X says that "I won't leave until I learn to do a somersault". X describes how acrobatic movements have made his life "More fun in some way, more interesting. Unusual. I mean I can't stand on my hands at work or in a shop", he says. In a society of physically constrained bodies that move in relatively restricted ways, a wider spectrum of movement that involves putting the palms or the head on the floor seems unusual. Downey notes that if certain physical moves of capoeira are seen by Western theorists of movement as unusual it is merely because of "the peculiarities of westerners' bodies" rather than due to any universal anatomical standard (Downey 2011: 80). The socio-cultural peculiarity of Russian bodies contributes to the uneasy relations between capoeira angola and its Russian practitioners.

Instructor G describes what happens if a novice is immediately asked to follow the conventions of capoeira angola during the first classes:

*He saw capoeira regional, he came to train. It is possible to say to him already during the first (class): "So, we are not going to have any of that, you will wear shoes, you will move slowly, you will do chamadas." He will say: "Thank you, I am not interested." He will turn around and leave. That's it.* (G)
Chamada is one of the more peculiar aspects of the game of capoeira angola. Chamada, meaning ‘a call’ in Portuguese, involves a break in the game between two players. One player ‘calls’ the other usually with her or his body standing in a position with one or both hands stretched out and the other player is then supposed to carefully approach the caller and eventually put her or his palms against the palms (or occasionally against the shoulder, head or knees) of the partner. The pair then walks together back and forth before parting and continuing the game.

So you see a chamada for the first time and you think: “What is this?” Like “Why did he raise his hand? Why did he get up like that?” Yeah so: “What is this – the end of the game?” (J)

The origins and exact purposes of chamada are unclear. Key authors on capoeira dedicate many pages to discuss ‘the call’ movement but most mainly offer hypotheses as to why the motions are practised rather than definitive explanations (Assunção 2005: 114–115; Downey 2005: 106–111; Lewis 1992: 121). In this respect, G makes a good point that if a beginner is immediately asked to do movements that even experts of capoeira are unable to comprehend, the person indeed might reconsider attending the classes.

Another instructor, N, describes how she began to practise capoeira in a gym where the classes combined “some sort of aerobics with elements of capoeira and that was somehow comprehensible to people”. Participants in Russia repeatedly mention that while strictly acrobatic, martial arts or dance movements are comprehensible to local beginners, unique capoeira angola movements, such as chamada, are not. A capoeirista describes her boyfriend’s reaction, who trains contemporânea capoeira style, upon coming to a class of capoeira angola:

Above all, the traditions there are incomprehensible: to tuck in a t-shirt, to do the moves differently. The most basic moves, they begin differently. And for him already… yeah, the habit is different and he is just like: “Why this way? This is so slow, you’re squirming. Why do you do everything for so long?” (S)

The pace, the uniform, and the basic movements tend to be different in angola when compared to regional and contemporânea styles of capoeira (Assunção 2005; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 172–173). One will often see practitioners’ backs in curvy positions during a capoeira angola class, in what may not seem like a ‘good’ upright posture (photos 4.3.2014). Movements that, in the eyes of everyday Russians, or even of practitioners of other styles of capoeira, appear slow, clumsy and even ugly looking, may indeed avert some bodies from committing to the style of angola. When one of the groups in Russia switched their style to contemporânea, several group members began to make fun of their earlier curvy backs and slow movements in angola classes.

Well it is difficult to understand and here many will not try to understand, they’ll just say it’s some foolishness. But I would like people to say “Wow, look at what they can do!” (X)

Angoleiros in Russia often express frustration at not being understood by outsiders. Most practitioners would like their arduously obtained physical skills to be recognised by the public. But to an ordinary spectator in Russia the African-Brazilian movements
tend to be unfamiliar. In fact, movements of capoeira angola may even appear inappropriate in the Russian context. Angola is often played at a rather slow pace with two players moving very close to each other. Frequently one player has her or his head between another’s legs. Capoeira is practised in mixed-sex trainings which may further a sense of inappropriateness in an increasingly conservative, heteronormative national setting that is being fortified in today’s Russia (Kondakov 2014).

A beginner in capoeira must variously re-evaluate her or his bodily sensations, becoming physically more resilient and eventually undergoing “subtle physiological changes” (Downey 2011: 73). P describes her sensations during the first capoeira angola classes:

* I was dying! (laughs) I’m a person for whom P.E. in school just absolutely didn’t work out. Not at all. In school I couldn’t do anything acrobatic, nothing. I had a very bad physical foundation. Because of that it was difficult for me. (P)

In a somewhat self-deprecating manner P notes that before practising capoeira, her body was not very physically active. Like many other angoleiros whom I interviewed, P mentions how physical education (P.E.) classes in school served to decrease her confidence in her own body, while capoeira classes gradually increase one’s bodily self-esteem. This implies that capoeira classes can help some to experience their body as a strong, capable aspect of self.

It is rare to come across someone practising capoeira angola in Russia who has a strong background in sports. Perhaps the more athletic young people in Russia do not want to waste their time on “some ritualistic dancing” as X had put it. Most of the participants come to their first classes of angola without much, or often any, experience in sports, martial art or other bodily practices.

* I always thought that sports it’s something ..., especially when you’re doing some acrobatic elements (laughs). Well, some things like that that definitely something (bad) will happen… I always thought that I’m completely not a sporty person. That is, only the bicycle and that’s it. (U)

When F was born she had complications with her lungs, “That’s why it didn’t work out for me and sports until I was 18... I was sick a lot, I was quite a weak child.” F did not attend physical education classes in school because of her lung condition.

R notes that it takes courage to learn capoeira: “Learning to fight one’s, one’s fears. That too. Because, for example, to perform a difficult element is very scary”, she says. By exercising the body, one becomes gradually able to let go of some doubts and fears that are holistically embodied. As an example, it takes bodily practice to be able to turn mistakes in a capoeira game into a playful element or a beautiful movement rather than into emotional-mental embarrassment. Some of the practitioners in Russia were doing just that during their weekly practice: “tripping and making something out of it”, I wrote about a fast reaction of one angoleiro to his own near fall (fieldnotes 25.3.2014).

* When even if someone falls, either he turns all of it into a joke or he comes out of this well, awkward situation with like... well, with skill, does it so that he in contrast puts his opponent into a difficult position. It can be very interesting to watch a game like that. (B)
Mistakes and embarrassing situations in a game of capoeira are not necessarily remedied by an analytical mind but rather with a thoroughly trained body, that reacts in a fast and graceful manner before the thought processes even realise what the body is doing.

The overall endurance and fitness of the practitioners’ bodies improves in capoeira angola classes. This kind of bodily change has many implications on their daily lives:

Now I, I really realise that it has become easier for me even to, even to ride a bicycle. It became easier, I got more endurance. Breathing. Already after, let’s say, jogging or after tough exercises, I don’t get out of breath. Already, well, I can quite easily take it. (P)

It’s just that when I started practising capoeira (laughs)... different kinds of movements appeared on a completely mundane level when you just start somehow literally twirling to change direction. Unexpectedly to myself I’d stand on my heels and turn in some impressive way. Not to mention how I mopped the floor… (T)

Several interviewees point out how their daily chores such as cleaning became easier after practising capoeira. "It became easier to fix the car", X describes how he and his father were once fixing a car’s motor and X bent his arm to reach for a part, making his father very impressed with the agile movement. "It’s capoeira!" X explained to his father. In Sheets-Johnstone’s terms, the practice of capoeira impacts how bodies “explore the world in movement” (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 486). New kind of “kinetic intelligence” begins to guide Russian capoeira practitioners in daily life (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 489).

Q notes that her whole being has changed with the practice of capoeira. Classes have taught her to:

…look at ordinary things differently. Here different senses are engaged; eyes as well as ears, the body… you play instruments. Well, we could even say that capoeira is a unique perception of the world or a way of knowing, learning about the world. You begin to hear rhythm where you didn’t see it, hear it before, and to see dance where you also didn’t see it before. (Q)

The capoeirista’s words illustrate the extent to which bodily changes are inseparable from our perceptions. Q’s very perception of movement and rhythm has changed with the practice of capoeira. Such experiences are in line with somatic and phenomenological theories of movement that assume the body to be the basis for how our minds work (Anttila 2009: 84–85; Merleau-Ponty 2002).

With time, capoeiristas begin to notice increasingly subtle aspects in a game that are not obvious at first:

We, who practice capoeira already for long, we can look at a person and say that he is now playing aggressively. But an outsider will say “Wait a second, I see a person who just rolls on the floor, how can you say that he is being aggressive?” (Q)

A change from seeing a person roll on the floor to noticing emotions expressed through the person’s rolling body may not occur without one’s own embodied experience in capoeira (Morley on phenomenology 2001: 73–74). The body is indispensable not only for learning capoeira angola movements but for learning to sensitively perceive the art-form.
Capoeira Angola Movements

What are the capoeira angola movements concretely like? In many ways they are the opposite of an office worker’s habits (Downey 2005: 197; 2011: 76). Instead of sitting or standing statically in front of a computer, an angoleiro only sits on a chair while playing music, or on the ground when observing games of other players. Otherwise practitioners are supposed to move throughout the class.

*Just beautiful. Just beautiful, impressive movements, very harmonious. There is a lot that is based on rotation, on strength.*

*... That is, they have everything: balance, and emotions, rotations and some kind of demonstration, and ... well, lots!* (O)

The movements are often carried out upside down, facing another person or a mirror. “Capoeira angola play is generally done as low to the ground as possible and one plays with one’s hands on the ground with one’s feet in the air as much as one plays with one’s hands in the air and one’s feet on the ground.” (Willson 2001: 24). Here we can see the African influences in capoeira movements whereby proximity to earth is given much value in the practice (Gottschild 2010). “The earth is revered in most African cultures because that is where the ancestors reside and because the earth is the repository of the food for the people” (Welsh-Asante et al. 2010: 33). In contrast, in classical European ballet, dancers attempt to leave the ground in leaps and pointe shoes high into the air – the higher the better (Bertonoff 1963; Katzke 2014: 39). Capoeira angola is the exact opposite: the lower the better.

An angoleiro stands firmly on her or his feet. Rosa notes that "angoleiros privilege stances greater than hip-width apart and keep their knees bent as they move" (Rosa 2015: 106). The movements are well-grounded as the feet are kept wide apart, the soles of the feet fully on the ground and the legs are bent, bringing the body nearer to earth. In the national Brazilian aesthetic in the first half of the twentieth century, Rosa notes that “contrary to the ginga aesthetic, which was perceived as a "shameful" and "corrupting" way of dancing, on local stages in Brazil the balé technique has exercised a "chaste" and "ennobling" role” (Rosa 2015: 160). In an attempt to de-Africanise the downtown of Rio de Janeiro, a Municipal Theatre was opened in 1909 where European, including Russian, "modern and civilized" opera and ballet would be replicated (Rosa 2015: 160). Capoeira performances were not welcomed in the theatre at that time when capoeira was associated with "that which was primitive, immoral, irrational, child-like, or linked to the colonial past" (Rosa 2015: 161).

F came to capoeira angola classes after training capoeira contemporânea on and off for a couple of years. Within the new angola style, she notes that:

*I really missed upright movements. I constantly wanted to get up. I was thinking "Why are they down there all the time? Why so low? There’s lots of interesting stuff higher up too. Why not get up?" And I understand that this was because I had already formed some (opinions) there… Like that. And for me it was a bit wild, it seemed to me like “How is it possible to do anything down there?!” It’s now that I understand that it turns out that there’s a lot that can be done down low. (F)*

Aiming towards the earth in many ways contradicts some dominant values of Russian society today. When describing the aesthetics of villas built by post-Soviet elites in
Russia, anthropologist Caroline Humphrey points out "the remarkable verticality" of new Russian private dwellings that "rear upward in several stories, with sharply tilted roofs, pointed gables and porches" (Humphrey 2002a: 200). In a newly capitalist society, the main direction of movement is upwards into the echelons of private villas and higher wages. Humphrey suggests that contemporary architecture in today’s Russia, and in particular the preferences of elites with regard to their own homes, can be telling of the current trends in Russian cultural identity. The "thrusting verticality" of the newly built villas is "ambitious and embattled, grandiose and unfinished", according to Humphrey (Humphrey 2002a: 201).

Unlike the aspirations of a capitalist society, capoeira angola movements do not necessarily aim to grow, to reach somewhere higher. "There is a grounded aspect to capoeira. Very simple, where you, where there is no need to complicate anything", J suggests. African cultures are certainly not the only ones that give special reverence to being physically grounded. Traditional Japanese views on the body and posture is another example: “in Japanese culture people sit on the ground, eat on the ground and sleep on the ground”, writes Klemola (Klemola 2004: 200). In capoeira angola the head is very literally grounded as it is frequently used "as a fifth limb" (Downey 2011: 71). Russian newcomers are often confused by this:

> When a person comes to an already formed group, and doesn’t know anything about capoeira, it is very difficult for him to understand why we are doing some moves. Very often we are turned head down, butt up. It is very difficult to understand what for. (S)

### **Ungraspable Ginga**

Even the most basic movement of capoeira with which I began this chapter can be tough to learn and thereafter to perform in pairs:

> It was very difficult for me to memorise ginga. I mean maybe I was used to that legs criss-cross each other when walking. But here it is a triangle! … I would peek at how others do it because I got confused with the legs. (Q)

The movement *ginga* is of paramount importance in capoeira (Capoeira 2003: 62; Downey 2005: 120–123; Lewis 1992: 97). Klemola notes that in many bodily practices one has to first learn a certain basic technique before anything else (Klemola 2004: 76). *Ginga* is the basic technique in all styles of capoeira.

In *ginga*, the left foot steps behind the right one, arms protecting the face and the upper body from a potential attack, as the left foot returns next to the right one, the right in turns steps behind the left, as the arms sway from side to side, constantly protecting the upper body and head. In capoeira it is considered that the face, chest and stomach are the vulnerable body parts of a player. They are the only parts of the body that should be attacked and therefore protected in a defensive position. (Downey 2005: 139.) *Ginga* is the movement to which a capoeirista always returns. It is the constant motion that follows the music’s rhythm and allows the capoeirista to express her- or himself in an upright position (Browning 1995: 29, 121, 125). After having conducted this research, I now see ocean waves, plants swaying, animals playing and humans moving in the repetitive, apparently simple, movement of *ginga*. In my perception it is no longer just a back-and-forward stepping movement, but also comprises both human and non-human processes, combined in a concise yet deeply symbolic motion.
Oh, ginga! It’s just a catastrophe! Catastrophe. Like that. It’s the most difficult. Really. Well, I well, now in, after eight years, I only started like with a millimetre only to come closer to what, what this is… how to do it. Before that I had no – none! – understanding! Just none. It’s just awful.

… To learn to do a ginga, it’s one day. It’s easy. Everyone can do ginga. It’s the basis. Any beginner in twenty minutes will do a ginga. But that doesn’t mean yet… Because like for real, how ginga works precisely for your body… that (requires) so much awareness! Work precisely with intuition, with the brain.

… Yeah, so that is, to become that kind of cool, cool gingeiro, you have to go through really a lot. Aaa lot. I know very few people who feel ginga.

… Like I only realised after seven years that it’s necessary to keep the back straight. It took me seven years to become aware of that! So as to keep (I: Yes, I understand, yes) – it’s elementary! I had tens of examples of how to do it. I was told that but it all passed me by. (O)

Rosa notes that ginga is a movement of harmony, as "capoeira angola players deploy the ginga aesthetic in an attempt to remain "in the middle": neither too hot, violent and inquisitive nor too cold, passive, and reactive" (Rosa 2015:103). Hence, it is understandable that it takes bodies like O time to find the balance and the overall harmony of the movement.

There are many variations of ginga. One seemingly simple variation is to carry out ginga with very bent legs whereby the body stays as low as possible while still managing to do the repetitive steps. "Doing a low ginga is very tough on the legs", I wrote after participating in one of the trainings (fieldnotes 10.11.2013). In this variation the thighs grow tired surprisingly fast. Any bodily eccentricities or rigidity also "become evident in ginga, for example, in how the arms are held", I wrote during one observed capoeira class (fieldnotes 27.3.2014). By firstly observing ginga, novice angoleiro begins to understand the game of capoeira not through words, but through movements.

At times, ginga alone in a game of capoeira can be enough: "So both of his hands had those how do you call them, prosthetics, and he just did ginga and didn’t do anything else at all, just ginga. But it looked beautiful, kind of awesome", describes a practitioner who watched an online video of capoeira angola from Brazil. Despite preconceptions about capoeira’s acrobatics, the practice can be accessible to the disabled and elderly without requiring sensationalist body movements (Petry et al. 2014; Sauer & Correa 2008). Even though predominant portrayals of capoeira present the art as an extraordinarily acrobatic, explosive system of movement (e.g. in Capoeira 2003: 119; Downey 2005: 7; Joseph 2008: 207; Stephens & Delamont 2006a: 119–121), there are many humble aspects to the art-form. Dumoulié for instance refers to capoeira as "the art of dodging" (Dumoulié 2010: 6). Mastering movements of escape is pivotal in a game of capoeira even though they are not always impressive looking.

Rolê

Rolê is one of the most repeated movements in a game of capoeira angola yet it is comparatively rarely discussed or even described in literature on capoeira. Downey only describes rolê as a ‘sideways roll’ without any further descriptions and Lewis includes rolê only in an appendix list of his otherwise extremely detailed work about capoeira (Downey 2005; Lewis 1992). Most authors extensively discuss movements
such as bananeira, the distinctive handstand of capoeira, even though many practitioners of angola play capoeira for years without using the handstand in their game. But everybody uses rolê all the time: masters, beginners and everyone in between. Rolê means to roll in Portuguese. Since most movements in capoeira are circular (Browning 1995: 89), rolê is a good representative of a much wider arsenal of capoeira transitions. Some practitioners see rolê as representing a way of transitioning from one movement or posture to the next, rather than as a movement in its own right:

Rolê, it’s how? It’s rotation. Yeah? It’s not a concrete movement but it’s many movements, rotations. It can be forward, backward, it’s a broader... not some concrete movement. (O)

It is a squatting position where usually one leg is straightened in front. The hand on the side of the straightened leg is on the ground and the other hand is held in the air, bent, protecting the face, stomach and chest from a potential attack. This is the starting position. The actual movement takes place as the person rolls over so that the weight is placed on the straight leg and arm as the rest of the body rolls around to the other side of them. It is simultaneously an escape from various kicks and a frequent entrance motion into the game of capoeira angola. A rolling movement like the waves, rushing up for fun, receding from danger. It is also a handy position for picking up something from the lowest shelves in a shop: “when I started practising capoeira I really had that phase when I would pick everything up from (the position of) rolê”, Z relates.

Rabo de arraia

The ‘stingray’s tail’ movement (rabo de arraia) is an attack in the form of a kick in capoeira angola. A body bends down to place the palms onto the ground in front of one leg while the other leg does a full or a semi-circular kick. During the circular attack, the head is bent down low from where a practitioner is encouraged to keep her or his cunning gaze at the partner in play. U’s favorite movement in capoeira is rabo de arraia because:

U: I don’t know, it’s somehow out of habit. Because well, because others are more difficult to do (laughs).
I: (laugh) Everyone repeats it often, it seems that way, yeah.
U: Oh yeah. Well, it’s one of the basics. That is, there is a foundation that includes certain movements that you need to do well. Well, that is, if you start from scratch. And it is in the foundation.

Another capoeirista adds that rabo de arraia is a basic movement from which many other transitions tend to flow: ”From it you can do millions of combinations... For me it’s just an ultra basic movement”, says O. A bit like U who often resorts to rabo de arraia out of habit, E also notes that his favorite movements in capoeira are the ones that he knows how to do best.

It may be difficult for the reader to picture these movements without youtubing them. Unfortunately, unlike music that can be notated, dance and other bodily practices do not have a universal notation system that could be used here to clarify the movements and later the sequences of capoeira angola visually (Silvennoinen 2007: 15).
One is discouraged from carrying out capoeira angola movements with a rigid, so called, 'robot body' (fieldnotes 23.11.2013). Angoleiros talk about the ideal relaxed bodies of Brazilian mestres during their interviews. Downey describes how capoeira mestres in Bahia would advocate a soft style of play since it is believed that "a soft player exerts force without strain" (Downey 2005: 197). B who has practised capoeira for almost a year says: "for some reason it's still difficult to fully relax while playing". In one of the games that I observed it seemed that the more relaxed the body of an angoleiro is, the more deceiving are her or his ways (fieldnotes 12.5.2016). Perhaps a relaxed body implies a lack of fear. The rigidity of the body came out clearly in the trainings of the group that changed their style from angola to contemporânea, as their ginga became very controlled, all the way to the tip of the fingers that were kept straight and tensed. Conversely, angoleiros are taught to let their arms hang and move loosely, unpredictably, in ginga.

A relaxed body can also be observed during the playing of instruments. The "cool, funky berimbau makes one move in mysterious ways", I once described the bodies of the capoeiristas playing berimbau (fieldnotes 27.3.2014). Another time I described G playing the main instrument as if his whole body participated in the playing (fieldnotes 25.3.2014). The bodies of angoleiros almost unintentionally begin to respond to the music once they start playing the instruments; their feet begin to move without anyone telling them to do so (fieldnotes 25.3.2014). Often I observed "jumpy moves in knees and shoulders" during music portion of classes (fieldnotes 27.3.2014). In this sense, movements and music are inseparable in a capoeira class.

During my observation of capoeira classes, it sometimes felt that the same movements such as, rolê, rabo de arraia, bananeira, aú (cartwheel) were constantly practised without much visible progress (fieldnotes 5.7.2013). But corporeal experiences from within and visual impressions from outside can be very different as embodied transformation is subtle and gradual, often unnoticed by the eyes (Downey 2005: 131). It is a slow bodily transformation that is brought about by the very practice of regularly stretching and repeating capoeira angola movements (on bodily transformation Metcalfe and Game 2014: 301). Despite the very gradual corporeal changes, capoeiristas who become instructors feel motivated to learn more. "Here apparently, you just need to love what you do, and to practise it for long and continuously", says G. Another instructor, N, remarks that she enjoys training movements more than anything else: "I love training, I don't even love to play as much as I love to train."

According to Parviainen, we often (rather superficially) expect for physical activity to bring us only positive emotions of joy and entertainment while we prefer to dissociate negative experiences from physical exercise (Parviainen 2006: 229). A class of capoeira angola movements is not all fun and games, it can be very tough and painful. Exhaustion after a day's work holistically influences the body: "Sometimes I come to training already so drained that for me the trainings don't bring particular joy" says Z. So many times I observed people coming to class looking utterly exhausted without much energy to sing or move. In addition to work exhaustion, participants' physical injuries also create extra challenges in a capoeira class. "Because of my leg, because of my weight, I am really slow. That is, if G says "Negativa!" then while everyone else is finishing doing their fifth negativa, I'm only going into my second." says the male practitioner who broke his leg during a capoeira game and who gained weight during the healing process. According to E, positions like negativa, very importantly build up the endurance of the practising bodies:
Everything develops in the process of training and a capoeirista, his strength is not in strength, not in the thickness of his muscles, but his strength is in his endurance. And this movement negativa, negativa, negativa, negativa, negativa, negativa, it builds up endurance. (E)

An angoleiro does not need to lift weights, according to this logic, as long as she or he can lift her or his body just off the ground over and over again.

Developing endurance in movements and instrument playing is not always pleasant. Hence, participants often half-jokingly note that their favourite aspects of the practice are those that are the easiest or the least painful to do:

I: Why do you like (playing) pandeiro?
A: My pinkie doesn’t hurt afterwards (laughs).

Playing berimbau notoriously causes one’s pinkie to turn from blue to purple and ultimately to become numb as the weight of the musical instrument partially rests on the smallest of fingers. In contrast, playing the pandeiro does not involve the torture of the pinkie and this is why A jokes that she likes the instrument so much. Although another angoleiro, D, points out that playing pandeiro for a long time can cause pain in the shoulder blade area. Hence, capoeira skills do not always easily transform their participants into joyful, energetic beings as some accounts of the practice like to suggest.

At times, it seems mentally incomprehensible why someone would go through the torment of capoeira angola training. "Um, dois… Davai!" a Brazilian teacher yelled at the class combining Portuguese counting and the Russian word for 'let's go' (fieldnotes 9.7.2012). "No more enjoyment, just complete tiredness in movements, really slowing down, no more energy", I wrote on a hot summer evening class in St. Petersburg (fieldnotes 11.7.2012). Nevertheless, my own bodily experiences, as well as those of the participants, suggest that squeezing all the energy out of the body can invigorate body-emotions-mind. "And then you come home so tired, pleasantly tired and just want to sleep. I like this state.", says L who spends lots of time studying in and out of school. "I think that movement itself brings joy to a person", comments another young female.

M describes her experiences of getting onto her head for the first time in her life during a capoeira class:

I stood (onto the head), I just had well, you know that, I just had the most unbelievable emotions! I am standing on my head! Freaking amazing!
… Yeah, well, you know even though my legs were still on the elbows but just already that upside down feeling that already (meant) amazing emotions! (M)

As a first timer, M was doing an easier version of a headstand, whereby her head and hands formed a triangle against the floor and her legs were raised up so that the knees rested on the elbows. This is a rather stable position that allows individuals without much earlier preparation to get the feeling of standing on their heads. C also learned to stand on her hands and head for the first time in capoeira classes. "I never thought that I would stand on my hands, well, on my head, ever, at all. The butt is heavy; it pulls me down!" C says, laughing. The interpretations given to oneself as a body as well as expectations of one's capabilities, prior to practising capoeira movements frequently have to be reassessed during capoeira angola training.
The Sequences

After a beginner has learnt a few basic movements such as ginga, rolê, negativa and a kick or two, the practitioner is taught to link several movements together. In classes in St. Petersburg, Ufa, Samara and Nizhnii Novgorod the linking of movements into sequences is usually done in front of a mirror – if there is one in the room – following the instructor’s steps. The use of a mirror, however, tends to undermine one’s proprioceptive sensibility towards the body and its movements (Klemola 2004: 97). One female instructor told me after a training in a small basement studio that she does not like to use mirrors in her classes as she finds them distracting.

"Every move affects the next one", a teacher would say when practising sequences with the class (fieldnotes 13.3.2014). If one first executes an attack, for instance, in the form of an upright front kick chapa, the next movement is likely to be evasive like rolê or neutral like ginga. Anthropologist Margaret Willson notes that the movements of capoeira and the connections between them "are so numerous that the variation of each game is almost infinite". She adds that the connections between various movements are important in themselves. (Willson 2001: 21.) Transitioning from rolê into a rabo de arraia is often seamless in a more experienced body’s work, "as effort gives way to ease" (Metcalfe and Game on experiences of running outdoors 2013: 302). Movement transitions teach a beginner how to eventually play a game of capoeira with another person – how to attack and retreat in a continuous string of events or as Dumoulié beautifully puts it, in a continuity "that allows the currents to run" (Dumoulié 2010: 2). The spontaneity of movement emerges gradually in capoeira as the novice learns new combinations of movements. Downey describes how experienced capoeiristas "can tolerate high degrees of instability without becoming tense because they have developed so many possible ways of transitioning smoothly out of a posture" (Downey 2011: 74). Increasing skills enable a body to interact more effortlessly with a practice.

The logic of capoeira sequences is not obvious at first for the practising bodies. As an example, the so-called scissor movement, tesoura, is an attack whereby an angoleiro puts both palms on the floor, the legs are straightened and are widely spread, the hips are in the air but not far from the ground as the person slides her- or himself backwards towards her or his partner. It is not immediately obvious how such a move can be an attack in the first place. Beginner capoeirista, A, however notes that the first time she encountered the scissor movement in training, it was a very effective form of attack as her more experienced partner, R, used the attack to knock A down onto the floor:

As an element of attack, I think that it is generally apt. That’s why it’s understandable, accessible, as R illustrated to me with an example, yeah (laughs). Although, if there will be some kind of street fight and a conflict there, how to do a tesoura there, yeah (laughs) and how the opponent will react to it… (A)

Like some other attacks of capoeira angola, it is indeed difficult to imagine how they could be applied in a real-life situation where one is in danger for instance, on a street. The idea that a tesoura would be used in a street fight made both A and I laugh during her interview.

For beginners in angola the scissor movement of one’s partner indicates that a cartwheel should be made to escape this type of attack. One can try doing a well-timed head butt to the partner in a cartwheel or one can begin to get up if the partner decides to crawl in between one’s spread scissor legs. One learns to do a beautiful tesoura or a...
head butt, as well as to transition gracefully from one movement to the next. Dumoulié suggests that grace “is precisely the hallmark of the good capoeira dancer” (Dumoulié 2010: 8). While there are no competitions and declared winners in games of capoeira angola, graceful movements are likely to contribute to a beautiful game of angola that many like to see (Browning 1995: 90; Höfling 2006: 88; Lewis 1995: 96; Willson 2010: 69). “That is probably the most important task of capoeira that is to… play capoeira beautifully. Well, probably that’s the most interesting thing (about capoeira)”, notes W.

A short sequence that was practised in one of the group’s classes included “repeating ginga and very slow meia lua for quite long” (fieldnotes 28.11.2013). Meia lua is a circular kick which is carried out from an upright position with one leg doing a semi-circle in front of the body. After finishing the kick, a person returns smoothly into the ginga and seamlessly continues this way; doing a kick with each leg in turn and ginga movements in between. It is a simple combination that, nonetheless, keeps the practitioner in constant motion.

Once on a promenade in Samara, a female was teaching others meia lua and aù or negativa (fieldnotes 5.7.2013). This means that after the semi-circular kick one either goes into a cartwheel or into a more static defensive pose of negativa close to the ground. Imagine doing just that sequence ten times – you are constantly on the move on your legs with the kick and on your arms in a cartwheel or the negativa which requires lots of arm strength to get into and quickly to hop out of. Amidst all the action one should remember to appear nonchalant. No wonder that angoleiros gradually begin to move in unusual ways also in their everyday life. T describes how he began to move around his wife after practising capoeira: “when I’d be getting out of bed, I’d almost move in a cartwheel over her”. The movements of capoeira angola are not restricted to the capoeira classes as they also spill over into everyday life.

Ways in which different movements are combined varies across angola groups as effectiveness of certain escapes and counter-attacks is debated. Downey writes how “a beautiful backward-bending headstand” was encouraged in some capoeira academies of Bahia while another academy and its practitioners saw the move as “foolish and easily attacked” (Downey 2011: 75). Practitioners in Russia note that the rules of which body parts can be attacked in a game, and when, are not always clear:

… let’s say that we’re taught not to hit the face when one is in a bridge (position) or when someone is standing on the head, not to hit the face. But someone will decide to hit (anyway). And to him you should… you want to say: “Actually, you can’t do that, that’s not alright”. He’ll say: “Why can’t I? I can. Why not?” I don’t know why not. (X)

A sequence taught by one instructor may not be compatible with the style of play of another group. There can be plenty of leeway in a game of capoeira angola: “You can tip someone over in different ways...”, says X and Q immediately suggests: “Beautifully and softly. Like that!” Q’s preference for tipping someone over beautifully and softly will not necessarily be matched with other capoeiristas’ styles of play as many will tip someone over in a rough and occasionally in an ugly manner. “In fact, mestre always says that some movements can be done like this and they can also be done like that”, U notes. It is not only the way in which movements are combined in capoeira but also with what tone they are executed that is debatable (Assunção 2005: 203; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 165, 178).
For more advanced students, sequences of different movements can be rather long. Starting with *ginga*, moving into *rabo de arraia*, first kicking in one direction then another circular kick in the opposite direction, from there into a closed position called *queda de rins* (meaning 'fall onto the kidneys', Lewis 1992: 83) and into attack with the scissor movement, a roll over with the *rolê* and back to *ginga*. The sequence is as circular as many of its movements, always returning to the swaying *ginga*. (Video 25.3.2014.) Such a sequence best makes sense when there is another person responding to it. Willson writes that "moves done alone have no meaning or balance; they only come alive when performed with a partner" (Willson 2001: 21).

So when one person does *rabo de arraia* in one direction, the other avoids it with a high *negativa*; when the kick turns into the opposite direction, the other rolls away from it with a *rolê*. The *queda de rins* is done in response to a *chapa* kick. In the defensive position, the entire weight of the body rests on bent arms, feet tightly bent in the air – face, chest and stomach are closed off from attack. From this closed position, a player suddenly opens up into the wide *tesoura*, a sudden counter-attack. The other person escapes by rolling over the person in *tesoura* with their backs touching each other. From there, both do a *rolê* and return to *ginga*. This sequence can be practised alone so as to perfect the movements and transitions but the purpose of learning them is eventually to perform the sequences in pairs – "to complete each other with movements", as J expresses it.

**Playing in Pairs**

How does "a deep game of deception and play" (Willson 2001: 21) emerge from the various movements and sequences of capoeira? A game of capoeira angola occurs between two bodies who move in close proximity to one another, but, ideally, not touching. "The capoeira player does not shatter the glass that separates him from his opponent, but sticks to the perpetual allusion of the gesture" (Dumoulié 2010: 11). The game is like a pantomime fight. J suggests that "you usually lose if you get touched by another player", meaning that a body has been unable to escape the partner in time. Anthropologist and sociologist, Ruth Finnegan, points out that humans are frequently doing things closely together even when they are not physically touching each other: "The experience of working, marching, playing, loving or competing together, 'in sync' is a real one in human interconnectedness, even without actual "touch" in the literal sense" (Finnegan in Blackman 2008: 86). A game of capoeira is one example of bodies "competing together in sync". J describes one of the first videos he saw of a capoeira game online: "they really were like two snakes that were intertwining and as if occasionally trying to bite (each other) but intentionally missing the target".

The snake is a common symbol in capoeira with many songs being about the *cobra* (snake in Portuguese, Capoeira 2003: 50; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 160–161). M describes how a Brazilian *mestre* plays capoeira: "Let’s say he plays slowly but he executes the attacks fast. So you have to be very attentive." A specialist in Brazilian literature and culture, Maria José Barbosa, notes the different ways in which women and men are portrayed as snakes in capoeira lyrics: "There are also songs that refer to male *capoeiristas* as snakes, but when this happens, it is not done to belittle the player." (Barbosa 2008: 9). While a snake in reference to a female in capoeira songs tends to have negative connotations, a comparison of a male to a snake is usually considered as a compliment. Well-known male *mestres* have capoeira nicknames with the word...
snake in it: Cobrinha Verde – little green snake, Cobra Mansa – tame snake, to describe their cunning ways of playing capoeira.

Most angoleiros in Russia describe interaction in a capoeira game as a conversation between two players: "For me, capoeira is precisely a dialogue", says K. S describes the game in very similar terms: "In a game of angola the goal is exactly to play, to build a dialogue". E also makes the comparison of capoeira movements in pairs to a verbal dialogue:

*I think that a game of capoeira it’s an interaction of two people who do something in a roda. But they do something not each one separately but together. Like I’m now talking with you. (E)*

An ethnographic approach to research also enables a face-to-face dialogue between a participant and a researcher. By comparison many other qualitative methodologies tend to end up with researcher and participant "doing something separately", as E puts it. For example, a survey is sent to a person who replies or does not to it without necessarily ever meeting the researcher(s). Discourse analysis may involve text analysis on the part of the researcher who never meets the persons whom she or he is researching. Through fieldwork, ethnography brings the researcher and the participants closely together, enabling them to interact in corporeal conversations rather than engage in one-sided monologues. There are commonalities between the slow, circular, time-consuming, practice of capoeira angola and ethnographic research.

Metcalfe and Game, following the philosopher Martin Buber, note that "to be responsible is to respond" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 299). An angoleiro learns not just to move but to move in a response to the movements of her or his partner. A game of capoeira angola arises from the relations of two bodies. Dumoulié argues that in a game of capoeira historically the pair has no reason to fight as "two black bodies … would have no symbolic reason to fight each other" (Dumoulié 2010: 18). A pair of capoeiristas plays on the same side, as it were, with real opponents being outside, the non-capoeiristas; the elites, hegemons of different types. Angoleiros playing in pairs "correspond and dialog more than clash", according to Dumoulié (Dumoulié 2010: 18). It is a bodily conversation of two people that follows certain conventions, such as aiming to attack the stomach area with a head butt or defending one’s chest and head from kicks.

Sequences of movements are combined spontaneously in a capoeira game of two persons. The sequences are not pre-choreographed. It is part of what makes capoeira games so interesting – their unpredictability. One practitioner who began training capoeira with another style remembers how he eventually became more attracted to the angola style. "While in regional there is extraordinary beauty of movement in demanding acrobatics", H notes, "here, when you see this interaction, this whole game, here it’s interesting." Because capoeira angola games are usually played with two players in close proximity to each other, angoleiros must interact with each other more intimately than in typically faster and more distanced games of contemporânea and regional styles (Downey 2005: 9–10, 142–143; Lewis 1992: 106–113).

During classes in Samara, Ufa and other cities, plenty of time was usually dedicated to playing in pairs. During one class I wrote: "Playing in rotating pairs. R and N are talking and joking while playing." (fieldnotes 1.7.2013). Every several minutes, pairs would change as the instructor would exclaim, usually in Portuguese "troca!" (change) and bodies would disperse and find themselves a new partner with whom to play for a few minutes until the next "troca!". Occasionally "long time would be spent on
sequences in same pairs" (fieldnotes 1.7.2013), for example, practising foot sweeps (fieldnotes 19.11.2013).

Capoeira's foot sweep, *rasteira*, is much described and discussed in literature on capoeira (e.g. Assunção 2005; Lewis 1992). Like the head butt (*cabeçada*), the sweeping movement is an attack, whose success in a game heavily depends on right timing (Downey 2005: 28; Lewis 1992: 91). In my fieldnotes I once wrote "taking one's time when doing the movements but some must be done fast (e.g. *rasteira*)", as I observed how bodies were practising foot sweeps in pairs (fieldnotes 2.7.2012). Although the overall pace of an angola game can be leisurely, *rasteira* should usually be carried out fast in order to be surprising and successful in knocking down one's partner. Thus, training capoeira in pairs involves simultaneous leisurely joking and sudden, out of the blue, attacking. The body of an angoleiro is trained not to reveal too easily whether it will crack a harmless joke or a harmful foot sweep in the next moment and movement. Even though the face does not ideally reveal the intention of an attack, once the attack is being executed I noticed that the "facial expression changes", for instance, with a suddenly intense focus of the eyes and tense lips (fieldnotes 12.6.2016).

Two players constantly keep an eye on each other. Willson argues that a student of capoeira learns to "never to take his or her eyes from a fellow player; it is through a person's eyes, almost more than their body, that one understands what the next move will be" (Willson 2001: 24). In my own bodily experience, however, many players, including Brazilian *mestres*, play precisely without direct eye contact. Lewis' experiences in Brazil support my own as he notes that "many master players avoid looking one directly in the eye" so as to appear distracted while in reality being guided by their peripheral vision (Lewis 1992: 102).

Playing in pairs can be dirty both literally and metaphorically. One can literally stumble upon another's shoe with one's face during a game. "Fast, immediate reaction" is needed to avoid unpleasant blows (fieldnotes 18.3.2014). The game can also be dirty in terms of deception:

*During the last training, the second last, about two weeks ago, I got two hits from J in a roda: first one on the head, then his foot into my nose. Well, it smashed my lip open, in short. I had blood coming out of my lip and nose, like that. That is not to say that it was a super hit or anything, a knockout. Just a very light hit but my nose was apparently very sensitive, it was enough. (K)*

During interview with J, he was describing aggression and competition in capoeira games, unrelated to the incident mentioned by K: "Yes obviously I also love to compete; occasionally I love to show my strength. Why not?" In another part of the interview J contrastingly says "I'd never insert aggression (into a game) because that's foolish. That's not needed in capoeira. It's not boxing." What exactly constitutes aggression in a game of capoeira is ambiguous (Browning 1995: 107; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 26). Getting a lip smashed by J's foot does not necessarily mean that J was being aggressive towards K but that K was too slow in avoiding contact with his partner; that he was fooled by J's playfulness.

*You need to feel this, this point – that is, with whom you can and with whom you can’t (do something). And what can you do with someone and what can’t you do. Sure, you can do anything but... it depends on the kind of game that you want to build. And a game is supposed to be beautiful, first of all. (H)*
A game of capoeira can be full of joking and surprises. During one class, two players were squatting facing each other, their hands stretched out with palms together. The two males then started hopping in this squatting position (*cocoรินha*) sideways, waiting with excitement which one will back away first and what move he will make next. "Cheerful faces in anticipation", I described the pair (fieldnotes 27.3.2014). This is one of the movements angoleiros use to enter the capoeira circle to continue playing their game after a break (Lewis 1992: 113). The pair hops together for a brief moment with suddenly one person taking her or his palms away and doing, for instance, a kick. The surprise element is well-known but its exact timing and consequences are not. Their unpredictability is one of the reasons why games of capoeira can be so engaging, for practitioners and viewers alike.

Occasionally classes go overtime, if it is possible to linger in a rented studio. Once at 11 p.m. in St. Petersburg capoeiristas were "still playing and joking: hand swaying, pretending to catch insects, making sounds imitating insects, in reaction to the partner’s hand gestures." (fieldnotes 10.10.2012). During another class I observed how "two girls were playing around as they experimented with a hand pushing move", (fieldnotes 19.11.2013). According to J, half of the dialogue in a capoeira game takes place through humour. A game of capoeira does not only include performing movements or showing one’s strength but also joking with one another, for example, making fun of how one’s partner is moving by imitating the gestures. There is plenty of room to act out, to corporeally express oneself. "Capoeiristas use humor in spite of – or as a defense against – the inherent perils of the world", describes Downey (Downey 2005: 124). A female capoeirista communicates a similar thought:

> Humour helps people in a difficult situation. Capoeira after all originated in very difficult times for those people who well, created it. And very often these jokes they help, when you’re having a tough time. (B)

During a wintry class I wrote that "sadly we didn’t get to play in pairs for more than maybe five minutes", as I hoped to play more with the angoleiros (21.11.2013). Another time and place, I wrote that "singing feels great, I’d like to sing more: flowing voice, enjoying the movement of music" (fieldnotes 4.5.2016). Many capoeiristas eagerly await the event of *roda*, where they can sing, play and joke with others. Capoeira classes prepare and transform the practitioners so that their bodies could play beautiful capoeira games in collective circles.

### 2.4 GAMES IN CIRCLES

After all the stretching, repeating the same movements over and over again, stringing them into different sequences and training these in different pairs, a body enters a circle to play capoeira in front of others:

> I was shaking, just this first step, this I don’t know, I was shaking. Then you anyway come out, kind of do something, not understanding anything. But the first step is already taken. That’s it and after that, it all gets easier, easier, easier. And then you feel like: “This is freaking awesome!” (H)
As in other African-Brazilian practices such as samba and candomblé, the performance of capoeira angola in front of others takes place in a circle (Browning 1995: 108). The circle where capoeira is played is called roda in Portuguese. Some authors translate the word into English as ‘a ring’ rather than a circle (e.g. Lewis 1992; Stephens & Delamont 2010). The rounded shape of the roda is formed by instrument players as well as spectators singing and waiting for their turn to play either the instruments or the game of movements. In the middle of the circle a pair plays the physical game of capoeira. In capoeira, the word roda is not only a reference to the round shape formed by capoeiristas but also the very event of coming together to play capoeira (Downey 2002: 491).

"Life situations, that we have in our lives, they are projected in the roda, in the game. And it’s possible to play joyfully with a person, yes? Or it’s possible very easily to have some stranger come into your life, to come and kick you in the face with a foot. Or on the contrary, you hit him. In roda there’s aggression like in life, and well, in capoeira in general because roda it’s the quintessence of capoeira. It’s the concentration where capoeira opens up. And in roda there’s anger, there’s love, well honestly, there’s love."

The roda is a ritual where capoeira is played, frequently as a special event held outside of the regular capoeira classes.

Many authors on capoeira have intricately described how a roda of capoeira begins and how the overall event tends to take place (e.g. Capoeira 2003: 27–29; Lewis 1995: 115–120; Stephens & Delamont 2010). Here I will focus on the bodily movements. Two players squat by the main berimbau, the deepest toned instrument called gunga, waiting to start their game. Around them, ideally, there is a circle of spectators sitting on the ground, ideally, all singing the chorus. In reality, in Russia there will most often only be two or three people forming the circle, some of whom do not know the words of all the choruses. Regardless of the number of bodies forming the roda, the two angoleiros eventually get permission from a berimbau player or decide themselves that it is time to play.

Before starting the game, the players may carry out symbolic gestures such as a Catholic cross with their fingers, for protection in the game, although I have rarely seen this happen in Russia. The earlier discussed warm-up is not the only way to prevent injuries in capoeira: "spiritual aspect of capoeira angola is important in part because of the protection it is seen to give a player" (Willson 2001: 31). Particularly studies on psychosomatics have suggested that "the body can be influenced by belief in curious ways". The placebo effect is probably the best known example of how belief in medication, even when it is absent, for instance in the form of inert pills, nevertheless produces positive effects on the body. (Blackman 2008: 54–55.) Once the two players are ready, each will raise one or both hands, place them together, greet each other – and off they roll into the middle of the circle to show their skills of movement and wit.

In a roda of angola, players are encouraged to begin the game as low as possible, staying close to the ground in slow-paced movements (Downey 2005: 143). The pace and style of the game largely depend on the stage of the roda as the overall rhythm.

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13 An African-Brazilian religion.
of music may become faster as the roda progresses (Lewis 1995: 106). Within games there are also contrasts in pace: snake-like writhing and different speeds of swirling bodies (Dumoulié 2010: 10).

If I’m doing a rabo de arraia and he is … immediately begins to do some kind of very complex elements straight from the beginning then you can feel that a game with this person, it needs to… He will always try to show how beautifully he can do a move but at the same time he can miss a very important point and you’ll be able to knock him down and show him that it is not necessary to do something very complex. (Q)

Simplicity and good timing can be the main assets in an angola game. However, as mentioned earlier, due to our constant search for sensational experiences (Shusterman 2008: 10), the simpler, humbler aspects of capoeira are often left unnoticed by players and researchers alike.

Academic accounts of games in rodas often portray ideal physical games played by experienced Brazilian mestres or other adept practitioners (Downey 2005; Lewis 1995; Stephens & Delamont 2010). Descriptions tend to focus on games where movements and sequences appear to be made up on the spot, so fast and effortlessly the limbs move in pairs (Stephens & Delamont 2006a: 111; Dumoulié 2010: 5). Lightness not only of body but also of spirit (Dumoulié 2010: 16). Most games I have observed and participated in myself in Russia, are not like this. The movements are not always light, transitions not always effortless and bodies are not constantly walking in perfectly positioned handstands. Despite this, angoleiros in Russia enjoy playing in rodas: “I, for example, really love to play in roda and nowadays I get really upset if I don’t get to play in it”, says Q. Particularly during capoeira seminars when a circle tends to be full of waiting spectators, not all capoeiristas get a chance to play in the circle due to time limitations. Others prefer to hide from the roda. A’s instructors have told her that “It’s for the roda that we train! It’s our like performance, our display!” Despite such words of encouragement, A feels too inexperienced to play in rodas: “For me still, maybe because I’m a beginner, I know little of what to do and it’s easier for me to wait it out (sitting), to hide behind someone there (laughs), not to participate in it”, she says.

According to Willson “at the end of a ‘good’ game, the players will often hug each other, laughing and exhausted, momentarily free from their burdens of daily life” (Willson 2001: 24). What exactly constitutes ‘a good game’ of capoeira? Like most features of capoeira, the precise movements that one can use in a game, when and how, are heatedly debated by mestres and students alike. “How much variation is tolerated in the game is subject to complicated ongoing negotiation, but variation is incessant” (Downey 2011: 76). In the roda “much of the strategy revolves around the players’ attempts to deceive each other” and in order to deceive one necessarily has to try a new pattern of defence or counter-attack occasionally (Willson 2001: 26). One male practitioner describes this process of innovation in a game by paralleling it to musical jam sessions:

There is such a thing as a jam. Well, the essence of it is exactly in the competition between musicians: who does it best. But at the same time there is the thin line of not breaking the overall playing (of instruments). So and in some way it is reminiscent of a capoeira roda. There is a need to show something better but to do it beautifully. (D)
Sheets-Johnstone similarly compares dance improvisation to a jazz jam session which "exists only in the here and now of its creation" (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 485). The creativity of a capoeira game and improvised dance stems from collective spontaneity of several bodies that occurs uniquely in a given moment.

When I ask N about improvisation in singing, she replies to me, like many other capoeiristas, by telling a brief story:

Once an angoleiro from Vladivostok was staying at my place. After the seminar in Ufa, he came over here for a week. And he was staying with me and we’d, well, especially after the seminar, we were all like… We’d, for example, take berimbau, just two berimbau and we’d sing. So we’d take some convenient song with which we could improvise and just like we’d try to build a dialogue. That is, my two lines, he’d reply something to me with two lines, I reply to him. So like this. And at first it was somehow pretty tense and strained. We were trying something, to develop something in these standard lines. And then it started going, going, going and then we just ended with him, already put down the berimbau and (when) just walking around the apartment, he’d say something to me in rhyme (laughs) and I would answer in rhyme. That is, it like went on and on and like that it worked out. So sometimes something like that happens. But it’s not so easy. (N)

Sometimes, improvisation in singing, in movement, just happens to work out. As N’s example illustrates, improvisation is often an outcome of tense effort just as much as it is an outcome of a seeming coincidence or some kind of a surprise to the practising bodies. N and her guest could not have premeditated that their singing would start to roll forward so that it would continue into their daily life even when the berimbau were already put down. Such moments are often noted to be the most interesting and memorable in their practice by the capoeiristas. Perhaps precisely because they come as a surprise rather than as something scheduled.

A player of angola is not limited by clear-cut rules of how to move but by an implicit sense of what is beautiful and appropriate in a game (Lewis 1992: 127). Even though the word ‘game’ suggests something that can be won or lost, that is not quite the case in capoeira angola (Browning 1995: 90). "The aim of each of the games does not revolve around ‘winning’ or ‘losing’ but in the development of the interaction”, writes Willson (Willson 2001: 21). Dumoulié offers a more cunning account of what the players aim for in a game: “enjoyment, not victory, though this spirit of play won’t stop the best from winning” (Dumoulié 2010: 14). At the end of an angola game, no player is clearly identified as the winner like in a boxing match but the players do try to show their superiority and the spectators are well aware of this.

Blackman discusses ‘muscular bonding’ as a reference to “the kinds of affective or emotional experience that are often produced when people move together rhythmically in time” (Blackman 2008: 30). Muscular bonding seems to occur in capoeira where bodies move rhythmically in pairs to music. A pair of capoeiristas occasionally moves "proprioceptively ("intuitively", "in tune with") without any need for conscious action", to borrow Game’s and Metcalfe’s words (Metcalfe and Game on running 2014: 305). In a roda, a body relates to capoeira on the one hand, by playing its own game of cunning movements, one that serves to keep it apart from the partner, the music and the audience; on the other hand, the body also constantly reacts to one’s partner, the surrounding rhythm, lyrics and audience. The practice and the body are simultaneously distant and synchronised in the roda. (Rosa 2015: 33.) T points out how a capoeirista is both dependant on others in a roda and is simultaneously responsible for his own game:
Roda it’s this… really tight ball of string. That is, everything is interlinked there. If the bateria play with their soul, if there is energy coming in, then like it or not, the game will be good if you’ll let the capoeirista inside of you loose. To overcome all these… barriers, to step over them, meaning to open all the gates inside, to let everything out and then it doesn’t matter anymore how cool your moves are. Yeah, if there is energy, it moves and everyone sees it and the game works out. So and for sure if you learn how to play and not try to just kick another person, if you are tuned in to play, then you’ll have yourself a game. (T)

There is plenty of talk among capoeira practitioners and researchers about the ‘energy’ of the roda and how it impacts the two players (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 145). U says that capoeira gives her “life energy” in addition to the physical and musical development. “When there is this energy in the roda, it after all… You can perform such kinds of things there that you’ll surprise yourself”, T notes. A famous mestre is quoted by mestre Nestor Capoeira saying “A specific energy has to come out from the game and this starts with the berimbau, the rhythm and the singing” (Capoeira 2002: 328). The energy of the roda springs primarily from the music with movements of two players reflecting the overall mood and sound of the circle.

The concept of energy in capoeira appears to originate from African-Brazilian religion candomblé and its concepts of xá, implying energy and strength, as well as axé, meaning cosmic energy or life force (Capoeira 2002: 58; Downey 2005: 138). The view that energy defines our existence is in line with new materialist views of the body that highlight the vitality and agency of matter (Coole 2013: 453). Braidotti, for example, introduces the notion of zoe denoting the “nonhuman yet affirmative life-force” that she contrasts with the discursive side of humans (Braidotti 2010: 203, 207). Bennett, in turn, contrasts her understanding of material vibrancy with what she sees to be the more traditional understandings of life force:

What I am calling impersonal affect or material vibrancy is not a spiritual supplement or “life force” added to the matter said to house it. Mine is not a vitalism in the traditional sense; I equate affect with materiality, rather than posit a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body. (Bennett 2010a: xiii).

Matter in itself is vibrant for thinkers like Bennett.

When Russian participants describe their experiences with energy in the roda they seem to be frequently talking about the exertion of physical force and the raw experience of that force:

During the game, that is when you are moving, you begin to feel this kind of… well life’s energy. That is, you feel that you can do it, that you are strong, that you are flexible, that you can just move like an animal. So that is really some kind of, well… real life! (R)

Through her moving body R begins to experience “real life”. R’s experiences are reminiscent of Game’s description of Durkheim’s “joyful religious experience” whereby there is a feeling that “energies have been set free in us” (Game 2001: 3). Such experiences can remake and enliven us, according to Game (Game 2001). What R says is closely echoed by the comment of one of the interviewees in Metcalfe and Game’s article, who is quoted as saying that running on the beach “is actually really beautiful because you know you are alive and it is just an incredible feeling of strength that you
get from running” (Delphine in Metcalfe and Game 2014: 301). Y describes that "When I come (to class) I give out my positive energy, that people who come (to class) take in, this positive energy, and reabsorb it and produce even more energy." Bodies as "cosmoses of lively materiality" (Bennett 2010b: 63), relate to practice at the same time as they relate to one another. The interaction of energy occurs in multiple directions.

Some of the practitioners mention the term 'trance' when describing their experiences of playing capoeira in a *roda*. "Trance states are brought about through repetitive, ritualistic practices marked by 'prolonged or heightened exertion’", according to Blackman (Blackman 2008: 30). U says: "I think that it's generally, in total, that there is a circle, that everyone is singing. That, well, it creates energy." U suggests that the circular shape and the singing in a capoeira *roda* brings about states reminiscent of a trance.

So when there’s a short solo song and the choir gives short replies and you get this rhythm, well, the kind that has a really, really good influence on the game. So that you start to fall a little into a trance and you start moving according to this rhythm. Well, it just works easier that way. Well, and it supports you. (U)

U’s words suggest that the live music’s rhythm begins to move or to ease the movement of the body. In relation to contemporary dance, Parviainen writes that "the dancer can never say – since the distinction has no meaning – what comes from her/him and what comes from the world" (Parviainen 1998: 136). From this perspective, bodily movement of a dancer stems simultaneously from within as well as from the outside of the dancer’s body. "This closest intimacy, hearing the space, other people and objects, elicits a response from the body’s felt awareness in motion", Parviainen notes. "One cannot say any longer when the body is moving or when it is moved." (Parviainen 1998: 169.) Similarly, when capoeiristas experience 'trance-like states', their bodies are possibly being moved, in part, by the space, people and objects that surround and impact them, and to which their bodies respond.

Just as the capoeiristas in Russia, we gradually begin to see that the complexity of physical movements is not the main criterion of a great capoeira angola game and the event called *roda de capoeira*. Russian angoleiros often appreciate games that are not physically convoluted:

There weren’t maybe all that many hits, there weren’t… she wasn’t doing all the acrobatics herself. There wasn’t a whole bunch of jumping. There was purely this interaction, somewhere it was fast, somewhere slow, somewhere flowing, somewhere something. But the movements were… just intertwining. (f)

It is frequently just a brief moment of effortless motions with a partner that many capoeiristas remember the best from their *roda* or training experiences, when two bodies move and react to each other in an organic, "flowing dialogue" (Rouhiainen 2003: 260). When describing movements of tai chi, Klemola writes that what matters in the practice is the practitioner’s “inner experience of the movement and concentration, not so much the outer appearance of the movement” (Klemola 2004: 65).

Now already I can see when a person is playing beautifully or not. This is decided not by tricks but by the attitude towards one’s partner. If everything is done let’s say, elegantly (laughs), well, such a game has lots of value. (Q)
The games described by J and Q portray a subtler experience of capoeira, one that is not loud or visually extravagant. Both practitioners highlight that it is not about kicks, jumps or tricks as much as it is about the feeling and the interaction between two players that create memorable and valuable games.

Another practitioner also describes how with time he has become less concerned with how impressive his movements look and more focused on subtle aspects in a game:

-... the level of your technique increases. Roughly speaking, you no longer run around the roda like a chicken without a head with somersaults and stuff like that. You already understand that you are playing angola. You need to listen to the berimbau. Like that. It is like your game becomes more experienced and self-conscious. (K)

Few angoleiros ever do a somersault in a roda, but be that exaggeration as it may, K suggests that with experience his pace of playing capoeira has slowed down and he has become more attentive, both to the surrounding music and to himself.

Capoeira classes and games simultaneously revolutionise and subtly transform the individuals participating in them "into something rich and strange" (Shakespeare 2006: 36; Lipiäinen forthcoming). The bodily changes are at times visibly revolutionary as the practitioners begin to move in unusual ways also in their everyday life. Their embodied reactions and perceptions are peculiarly sensitised with the practice of capoeira angola. The relation to one's body is constantly transforming in classes of capoeira angola as one becomes more experienced in the movements and continuously notices new aspects of one's body and its play. The body is not static for the actively practising angoleiros.

### 2.5 THE SKILL OF BEING STILL

Many philosophers and poets, both Eastern and Western, urge us to pause for a moment so that we may notice the moment itself, to have time to think and just be (Arendt 1958: 5; Eliot 2002: 54; Patanjali in Tavi 2014; Rumi 2004: 8). An increasingly experienced angoleiro develops appreciation not only for slowness but also for occasional stillness in a game: "When I am already not like, faster, faster, do something!" H says. To stop still in a beautiful posture is difficult and often effective in the contrast it gives to the game of otherwise continuous movement. "Capoeira is eminently paradoxical insofar as extremely slow movements, given the intensity they contain, fire off affects at lightning speed, whilst other movements are so fast that they almost seem to stand still" (Dumoulié 2010: 7). Often when training a demanding movement, an angoleiro will pause, looking concentrated as if collecting her or his energy into a tight bundle of a body "before doing a flip and a bridge on a dark green mat" (fieldnotes 12.5.2016). Stillness appears to be a prerequisite for the execution of movement or as Heidegger puts it: "rest is the seat and the reign of all movement" (Heidegger 1966: 67).

Variations in pace and in movement-stillness are part of the game of deception in capoeira angola. Cunningness in capoeira has been extensively discussed in literature (Capoeira 2002; Downey 2005; Lewis 1992; Stephens & Delamont 2009; Talmont-Chvaicer 2004; Willson 2001). Assunção defines both malícia and mandinga in terms of cunning (Assunção 2005: 217). Browning perhaps more creatively calls malícia "the art of irony" (Browning 1995: 107.) Smart deception is an essential skill of a capoeira
player. "The task of a capoeirista angoleiro is not to hit the other’s nose with a foot but to create the circumstances so that (the partner) would hit his nose on my foot", says E. Indirect ways are the ways of capoeira angola. "Malicia and mandinga are considered the most difficult aspects of capoeira angola and many older mestres say that they only began to understand the complexity of the practice when they had been playing for many years" (Willson 2001: 34).

During one of the interviews, a brief occurrence took place that is illustrative of capoeiristas’ cunningness in daily life. E and I were sitting in a café:

He (E) is casually dressed, sitting opposite of me by the table, answering my questions. From behind comes a man to sit at a table behind E. The angoleiro spots him with his peripheral vision and intensely starts looking at the newcomer as the man goes over to hang his coat on a hanger in the corner between our two tables. I, unsuspecting of anything, continue to listen to E’s replies, although I am wondering why he is paying so much attention to this man. The man somehow clumsily instead of hanging his coat next to E’s and sitting at a table, stumbles and leaves. As he goes away, E says to me "He’s a pickpocket." I didn’t realise it until E said it. Like a true mandingueiro, E was calm and focused. He knew that the man was trying to pickpocket his coat but he didn’t say a word to him. E’s posture was that of a mandingueiro. He was sitting with legs crossed, back leaning backwards, relaxed, resting on the chair. He would lean back and intensely look straight into the man’s eyes – calmly but persistently. The man thought that he might fool E by pickpocketing his coat but E was ahead of him, he knew what the man was doing and merely settled to observe his clumsy attempts to pickpocket a capoeirista. "I know them", E said later “that’s why I keep all my things here”, by his side. (Fieldnotes 28.4.2016.)

In his interview, E notes that "Well, capoeira it’s trickery [/deceit]. And cunningness too. And when people there [in roda] shake each others’ hands and well, smile, they can in fact be thinking otherwise.”

A game of capoeira angola is impressive in the overall, ongoing, content that the two bodies create through small nuances and surprising pauses. The pausing in a game of angola could be interpreted as a sign that a practitioner is able to think with one’s hands, feet or head firmly on the ground. I interpret the transition from motion to stillness in a chamada or a headstand to be a sign of subtle learning, of a capoeirista’s developing sensitivity. It is also a sign of what Klemola calls the progression of learning from imitating outward appearance of movements to gradually internalising the moves into one’s body and feeling them from within (Klemola 2004: 103).

One of the focal moments of the roda is its opening with a litany (ladainha) during which the first two players in the circle squat by the berimbau in stillness. "Capoeiristas do not do physical play during a ladainha, rather they listen and concentrate on the sentiment being expressed” in the litany (Willson 2001: 30). Sitting still and patiently does not come easy to everyone. "Skills requiring little or no movement also place severe adaptive demands upon our bodies; for some individuals these demands are even greater than those for skills requiring intense activity”, writes Downey (Downey 2011: 76). Indeed, it is a skill to be able to slow down and occasionally come to a halt. One angoleiro says that after four years of practising: "So now I already realise that

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14 A cunning, witty person.
damn it, I need to slow down sometimes, not to rush the horses”, says H. Horses rushing in vast plains on endless roads is a popular theme in Russian culture.

Russia, where are you hurtling to? Give an answer! There is no answer. The bell peals with a wonderful ringing; the air, ripped to pieces, roars and becomes wind; everything that exists on earth flies past, and other nations and empires look askance and stand back to make way for the troika. (Gogol 2012: 264)

Three horses pull the passenger in a Russian troika, not one or two, making the ride just a little faster. Russian angoleiros frequently remark that: "I understand that it’s tougher to play slow but when I play in front of people, I understand that slow pace won’t be interesting for them", X remarks. Russian spectators are expecting fast acrobatics, which makes it difficult to play slow or to be still in a street roda in front of an audience.

Downey writes that a novice in capoeira is inspired to “reassess what his or her own body is capable of doing” (Downey 2011: 77). The experience of reassessing one's body holistically transforms the bodies participating in the practice of capoeira angola. "Attentive eye, quick response, and accurate control of the body are a part of capoeira angola that enter every moment of a capoeirista’s daily life" (Willson 2001: 25).

I developed more understanding. We should all be able to smile in our mind at that moment when we are really caught. Well and to smile not in such a way as to acknowledge one’s own defeat but in acknowledgement of the other person’s merit. … Just to say, that’s cool, sincerely. If you do that sincerely then you really aren’t defeated. (Q)

And this factor of restraint, yes? That is, to understand that this is a game. You, if you have missed something, it means there’s no need to get upset with the partner, you need to say “thank you” to him for pointing out your weak spot. And it’s like that in life too. That is, you got hit, you analysed it, next time you’ll escape… you’ll do an, escape with a negativa. That is, you already know how to escape that attack, yeah? You’re already prepared for it. (Y)

It takes stillness of mind or a 'cool head' not to get upset at an unexpected blow but to mentally congratulate and thank one’s partner (Lewis 1995: 129).

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All in all, it is challenging for the Russian bodies to grasp the movements of, and consequently to come into a close relation with, capoeira angola. Bodies in urban Russia are in many ways not adapted to the physically tough, acrobatic practice, and conversely the practice itself is not well adapted for bodies like that of a contemporary office worker. Thus capoeira angola and the Russian bodies at first connect through many embarrassing and at times painful trials and errors that occasionally result in bodily injuries. In this respect, the interaction of beginners’ bodies and the practice of capoeira is not particularly easy, nor always pleasant. Like Tsing, who in her work emphasises discontinuities and awkward moments in global connections in order to challenge assumptions about "global coherence" (Tsing 2005: 11), here I too have shed light on the physical uncomfortableness and awkwardness of the relation between Russian bodies and African-Brazilian practice, particularly in its early phases.
Also for more experienced bodies, capoeira classes involve sweat stains, red faces as well as the loud falling down of bodies onto the hard floor. The practice of capoeira angola quite literally grounds the bodies of its practitioners, who are not used to being on the floor or close to it in their daily lives. It is often the pride of the practitioner that suffers more than the body in the early falls of capoeira. Klemola, following philosopher Dan Zahavi, suggests that a beginner’s body is unable to control its own movements despite all intentions when faced with a new bodily practice (Klemola 2004: 119). As the capoeiristas' bodies gradually become more resilient, the relation between them and the practice of capoeira alters.

Slowly, the body eases into a game of capoeira in which the movements occur spontaneously in pairs. Researchers of dance similarly note how movements that become effortless as if carry the dancing body into something unpredictable (e.g. Parviainen 2006: 232–233). After repeating the same capoeira movements and many different sequences over and over again the bodies are able to react with increasing cunningness and grace to the partner’s surprise movements. The body and the practice interact with increasing flexibility as experience accumulates. Capoeira angola becomes part of the body also in its daily movements and habits, thus transforming the everyday behaviour of the more experienced practitioners. Each body tends to filter the practice through itself. More experienced bodies become increasingly active in interpreting and adapting the practice to their own tendencies, thus always rendering a unique interpretation of capoeira angola in gesture, motion and feeling.

The relation of capoeira angola and the practising bodies requires a lot of time, effort and endurance in order to eventually become an effortless, spontaneous, bodily movement. The Russian bodies dive into unknown waters as they enter a class of capoeira angola where the waves move them in mysterious ways. Some dive in deeper than others in corporeally echoing unfamiliar creatures and histories with their white bodies. In the next chapter we will explore further the kinds of environments that capoeira angola and its practising bodies in Russia emerge from and how they come to encounter each other in the first place.

Overhead the albatross hangs motionless upon the air
And deep beneath the rolling waves in labyrinths of coral caves
The echo of a distant tide
Comes willowing across the sand
And everything is green and submarine
(Pink Floyd 1971)
3 DISTANT ECHOES

Capoeira angola and Russian bodies are distant echoes to each other before they intimately meet in capoeira angola classes. The current transnationalisation as well as the historical hybridisation of capoeira angola will be discussed in this chapter in order to expand on the practice’s background. Also the wider social context of today’s Russia and especially the cities of Samara and Ufa will be outlined. After the African-Brazilian-Russian cultural contexts have been sketched, I will describe how the practice of capoeira angola has emerged in Russia primarily through the spread of global media, most recently in the form of the Internet. I will also consider how Russian bodies participate in the global interconnectedness of capoeira, be it through travel, learning Portuguese, receiving foreign guests or by imagining Brazil as the exoticised other.

Picture 3. Capoeira angola by a Russian river.

Ethnographies usually embed their empirical micro-data, like that of the previous chapter, into a wider socio-cultural context so as to have a multi-layered outlook on a phenomenon. Rather than viewing a socio-cultural context as the existence of fixed surroundings or containers, I will treat ‘context’ more organically as – to put it in Haraway’s terms – an ecosystem. Haraway speaks of ecosystems as entanglements
in which units and things cannot be distinguished from the wider environment. (Haraway 2015b: viii.) Haraway believes that in our world "bounded individuals and their contexts and responsibilities have become unthinkable" (Haraway 2015b: ix). Throughout this chapter I will attempt to isolate certain phenomena, such as the development of capoeira angola or the influence of the Internet on the spread of capoeira to Russia, but this does not mean that the discussed phenomena are bounded and distinguished from the wider environment in practice.

A researcher actively produces a particular context by focusing on certain socio-cultural and historical details of the wider environment (Salmenniemi 2008: 26). It is the task of the researcher to highlight specific aspects of our reality. I will focus on aspects of the African-Brazilian-Russian-global socio-cultural environments that seem especially interesting from the perspective of the capoeira angola classes in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod. In this respect, the socio-cultural context described here is made but it is not made-up (paraphrasing Haraway 2015a: 6). By focusing on the socio-cultural environments that surround capoeira angola practitioners in Russia I do not mean that the surroundings mould the practitioners’ bodies without the bodies having an impact on the surroundings. The relationship is reciprocal (see Blackman on body agency 2008: 28).

The main themes of this chapter are closely linked to the "former cultural, or linguistic, turn" that arguably predated the current new materialist thinking in the social and human sciences (Coole 2013: 451). A cultural turn in the social sciences "privileges language, discourse, culture, and values." (Coole & Frost 2010: 3). Coole and Frost propose that new materialism offers "methodological realism" in contrast to constructivist, linguistic approaches (Coole & Frost 2010: 25). By methodological realism, Coole and Frost refer for instance to the study of material, embodied beings in their real environment (Coole & Frost 2010: 25). Ethnographers have been studying "material, embodied beings in their real environment" for over a hundred years even if not always explicitly discussing the role of the body. This chapter is written in agreement with both new materialists and constructivists that society is simultaneously constructed and materially real, that culture significantly impacts our lives, that are nonetheless more than purely cultural (paraphrasing Coole & Frost 2010: 27).

3.1 TRANSLATING CREOLISED CAPOEIRA

Following the words of Squarcini, Russian bodies could either "unquestioningly accept and simply repeat" the globalised practice of capoeira angola or they could "restore, question, modify and even deny or abandon" (Squarcini 2011: 30) the traditions of capoeira. A Russian female who has practised capoeira for several months describes a sense of tradition in the practice:

Capoeira is... you feel traditions there. There even the sound of the berimbau it, well, you understand that it’s something... something that, I don’t know, hasn’t been changed by time. Here (in Russia) you don’t feel it, well I used to sing Tatar folk songs in my childhood but now... that doesn’t exist. (B)

Tradition of capoeira is seen as something static in B’s quote rather than processual like her own culture in which she has differently participated throughout the years. Similar dynamics have been observed also in other contexts: "The lingering notion of
India’s persistent traditionality owes much to the observer’s feeling of having lost his own traditional moorings, which makes him cast around for the certainty of tradition” (Heesterman in Squarcini 2011: 32). Bodies practising capoeira angola in Russia are perhaps searching for stability in the form of foreign traditions to compensate for Russia’s historically fragmented context. Fabian argues that anthropologists too have presumed “that foreign places have no time; only the time of the (Western) traveler and researcher matters” (Fabian in Veijola and Jokinen 1994: 132). Capoeiristas and researchers alike might have a tendency to see their own locality as temporally and culturally more multi-dimensional in comparison to more distant places.

The notion of tradition is problematic, potentially raising more questions than it provides answers. Here I broadly understand tradition as “the dynamics of cultural transmission”, once again following Squarcini’s work (Squarcini 2011: 12). Eliot adds an important note to our sense of tradition as cultural transmission: “if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged” (Eliot 1920: 40). In Eliot’s view, the worth of tradition is not only in transmission but in the constant building upon what is already existent. The poet advocates being acutely aware of what one can add to the composition, without repeating what has already been done (Eliot 1920).

A practice like capoeira angola seems to be searching for a synthesis between “the attempt to preserve power, the constant effort to gain legitimation from history” and “the awareness of the constant need to adapt to reality” (Squarcini 2011: 32).

Let’s say that the master starts to teach capoeira to his students and the students, already each student develops (her/his) own style. And here there is a need to maintain a balance so that capoeira would not turn into something else. Because I understood that there is a really, well, a fine line in capoeira where you can apply something and where you need to really upkeep traditions. Like that. And because of this, one needs to socialise more with the masters and see that you really aren’t well, kind of distancing too far from those traditions. (K)

Bodies in Russia face the challenge of learning and upkeeping African-Brazilian traditions if they wish to closely relate to capoeira angola. Eliot notes that a poet’s work is judged “by the standards of the past”, and he importantly adds “I say judged, not amputated, by them” (Eliot 1920: 42). Contemporary interpretations should be as vibrant and alive as the traditions that they are following, suggests Eliot and Squarcini similarly notes that “systems of transmission must be able to dynamically preserve what they were once given” (Squarcini 2011: 26). Are Russian bodies able to dynamically preserve the traditions of capoeira angola?

Klemola writes that “the closer we are to the immediate, embodied experience, the harder it is to describe the experience with precise concepts” (Klemola 2004: 134). The Western imagination has traditionally reduced human experiences to thought processes and linguistic expression (e.g. in Arendt 1958, 1971). That is perhaps why metaphors like translation and creolisation, deriving from linguistics, are widely used in social sciences today to address issues such as cultural globalisation (e.g. Eriksen 2003; Hannerz 2014).
Translation

Writer Umberto Eco notes that "translation is always a shift, not between two languages, but between two cultures" (Eco 2001: 17). This ethnography is a result of multi-lingual, and hence multi-cultural, work. Conversations and interviews in the field have been carried out in Russian. At the same time, most field and interview notes have been written in English (see Picture 1). The majority of literature read has been in English, Finnish and some Russian. My doctoral seminars have been held in Finnish and in English. Much of the material on capoeira is in Portuguese, such as the lyrics of capoeira songs and online interviews. I have studied and used some basic Portuguese in the past but due to lack of practice my language skills have deteriorated. Merleau-Ponty argues that "we may speak several languages, but one of them always remains the one in which we live" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 218). This has not been the case in my life since my family migrated to Finland, after which I have been constantly living in at least three languages: Russian, English and Finnish. Thus, the process of translation strongly defined the process of making this dissertation, both in linguistic and cultural terms.

Every time I returned to Finland after fieldwork in Russia, it took me several weeks to settle back in culturally. The language difference was only one aspect of this settling, the gaps between ways of socialising in Russia and in Finland were in fact much more challenging. "People are constantly trying to take your place here; be it on a marshrutka\textsuperscript{15}, in a café or a yoga class. You can never relax here." I wrote in a diary in Samara (19.6.2013). Just as I would re-learn to stand my own in a queue in Russia, to deal bluntly with bus drivers and cashier ladies, I would return to Finland where these skills are not only unnecessary but are interpreted as rude behaviour. Even though both Finnish and Russian cultures are familiar and in fact, are 'native' to me, going from one to the other is always a challenge.

Another notable challenge has been the translation of interview excerpts from Russian into English. It has been impossible for me as a non-professional translator to carry the voices of Russian capoeiristas across into English. Ultimately the interview excerpts found throughout this work reflect more my own vocabulary and perhaps even tone than those of the interviewees. To give just one example: when interviewees say in Russian ‘u nas’ it is untranslatable into English in two short words. In English we could translate it as: ‘at our place’. This translation however, is not accurate in many quotes as in them ‘u nas’ is referring not to ‘here’ or ‘our home’ but to Russia as a whole. While an American could say that ‘here in the U.S.’, a Russian would frequently say ‘u nas’ and what is meant is ‘here in Russia’. Such nuances have made it very difficult even to translate accurately what the interviewees say, not to mention capturing the tone in which something is said. I hope the reader will keep this in mind when reading the quotes that are my translations of the participants’ speech rather than their own living words. I have tried to transmit the content of what the interviewees are saying as clearly as possible, thus occasionally modifying some of the expressions to make them understandable in English.

If it is difficult for a researcher to translate cultural habits from one familiar context to another, as well as to translate text from one familiar language to another, it is certainly a challenge for Russian angoleiros to translate the language and logic of their African-Brazilian bodily practice into Russian and Russia. In the process of translation,

\textsuperscript{15}A minibus.

Benjamin suggests that there are two especially significant questions. One is whether a work of art lends itself to translation? The other is whether a suitable translator is ever found who can adequately communicate the work in another language? (Benjamin 1968: 70.) Benjamin discusses translation in relation to written text but we could attempt to stretch his discussion to include the practice of capoeira angola and the bodily translations that it requires. We could ask whether the practice of capoeira angola lends itself to translation in the first place.

Some Brazilian angoleiros argue that it does not. "Players in Salvador often discussed whether non-Brazilians had the ability to learn capoeira angola", Willson describes her fieldwork in Brazil. "Could non-Brazilians, who did not have the knowledge of Brazilian lifestyle, learn to "ginga"?" (Willson 2001: 23). In the previous chapter I have discussed how Russian practitioners are able to learn the movements of capoeira angola although they are physically demanding for most. Indeed, Rosa argues in her ethnography that "ginga is a bodily disposition or way of moving that, though connected to a particular culture, might be acquired, embodied and reproduced by anybody, in spite of his or her ethnicity or place of birth" (Rosa 2015: 24). For instance, there are plenty of Brazilian men who do not know how to "ginga" while there are Japanese or German women who do. Class, gender, race, are increasingly globally intermixed and culturally confused in multiple, displaced identities (Braidotti 2006: 201).

Some authors suggest that the social status of the body defines its relationality with capoeira. Willson writes that "qualities of malicia, mandinga, the ginga, malandragem and candomblé are not understandable nor desirable to United States or many middle-class Brazilian students and tend to be diminished or ignored altogether" in the practice of capoeira (Willson 2001: 35). In Willson’s view the spirituality, trickery and irony of capoeira angola are not easily translatable. Like some Brazilian practitioners, she suggests that the subtler aspects of capoeira cannot be understood by especially foreigners or wealthier Brazilians.

A Russian male capoeirista supports the view that capoeira angola outside of Brazil is frequently transformed, in some cases it is Europeanised, as he describes his first Russian instructors of capoeira and how they attempted to infuse non-Brazilian spiritual elements into the practice:

They’re adding some kind of shamanism that doesn’t exist there. Like that. It doesn’t exist and it never did. It may have been there where people practised candomblé, it may have been there where orixás were dancing but it’s not here. Here it’s Europeans. Europeans are so distant from African culture that… we can dance maculelé, we can dance Afro dance but sometimes people just forget who they really are and start making up some stupid stuff that has nothing to do with them. (J)

J refers to Russian practitioners as ‘Europeans’ who have little in common with African customs. Orixás, mentioned by J, are the spirits of candomblé (Downey 2005: 11) and maculelé is an African-Brazilian art-form that involves "rhythmic stick play" (Lewis 1992: 236). Both candomblé and maculelé are closely linked to capoeira. Mestre Bimba, the creator of capoeira regional style, is said by Assunção to have used movements from maculelé (Assunção 2005: 132). Capoeiristas in Brazil tend to be familiar with

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16 According to Downey, malandragem could be translated as "sly roguery" (Downey 2005: 119).
candomblé and the many references to it in capoeira (Lewis 1992: 26, 180) but in Russia I rarely heard talk of candomblé and orixás. The practice of capoeira is intertwined with many African-Brazilian cultural forms that are not usually holistically vibrant outside of the Brazilian setting. The Russian setting could therefore be seen to be less 'authentic' in comparison to Brazil for bodies to practise capoeira angola.

There is plenty of literature on authenticity of transnational capoeira (e.g. De Campos et al. 2010; Griffith 2010; Joseph 2008, 2012; also Cuesta on authenticity of Afro-Brazilian candomblé 1997). Downey describes his own experience of including a religious gesture into his capoeira game during fieldwork: "At some point during my apprenticeship in Salvador, I inadvertently began to sign the cross and kiss my thumb, a popular Catholic custom in Bahia" (Downey 2005: 147). As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, before beginning a game of capoeira in a roda, two players may carry out symbolic gestures with their fingers evoking spiritual protection. In Downey’s case, he had unreflectively emulated the signing of the cross as a gesture that became a habit (Downey 2005: 147–148). Whether or not this kind of gesture is 'less authentic' for a non-Bahian angoleiro is not an easy question. After all, most of our learning happens through emulation and like a blessing gesture in a capoeira game many of our daily gestures are carried out without reflection or any visible usefulness (Downey 2005: 42–43). Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein points out that by kissing a picture of a loved one, we do not assume that it will have any effect on the person in the picture, rather it will have a satisfying effect on the one kissing the picture: "It aims at some satisfaction and it achieves it. Or rather, it does not aim at anything; we act in this way and then feel satisfied." (Wittgenstein 1979: 64.) Similarly, someone emulating African-Brazilian gestures in Russia may simply get satisfaction from them without reflecting on the acts and their meanings.

Benjamin writes that "kinship of languages is to be demonstrated by translations" as he notes that languages are not strangers to one another but are interrelated (Benjamin 1968: 72). For Benjamin, kinship of languages does not mean the similarity of their specific content but that their intention is similar (Benjamin 1968: 74). Russian bodies note that the intentions of capoeira angola are not wholly unfamiliar to them:

Well, it’s a strange (foreign) culture for us. Although... when I started practising capoeira I realised that there are many similarities, well, in Brazilian, in Brazilian folklore and capoeira music and in Russian (music) as well. (U)

Songs are also sung here in Bashkiria. There is also a national dance. And there is also national combat sport, for instance, kurezh. (W)

There are a number of collective folk practices in Russia that share many of capoeira angola's intentions. "If we slightly dig into Russian culture then all those khorovods17, singing, games, yeah?", says F. "There used to be a huge number of them that would be played in the evenings. Collective, communal... Well, there is a lot in common." F and U frequently refer to Russian folklore in the past tense during their interviews as U notes that "in Russia, well again, our history is after all very sad and it's clear that folklore was generally, honestly speaking, eradicated". U seems to refer to the

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Soviet era when old folklore practices were allegedly suppressed by the communist state. However, a researcher of folk culture, Laura Olson, points out that despite the repression the Soviet system also had room for "many individual performers and producers who either interpreted folk music differently from the requisite norm, or freely pursued government-prescribed artistic formulas, yet imbued them with their own energetic and creative spirit" (Olson 2004: 13). Soviet Russia's folklore was not necessarily as monolithic as U suggests.

How closely a practice and bodies relate can be influenced by their familiarity with each other. Hanna points out that even when a practice translates onto a new context, "if the new style is too unfamiliar, the behaviour might qualify as dance, bearing traces of cultural conditioning, but would not be emulated and thereby perpetuated" (Hanna 1979: 33). Everyday situations, gestures and experiences (Maffesoli 1996: 21) differ in northern Eurasian Russia and southern Latin American Brazil. For example, gestures have different 'kinetic meanings' that do not require linguistic transliteration (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 491, 493). Rosa discusses how bodies that are born and raised in Brazil tend to develop "a distinguished familiarity with the African concept of polyrhythms or multi-meter" that in turn influences the ways in which these bodies "move around in their day-to-day life", for example, in syncopated movements (Rosa 2015: 34). Moving off-beat in daily life suggests moving and acting somewhat unpredictably.

Customs are "an expression of the collective sensibility", suggests sociologist Michel Maffesoli as he discusses everyday tribalism that we create through mundane encounters and habits (Maffesoli 1996: 25). Classes of capoeira are embedded in particular collective sensibility where commonly known puns are shared, where certain facial expressions are immediately understood. A scholar of Slavic and comparative literature, Svetlana Boym, begins her wonderful book on Soviet everyday life by noting:

*There used to be a saying among Soviet intelligentsia – "to understand each other with half-words." What is shared is silence, tone of voice, nuance of intonation. To say a full word is to say too much; communication on the level of words is already excessive, banal, almost kitschy (Boym 1994: 1).*

When capoeira travels transnationally and is divorced from its organic African-Brazilian setting its expression perhaps becomes too explicit, banal and even kitschy as non-African-Brazilian bodies miss the subtle nuances involved in the art, its multi-dimensional, implicit ways of communicating musically, corporally. As tribes, to use Maffesoli's term, and their customs mix, some shared bodily sensibility is surely lost. The interaction of capoeira angola and Russian bodies is an example of new, cruder, forms of transnational bodily expression.

**Creolisation**

Creolisation, like translation, is a concept originally stemming from linguistics. The concept was first used to describe the mixing and changing of languages in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Americas due to colonialism and the uprootedness of people that it caused (Stewart 2007: 7). By now, the term creolisation has been expanded to cultural studies, anthropology as well as the interdisciplinary field of globalisation studies (Eriksen 2007a: 121–122, 2007b: 155–156). From the perspective of
cultural globalisation, anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen understands cultural creolisation to mean cultural mixing and impurity that he and anthropologist Ulf Hannerz closely associate with processes of newness and creativity (Eriksen 2003; Hannerz 2014: 18–20). Their understandings suggest that as cultures mix, they generate new ideas and practices that are not necessarily all positive. For instance, religious radicalisation can be seen as one outcome of cultural encounters (Eltantawy 2013: 104–105). In terms of transnational capoeira, cultural creolisation theorists seem to suggest that as such practices spread worldwide they become more varied and creative. I have, however, elsewhere argued that this is not always the case based on my research. Direct imitation can also be the outcome of globalising capoeira. (Lipiäinen 2015b.)

Cultural historian, T. J. Desch-Obi, argues that the current use of the concept of creolisation in relation to practices such as capoeira serves to reproduce racial essentialism. He notes that there is a double-standard in referring to some culturally mixed bodily practices as creole and others, for instance English-American boxing, as non-creole. (Desch-Obi 2012: 211–212.) Desch-Obi traces the long and messy development of the terms creole and creolisation to conclude that authors like Assunção, whom I cite extensively in this work, disproportionately apply the term creole "to that which is African-derived" (Desch-Obi 2012: 213). Desch-Obi proposes the use of a more neutral term 'traditions' rather than 'creoles' in order to refer to culturally mixed combative arts (Desch-Obi 2008: 5-6). However, historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger note that the concept of tradition is thoroughly Western and it has been variously imposed upon African people who in the European imagination have frequently been divided into static 'traditional tribes'. The authors argue that African population has consisted of fluctuating currents of people with their habits and rituals in flux rather than fixed in any static traditions. (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983: 211–212.) Nonetheless, critique of the notion creolisation should be kept in mind throughout this chapter as a reminder that it is a contentious term that also has negative, racialised connotations.

Dumoulié poetically traces the cultural mixture of capoeira:

_The movements are repeated, dispersing infinite lines of escape, paths beaten by the old slaves that went before. In the roda, the dancer is at the center of these escape routes, which run through the most heterogeneous places (Dumoulié 2010: 5)._  

The places where capoeira is practised today are indeed increasingly heterogeneous as Samara and Ufa illustrate. Smalls groups of capoeira angola dispersed throughout the world, at times produce what Braidotti calls "new modes of multiple belonging" (Braidotti 2010: 204). M describes how the clothing of capoeira tends to unite practitioners around the world: "They dress the same way. My mum looked at a photo that I took in Toronto and said "capoeiristas of the whole world look the same". Be it in Samara, in Rio or Toronto, the required capoeira angola uniforms and seemingly voluntary accessories are global equalisers: white or yellow t-shirts with a group logo, white or black trousers, soft sneakers and occasional headscarves, dreadlocks or tattoos (Hedegard 2013; Höfling 2006: 88).

_That capoeiristas angoleiros wear yellow t-shirts, it doesn’t mean that it’s “Ooh, it’s the colour of capoeira!” Or that it’s the colour of Africa. Yeah. It’s just that, well,
Pastinha had this favourite football team that he supported and wanted in this way to express his love. (E)

The black and yellow uniforms of some capoeira angola groups originate from the colour of mestre Pastinha’s favorite football team’s kit (Taylor 2007: 203).

The covering of the body in order to look like a cosmopolitan angoleiro is relatively easy to achieve. Some capoeiristas are critical of such fast and easy global belonging.

Some people, well some young people, they learn everything from the whole world but they forget about, I don’t know… about that this is their homeland – “you’re needed where you’re born”18. Anyway, one has to, one needs to, do something for her/his motherland. (B)

Capoeira angola makes some Russian bodies reconsider not only the ways in which they dress but also the extent to which their social responsibilities are locally, nationally and/or globally bounded.

The broad topic of transnationalising capoeira and its many implications for the practice have been dealt with by authors such as anthropologists Monica Aceti and Lauren Miller Griffith, researcher of transnational sports Janelle Joseph, and researcher of Latin American culture Laurence Robitaille. As is frequently the case in studies of transnationalism and globalisation the focus is placed on various socio-cultural links between ‘the West and the rest’ rather than on more multi-directional phenomena. Aceti discusses how European practitioners become capoeiristas and how some attempt to professionalise capoeira teaching in Europe (Aceti 2013). Joseph focuses on the Canadians’ experiences with capoeira (Joseph 2008; 2012) and Griffith examines how Americans practice capoeira in Brazil (Griffith 2010). When describing the process of transnationalisation of capoeira in her dissertation, Robitaille focuses on how capoeira has spread to North America and Europe despite the fact that capoeira groups today exist in all continents of the world (Robitaille 2013). Thus academic discussions on how capoeira mixes culturally outside of Brazil have a tendency to be Western-centric. This ethnography of Russian bodies practising the African-Brazilian art offers a less Western-centric perspective on the transnationalising capoeira.

Regarding Benjamin’s second question about translation, we could paraphrase it as: are the Russian bodies adequate translators of the practice of capoeira angola? Benjamin maintains that inferior translation is “the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content” (Benjamin 1968: 70). Hence, the question turns into: are the Russian bodies accurately transmitting the essential content of capoeira angola? Rather than being a purely empirical question, this query may serve as a heuristic device that enables us to explore the relationality of capoeira angola and Russian bodies from an angle that focuses on the historical-cultural content of capoeira and its translation within the socio-cultural environment of Russia.

3.2 INTERTWINED ROOTS OF CAPOEIRA

As we saw in the previous chapter, the kinaesthetic content of capoeira is not always readily understood in Russia.

18 “Tam gde rodilsia, tam i prigodilsia” – a saying that rhymes in Russian.
H reproduces a rather common discourse of uniqueness among practitioners of capoeira angola, as the style of angola has from its origins been constructed as the ‘authentic’ capoeira (Assunção 2005: 203–204). Stark divisions between authenticity and inauthenticity are common in subcultures, such as punk or anarchist communities (Litvina & Omel’chenko 2013; Pilkington 2010). Therefore, to decipher any ‘essential content’ of capoeira is no easy task since what appears essential to one capoeira group can be altogether ignored by another. In view of these complications it is helpful to explore the content of the practice by taking a brief chronological overview of capoeira, outlining its origins and more recent globalising developments.

M, who is in part a university student of history, tries to contrast the origins of capoeira from the Russian context and its history. In her view, capoeira resulted from the history of Portuguese colonialism in Brazil – the kind of colonialism that did not exist in the Russian context.

The Russian state colonised vast territories to the north, south, east and west of Moscow in what a Russian Studies’ scholar, Alexander Etkind, calls ‘internal colonisation’, something that arguably lead to the colonisation not only of distant ‘others’ but also of many Russians themselves (Etkind 2011). Thinkers like Etkind support the view that the Russian state has historically engaged in a paradoxical ‘colonisation of itself’ (Etkind 2011: 63). Serfdom in Russia continued until 1861 while in Western Europe it had mainly come to a halt during the Middle Ages (Dennison 2011; Pounds 2014: 208–210). Ahmed points out that phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty “helps us to explore how bodies are shaped by histories which they perform in their comportment, their posture, and their gestures.” (Ahmed 2010: 246). Bodies shaped by a long history of serfdom and colonisation of self may relate differently to a bodily practice than those of for instance, Western European origins.

Historian Tracy Dennison notes that serfdom “had no uniform meaning across Russia” (Dennison 2011: 214). Thinkers like Alexander Herzen and Nancy Ruttenburg treat Russian serfdom as a form of slavery. Herzen saw the Russian landowner as "the whipper-of-men, who mixes up in his concept of property the garden plot and the peasant woman, boots and the village elder” (Herzen in Ruttenburg 2008: 252). Ruttenburg adds that the conditions of the Russian serfs were not only slave-like in practice but were unambiguously inscribed as such into the Russian laws (Ruttenburg 2008: 98). “Even for those not enslaved, the ‘twelve million people hors la loi’, Russia recognized no legal rights”, writes Ruttenburg (Ruttenburg 2008: 98). Thus, the often neat picture constructed by some African-Brazilian capoeira practitioners that whites are solely the colonisers or slave owners can be disrupted by the historical example of Russia where many whites were also in, or very near, the position of slaves.

Whereas the roots of capoeira are undeniably old and culturally far reaching, academic understandings of the art-form are rather new. Capoeira’s emergence is predominantly explained by researchers, as it was by M, through the African-Brazilian
colonial slave culture (Assunção 2005: 32; Desch-Obi 2008: 152–154). Without it, capoeira as we know it today would hardly exist.

I think that yeah, that it’s precisely a Brazilian thing. Well, because if there would be no Brazil, there would be none of this time when Africans were enslaved, brought to Brazil and (there) they were forced to like so to say to mask (their activity) and they were forced to struggle for their freedom. So there wouldn’t be capoeira (without all that). (E)

The Portuguese slave trade carried African captives from the West and South coasts of Africa across the Atlantic to ports such as Salvador in the Bahia region of Brazil (Assunção 2005: 98–99; Eltis & Richardson 2010: 37). This forced transportation of individuals from different areas gradually created new combinations of Bantu, Yoruban, Portuguese Catholic and Indigenous American cultural elements in the American plantations (Lewis 1992: 22–23; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 3–4). The origins of capoeira are heatedly debated as Assunção and Lewis note that there are many controversial legends and myths of origin circulating among capoeira practitioners (Assunção 2005: 5–9; Lewis 1992: 18–20). Not having much written record of the practice prior to the 1940’s there is little evidence to support the dominant myths (Assunção 2005: 5–6; Taylor 2007: 82).

Occasionally Russian bodies discuss the roots of capoeira:

The look itself of capoeira formed precisely in Brazil… Well, it’s clear that the roots are African… but these are some very ancient roots. … Well, it’s just not right to think that in Africa it was capoeira. There it was not capoeira, it was a dance ngolo. So that it’s not at all capoeira, it’s just some slightly similar movements, well maybe that the structure of the music is similar. (U)

No one denies the role of Africa. Like that, but to make it such a priority: I wouldn’t do that. Even taking into account that there is all this research, this and that. It’s just necessary to understand that it’s taken to be a Brazilian art. That is, in this environment, they themselves don’t even like have a uniform opinion. Many say that yeah, it was created in Brazil, respect that. … We need to remember that many Brazilians themselves they don’t honour it as a… not the Angolan or even the African influence. They say, that yes it’s there and so be it. Like there is no need to force us to suffer over this theme now or something else… Like there’s no need to make some cult out of it. Brazilians themselves say so. (G)

To research, to like dig deep – that’s not really my thing. Because in fact there are people who really, for them it is, they like to dig (deep). History, songs, roots… some people don’t really like that. …I have a feeling of complete blurriness. Blurriness of this history. … No one knows anything. Even mestre when he speaks of it, even I can see that it is not history. … And that’s why to dig into all that, I don’t see much sense (in that). (O)

E shares O’s sentiments when it comes to deciphering the meaning of capoeira angola songs’ lyrics. He says “I’m not interested in the meaning of songs” because while it is possible to translate the literal meaning of the lyrics from Portuguese into Russian, E is aware that the symbolism of the songs is far more difficult to figure out.

Even though some practitioners argue for pure origins of capoeira – be they purely African, Brazilian, Angolan or Bahian (Assunção 2005: 5–32) – arguments for culturally
messy, mixed origins seem to be most convincing. Assunção suggests that creolisation is "the best suited category to analyse cultural change" as it implies change through a socialisation process rather than for instance, through the miscegenation that is implied by the term hybridity (Assunção 2005: 34). However, as we saw earlier, Desch-Obi points out that the term creole creates a false dichotomy between what is considered to be creole and non-creole cultural forms, as the concepts creole and creolisation are "overwhelmingly applied only to forms associated with blackness" (Desch-Obi 2012: 213–214). Using more neutral terms, we could suggest that capoeira angola is a culturally mixed practice that is not only African-Brazilian but also Amerindian and Portuguese in some respects.

Capoeira emerged as a culturally mixed practice out of impositions, rather than out of voluntary initiatives:

"Music and dance were not only tolerated, but almost even imposed, on the slave ships, where they were considered an effective way to keep up the morale of slaves, as well as providing salutary daily exercise outside the holds. Groups of slaves were taken up on deck by turns, where a cask or a trunk served as a drum, and they could make music and dance in the open air before returning to the hold." (Chaudenson 2001: 198)

Since European influences on African slaves were violently imposed, the European contributions tend to be downplayed in today’s capoeira (Lewis 1992: 18). Consequently, there is an embattled unity in capoeira’s language and content. While the early practitioners of capoeira aimed to challenge the white slave owners with the practice, the very language of capoeira is white (Chaudenson 2001: 197; Dumoulié 2010: 10). Communication of capoeira’s instruments and movements is African in origin and black in aesthetics but verbal communication takes place in the colonial language of Portuguese with only some African and Amerindian words appearing in the songs (Lewis 1992: 18). "Naci dentro da pobreza. Naõ naci na raça pobre." (I was born in poverty, not born of a poor race), say the lyrics of a capoeira song (Lewis 1992: 164) – a message of resistance, in the language of those being resisted. This is a common trend also in academic writing. While postcolonialist and feminist theorists tend to resist a variety of hegemonic discourses they tend to resist them with the concepts and theories of those very discourses (Dirlik 1994; Spivak 1999).

Slavery officially ended in Brazil in 1888. Racial inequalities have however, remained ingrained in Brazilian society. Racism exists symbolically and concretely throughout the large country despite the fact that the majority of its population is racially mixed (Downey 2005: 12–13). Rosa insightfully notes how the Brazilian society has been caught in a "pride-and-shame conundrum" over its African heritage (Rosa 2015: 148). Downey mentions a study that indicates that as many as 87 percent of Brazilians, including African-Brazilians, have "prejudices against darker Brazilians" (Downey 2005: 13). The government and elites, however, wish to preserve an "ongoing myth of racial equality in Brazil" (Almeida et al. 2013: 1354) by arguing that the majority of Brazilians are racially mixed and that therefore, no racism can exist in such a country (Downey 2005: 12–14). The myth of racial equality is a legacy of the so called ‘democracy of races’ ideology that was particularly embraced during Vargas’ presidency in 1930’s and 1940’s Brazil (Rosa 2015: 123).

More recent developments of capoeira are closely linked to the urban environment of the poorer sides of Brazil. Cultural historian Maya Talmon-Chvaicer depicts capoeiristas of the 19th century in Rio de Janeiro in her work. Although most were
formally free men by the end of the century, capoeiristas and their art were criminalised
to the extent that the practice of capoeira was outlawed in 1890 (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 111).
Urban capoeira was indeed a violent activity of various gangs during that period
and many of capoeira’s remaining songs are a record of this (Almeida et al. 2013: 1347;
Lewis 1992: 168). Capoeira’s history is in various aspects filled with bodily violence:
Portuguese slave owners’ violence towards Africans as well as violence within urban
Brazil. Nevertheless, Russian practitioners today rarely see physical violence as part
of their weekly practice. The way in which Russian bodies practice capoeira is already
a translation of a sort that does not carry capoeira’s roots directly across.

Anthropologist Natasha Pravaz, who writes about another African-Brazilian
play form called tambor de crioula, describes the poor suburbs (periferias) of Brazil
as “marked by the absence of urban infrastructure in many areas, lacking not only
pavement, running water, and electricity, but also proper medical services and
educational facilities” (Pravaz 2013: 829–830). Although Pravaz does not explicitly
state that periferias are predominantly populated by blacks she does make this fact
tangible throughout her text as she contrasts the dwellers of periferias to “tourists and
the urban, White middle class” (Pravaz 2013: 846). It is also a common underlying
understanding in many texts on capoeira angola that most Brazilian practitioners are
primarily black or racially mixed bodies from poorer areas of Brazil.

Instead of identifying any static essence of capoeira angola, we could propose
that capoeira’s development is an ongoing process that has an African heritage. The
practice has been an outcome of forced colonialism. Capoeira has been created or
at least continued by plantation slaves and later on by urban dwellers in peripheral
areas of Brazil, most of whom have predominantly been black men. Since capoeira has
spread transnationally in the past forty to fifty years (Delamont & Stephes 2008: 60),
how is the ongoing process of capoeira making itself understood in places and cultures
not familiar with Portuguese colonialism and the everyday life of Brazilian periferias?

3.3 RUSSIA – "MY HAIR IS VERY ELECTRIC HERE."^{19}

When asked whether a Brazilian capoeira angola mestre has ever lived in St. Petersburg
or Moscow, U answers “no”. After a moment of silence, she adds: “I think that they
try to move to more favourable countries (laughs). Not like Russia (laughs).” What is
it that makes Russia an unfavourable place for a Brazilian capoeira mestre to live in?

A Russian angoleiro once visited a German city during his work trip. He noticed
how different urban dwellers and their habits were there compared to his hometown
in Russia:

*Their parks and our parks are different parks. Out there, people come to relax and they
relax by sitting on the grass or something, maybe engage in some leisurely activities,
yeah. But here it’s a different story. People dress up for the park into flashiest, most
beautiful clothes and walk around parading themselves, yeah. Or they consume some
attractions or boosters (i.e. alcohol or cigarettes) that were prepared for them for money. (T)*

^{19} Walter Benjamin in his Moscow Diary, December 1926 (Benjamin 1985: 18).

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In his hometown in Russia T sees pompous bodily habits of display whereas in Germany the clothes as well as practices characterising the bodies are simpler, more down-to-earth. Today there are several Brazilian capoeira angola mestres living in Berlin unlike in Moscow.

When Benjamin returned to Germany after spending nearly two months in Moscow in 1926, he wrote in his diary about Berlin: "the neighbourhood I had to cross struck me as scrubbed and polished, excessively clean, excessively comfortable" (Benjamin 1985: 114). Berlin seemed too comfortable to Benjamin after Moscow! While living in Moscow, Benjamin repeatedly notes the daily uncomfortableness of living in Russia: the cold weather, "no seats anywhere" at a market place, unexpectedly closed museums, disagreeable cafés with terrible food, the dullness and disappointments of his many theatre or restaurant outings – the overall provincial coarseness of the city and its population from his Western European perspective. (Benjamin 1985.)

Bodily experiences felt different and often unpleasant to Benjamin in Russia. Benjamin’s hair was literally very electric in Moscow due to the cold dryness of the winter air.

The queues in railway stations are the worst. I mean it’s like the people go somehow mad in them. Men would just join a line, one elderly man stood right next to me for no reason. Another younger man behind me in line started asking if I’m not going to Samara as I was talking to the cashier lady. It is a stressful environment.

(Fieldnotes 30.4.2016)

When Russia is compared to Germany or many other European countries, the daily living environment in the former is stereotypically portrayed as outdated, with all the pomp and lack of comfort that implies.

Even as global interconnectedness compresses space with fast technology and cheap modes of transportation, the size of a country is significant if only due to its historical path dependencies that continue to impact the habits of the population. "The greater breathing space gives people a feeling of freedom of movement, of an ability to venture out into the unknown, of an indefinite ability to set broader goals…”, writes Simmel (Simmel 1997: 145). The state of the geographically largest country on earth has certainly set itself very broad, ambitious goals throughout its highly unsteady history. Economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron points out that Russian economic development has been broken into stages of rapid development at all costs, usually boosted by military conflicts, followed by periods of prolonged stagnation (Gerschenkron 1962: 16–17). The Russian government today is very much following the pattern identified by Gerschenkron in the 1960’s.

"We have such a big country that... Altai, for example, it’s on another end almost. Ural... We have so many interesting places." says D whose hobby is mountain climbing. One gets a good sense of Russia’s expansiveness in cars and trains, both inside and outside of the urban centres. During a summer weekend we once visited R’s family in a Chuvash village. Late in the evening we arrived on a local train at the station of a small town. “R’s dad greeted us and her two cousins with his Renault. He drove fast in the dark, hilly and bumpy roads. At one point a car overtook us on the right hand side of the narrow road and quite soon after, a police car came chasing after it.” (Fieldnotes 24.6.2013.) As was noted by Nikolai Gogol in the previous chapter, there is a certain inclination towards fast, reckless driving in Russia, possibly due to its long,
bumpy roads that never seem to end. Perhaps people in Russia are fed up, impatient, with the never-ending cycle of progress and stagnation.

The urban setting frequently does not feel any smaller than the rural in Russia (photos 4.3.2014). Capoeira practitioners in Samara and Ufa often spend hours on minibuses, trams or cars each day going from home to work or to a capoeira class. This is not only due to distances but also to how transportation infrastructure is variously disorganised in Russia.

\[I\text{ take the marshrutka. What’s bad there is that there’s no transport where I live. It means that my parents have to pick me up. Constantly… well, so after classes, they pick me up. (W)}\]

W often had to leave capoeira classes early because it takes him over an hour to get home using various means of transportation. Therefore, angoleiros not only idealise the great size of Russia in nationalistic tones but are also frequently critical of the concrete implications that distances have on their everyday lives: "It’s here in our Russia where in 1000 kilometres you’ll only find one capoeira group", remarks Q. The geographic size of Russia and the way in which it is governed often makes one’s body, and importantly its capacities, feel extremely small, insignificant. But O notes that the worldview of many Russians is not necessarily as expansive as the physical size of the country. O who sees himself not to be of pure, I suppose Slavic, Russian ethnicity, occasionally speaks of Russians as ‘they’ rather than as ‘us’: "Russians they are like, a little this, these… The worldview is not always sufficiently… broad", he says hesitantly.

The bodies and their Russian language in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod are not only bounded by the borders of the huge Russian state but rather by the even wider ex-Soviet borders that included notably what are now called the CIS states. In her interview, R, appears to want to refer to the post-Soviet space or the CIS countries as one entity, as perhaps some broader Russia: "From the entire, from entire Russia – CIS countries, we already knew everyone.", R says as she describes the history of their capoeira group. Affinities to capoeiristas in Ukraine and Kazakhstan are mentioned by some participants, the Russian language being their key unifier as many do not speak English or Portuguese. The Russian context is not only wide and diverse in terms of its geographic size or its tumultuous history but also very importantly its people – their ethnic identities, their often multi-layered cultures that in many ways affect their bodies and practices. Many of the interviewed capoeiristas seem to lack a clear ethnic identity of their own. The practice of capoeira angola perhaps helps to fill in some gaps in this troubled identity.

Even though many of the capoeira angola practitioners in Samara, Ufa, Nizhnii Novgorod and St. Petersburg are ethnically Azeri, Bashkir, Chuvash, Mari, Korean, Tatar or Ukrainian, most do not speak any other languages than Russian. The Soviet and current Russian state ethnic policies are incredibly convoluted in their various contradictions. The Soviet state on the one hand in its internationalist communist mission embraced the proletariats of all ethnicities and races, but on the other hand the state policies were overtly segregationist against ‘non-ethnically Russians’ (Hirsch 2005: 28, 165). In post-Soviet Russia, the state’s ambivalent attitude towards minority ethnicities continues (Sotkasiira 2016: 45–49).

While the city of Samara is located in a region called an oblast’, Ufa is located in the republic of Bashkortostan. There are 46 oblast’s and 22 republics in Russia (Wikipedia: Federal subjects of Russia). The republics are intended to represent areas of particular
ethnic minorities, the Bashkir minority in the case of Bashkortostan. In reality, the Republic of Bashkortostan held Russian and Tatar ethnicities as its majorities with Bashkir ethnicity holding only third largest population in the region in 1989 while in 2010 Bashkir ethnicity has climbed to second place after Russian ethnicity (Gorenburg 1999: 557; Wikipedia: Bashkortostan). Political scientist Dmitry Gorenburg outlines the recurring shifts in ethnic identities between the Tatar and Bashkir categories in Bashkortostan from late 19th to late 20th centuries due to the changing state policies (Gorenburg 1999).

While the Russian state keeps shifting identities based on ethnicity, young Russians today are at a loss to find a sense of stability and cultural belongingness. One of the angoleiros in Ufa who is Tatar does not actively practise Islam because he dislikes the politicisation of ethnicity in the Bashkortostan region (fieldnotes 23.11.2013). Only few capoeiristas manage to construct a sense of ethnic traditions at least on an occasional basis:

Well, my grandmothers live in their own houses. And with them you still feel it, when you sit next to the oven (laughs), speaking in your own language and especially if they also make some chak chak or belesh, this national dish. (B)

When we were in the Chuvash village with R that summer weekend I heard a lot of Chuvash language for the first time in my life. In the countryside around Saratov, where our family’s summer cottage was located, I never heard any other language than Russian. But in this village of Samara oblast’, particularly the elderly were speaking Chuvash. When we went down to the spring to get some water with R, two very old, frail looking ladies smiled at us and chatted away in Chuvash. R understood what they were saying but she was unable to reply fluently in Chuvash. Some other angoleiros also understand the language of their origins but are unable to reproduce it verbally, in part because in urban Samara and Ufa they rarely need to. One Tatar capoeirista notes that it is the youth who “often doesn’t even understand the Tatar language”. It is very difficult to establish any coherent ethnic trend even among the twenty-five angoleiros whom I have interviewed. Some know their ethnic language, others not at all, some know it partially.

C’s story is quite telling of the ethnic ambivalences in today’s Russia:

Well, (my) dad and mum are Bashkir so like our child was born into a mosque and we had to give the name in a mosque. But I don’t know Bashkir language. So my native… I can understand a little, the meaning… but I can’t (speak).
In school I didn’t study the Bashkir language. … I was studying in a class where we didn’t have Bashkir language, there was only one class where Bashkir was studied. But it turned out so that I only studied Russian.

While C never studied her parents’ native tongue, her daughter is now studying hers:

She goes to a Tatar gymnasium; there they study the Tatar language. There are two of these gymnasiums in Ufa. My husband is Tatar. (I: Oh, that’s why). Well it just so happened that we live right next to the school. But it’s very difficult for us because my husband doesn’t know Tatar at all. And when he opened the textbook for the first time – and there even the exercises are (given) in Tatar: “How to do the homework?” “I don’t know” (laughs).
Ethnically C and her husband are a mixed couple, Bashkir and Tatar but both are of the generation that has not learned their native language in school, unlike their daughter who now has the chance to learn her father’s tongue – the one that he himself does not know. Moreover, in a city of over a million inhabitants of which over 280 000 were Tatar in 2010, there are only two schools where one can study in Tatar language (Bashstat 2010). Many of the basic services in today’s Russia, like those of lower education, do not offer fruitful opportunities for continuity in ethnic practices and skills from one generation to the next. In the seeming absence of vibrant, continuous ethnic customs among the Russian youth, a curious practice like capoeira angola enables some young Russians to find alternative ways of belonging to cultural traditions.

Walter Benjamin’s insistence on the uncomfortableness of Russian – as opposed to European – everyday life was noted earlier. A restaurant or a train that may seem inconvenient to a European visitor in Russia is hardly comparable to the kinds of difficulties young capoeiristas face in daily environments that are often far less glamorous than any train, hotel or restaurant. A male capoeirista who has long dreadlocks describes his work experience in welding:

> I went there where I work now. I came there with dreads and all the welders there were like “What’s that there?”. Everyone basically drunk all the time, every day from morning till evening they drink (alcohol). There it was this kind of survival of the fittest we could say. (H)

It took a while before the other welders accepted young H into their community, partly due to his unusual bodily appearance. Y also describes his trainee experience with an artist: "Well, as a general rule, the majority of artists are drinking people, heavily drinking". Most of the participants in Samara, St. Petersburg and Ufa have a blasé attitude towards alcohol and its excessive consumption, many seem sick and tired of dealing with drunk people and quite a few capoeiristas refuse to consume alcohol at all.

T dreams about having different African-Brazilian percussion instruments (*batucada*) and performing with them on the streets with others. Such collective performances would increase their capoeira group’s membership as they would be better able to attract newcomers:

> It’s clear that for us a batucada would elevate our group quite a bit in that people could go out to the streets and beat the drums. That would be cool if of course in our Russia they won’t take that opportunity away from us, won’t punish us for an unsanctioned protest, won’t give us a fine so that we’d have to sell that batucada. (T)

T’s ‘they’ is a reference to Russian officials and police. Angoleiros in Russia face many daily challenges beyond the stereotypical drunkenness of the population. Many scholars suggest that the key challenges in today’s Russia spring not from its history, its geography or culture but are primarily due to mismanagement by the current government and elites (e.g. Josephson et al. 2013: 319; Sakwa 2014). But then again, the Russian government, its individual representatives are products of the Russian history, geography and culture. From a feminist perspective, I would suggest that political decision-makers and their surroundings are in a reciprocal relationship.

How is it that something so physically and culturally unusual like capoeira angola penetrates the rather rough, dusty scenes of urban Russia in the first place? Capoeiristas
note how amazed their Brazilian master and other non-Russian capoeiristas are when they encounter an active group of angola in Ufa:

\[
\text{They come to Russia and encounter here this energy. They say "What’s this? We manage to come here once a year and it’s so great here!" (M)}
\]

\[
X: \text{Mestre was also all the time wondering "How you here, where the sun don’t shine’, how you manage to…"} \\
Q: \text{Even to show me something new?} \\
X: \text{Even to develop the group.}
\]

Various global (rather than purely national or local) influences bring capoeira angola to Russia and help to sustain it there, at least for a moment.

### 3.4 NEW BEGINNINGS

Capoeira angola arrives to Russia primarily through the Internet, television, books, video games and local organisations.

\[
\text{At one point I was really interested in South American literature. … That was a period when I was into Spanish, I was reading books. So… and amidst all these authors there were books by Jorge Amado. I didn’t come across any other Brazilian author. And somehow I consumed a lot of these books and then after some readings this word ‘capoeira’ stayed in my mind. I was interested where it was, what it was? … Well, I found that it’s there, that it is in Brazil, that it is in Jorge Amado, so I tried to find more information there. Well, there it is definitely all, well, it’s difficult to get a full picture of what capoeira is based on books by Jorge Amado. But my interest came from there. Then I started to search online. (N)}
\]

In Soviet Russia, particularly during its late period, young people had access to global radio broadcasts, some foreign films, rock music and magazines (Yurchak 2005). However, N notes that it would have been difficult for her to get a full picture of capoeira solely based on Amado’s books. Instead, she searched online and later travelled and lived in Brazil to get a fuller picture of the practice. This would not have been possible in the Soviet period. In this respect, we could say that capoeira angola entered Russia as its borders and technology opened up to influences of globalisation.

The first capoeira groups of contemporânea styles emerged in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1990’s. The style of angola appeared only later in the beginning of the 2000’s, first in Moscow. Capoeira angola developed gradually in Samara, St. Petersburg and Ufa. A female instructor describes how a French angoleiro who occasionally visited Samara in 2008 was the first person to play the style of angola in the city:

\[
\text{Angola in Samara was this very wild thing, incomprehensible. Whenever he would come out to play in roda with someone, everyone would just get confused; we didn’t understand what we needed to do (laughs). (R)}
\]

The first angoleiros in Russia began their practice with mixed styles of capoeira, often reminiscent of contemporânea movements. Mostly, the early Russian capoeiristas
were not aware of stylistic differences in capoeira: "Closer to, let's say to, 2007 when people started getting deeper into capoeira. Before that it was just capoeira", says Y. The background and meanings of capoeira only gradually unravelled for its first practitioners in Samara, Ufa and St. Petersburg.

When F attended a first training of capoeira contemporânea she did not know anything about capoeira. This surprised some of the practitioners as they asked her:

F: "You what? You haven't seen the film with Dacascas? Aren't you in on this?" And I realized that, "Guys, I'm not in at all, not at all!" (laughs)
I: You hadn't seen the film, yeah? Only the Strong?
F: No! I went to capoeira and only after some time I watched the film because like damn, I had to watch it! So much is talked about it.

Before corporeally attempting capoeira, many bodies in Russia encountered capoeira in static positions by watching a Hollywood film:

I was probably 14 years old when I saw that film, Only the Strong. I got it from my uncle who is also a sportsman, he has practised judo for a very long time. And he said: "Watch it! You should like it." And really, so I watched it in my childhood, and liked the film, I liked capoeira, I was even trying to do ginga (laughs). (A)

In the beginning of 2000 I saw a film with Mark Dacascas (laughs). Probably everyone has seen it. An old film, I can't remember what it's called. (Y)

Well, here it's the classic scenario we could say. In our country it is the film with Mark Dacascas (laughs). What is it called? I can't really remember anymore. Only the Strong I think. (T)

It's Hollywood capoeira. (J)

The plot is like that he arrives to some championship where different countries, there is a fighter that, well, is characteristic of that country. If it's Brazil then it's a capoeirista, if it's an Englishman it's English boxing, from Russia there was some huge guy with fists… (G)

Well, so long as I've spent time with guys (capoeiristas) from different cities, many were saying that "We began training by ourselves in school, we watched Only the Strong and started in a hall to ooh, twist these whirls!" (F)

Most capoeiristas saw the film Only the Strong accidentally while watching TV, although in recent years it has become common to find full films online, particularly through Russia's most used social network Vkontakte where pirated films and music albums are widely shared (Baran & Stock 2015; Duvanova et al. 2015). "It took a while for the film to reach us", says E who watched it in the late 1990's. "Because back then was still that kind of time. Now of course if we watch it, it will seem really, I think, very old-fashioned." E was among those capoeiristas who were inspired to practise capoeira partially after watching the film:

I got to know capoeira when I was still in a technical school. We went to the mountains with my youth organisation. Well, just to the mountains, to visit our like, our affiliated
organisation. And there I met a person who says “Oh, oh, I practice capoeira!” I’m like
“Wow! I’ve seen it there in the film Only the Strong! Oh!” He’s like: “Yeah, yeah, let’s
train together.” And well, in short, he became my first trainer. (E)

Even if a capoeirista has not seen the film, she or he is likely to have heard about it: "I
still haven’t watched that film", says O.

The film presents capoeira primarily as a martial art, at the expense of other aspects.
U notes that similar misrepresentations occur with Russian folklore: "It’s shown what
is Russian folklore art, yeah, older women jumping in kokoshniks20, there, I don’t know
into squatting positions. "This is Russian national art" – but it’s not so. The same thing
with capoeira, I think." U points out. The film portrays a simplified, sensationalist
account of capoeira. "There it’s somersault, there it’s this cool capoeira, extravagant.
Not like capoeira angola, but like an extravagant show-off. I really liked it and I
wanted to practise that." says E. An inaccurate portrayal of capoeira sometimes serves
as the very catalyser for the relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola.

Much like the main character in Only the Strong, a young muscular man who uses
spectacular capoeira movements for combat, a video game character, Eddy Gordo,
introduced capoeira to some of the participants.

Once I got a Sony PlayStation for my birthday … and with it came a disc with a
game (called) Tekken. Well, like a fight. … I started playing it and noticed a character,
well with time of course, who was well, the representative of capoeira. And I liked the
movement. I became interested. Meaning that, well, he does everything beautifully, that
you always win when you play as him. (W)

J also discovered capoeira through the game Tekken around 2005. B suspects that her
first impressions of capoeira came either from a film or a video game: "As a kid I
watched a lot of action movies (laughs). I played Mortal Combat (laughs) maybe from
there…".

As O was trying to remember where he heard the word ‘capoeira’ or where he
had seen the practice for the first time during his interview, I noted that some have
encountered it in games:

I: Some people have also seen it in computer games.
O: Oooh yeah! Tekken 3 actually, yes! Yeah, it’s the favorite game of all the boys of the
1990’s generation. And mine too. I remember before when I used to live in the city of
Perm, there kids would have fun in different ways and well, this game where there was
a hero who was moving perfectly and drew admiration from any kid. Actually it could
be, could be from there.

The capoeira character in the game is a dark-skinned male with huge biceps, long
dreadlocks, a fierce look in his eyes and a tight green and yellow costume. It is a very
different look to the angoleiros whom I observed in Russia.

When A saw capoeira angola movements for the first time she wondered “What
kind of dough are they working?! (laughs)” she says referring to the hand gestures
particularly during the cunning ginga movements in which the hands of some

20 An old Russian headdress.
practitioners move in circular ways that can be reminiscent of kneading movements. "Well yeah, somehow the movements seemed a little strange to me like, unusual. Not like it was in the film." A says laughing. Working dough is a kind of reference to what one’s grandmother's hands would do rather than an image compatible with a young African-Brazilian man fighting in a Hollywood film or a PlayStation game. Some of the hand gestures in capoeira angola that are reminiscent of gardening or baking have rather feminine connotations in comparison to the more rigid, linear gestures of other capoeira styles. Rosa also points out that angoleiros often deliberately develop "a style no one can deal with" in hyperbolic, strange-looking gestures and twists and turns so as to hide the intentions of the body in a game (Rosa 2015: 113).

The sensationalist look of capoeira that was mentioned in the previous chapters fits well with the characters both of video games and of the aforementioned Hollywood film. Their movements are fast, violent and almost supernaturally acrobatic. Almeida et al. who discuss the commercialisation of capoeira, note that "the ways a product's meanings are advertised and consumed must change in order to be sold to a foreign market, and the extent of the modifications is dictated by the marketplace" (Almeida et al. 2013: 1348). As with so many other transnational practices, capitalist logic has impacted the meanings of capoeira in order to commodify the practice globally. G, for example, argues that capoeira and African-Brazilian practices in general are such novelties in Russia that knowing their historical backgrounds and cultural details is not as important as popularising the practice in the Russian context:

_In general, this whole like, this whole orientation, Afro-Brazilian, Latin America and so on, uniting all of this. It’s as a whole huge novelty for the local population, because of that, any aspect of it (here), will be a big plus already. Without going into any details yet…_(G)

As a capoeira instructor, G is more interested in spreading Brazilian practices in Russia widely rather than in conveying them accurately in all their nuances.

Another much-mentioned influence for the beginning of angola groups in Samara and Ufa is the role of capoeira groups of other styles as well as the organisation INBI World. Prior to setting up a group of angola, N remembers that: "Before that, there was just a group of people who left ABADA and didn’t know what they should do next". ABADA is one of the largest and best-known groups of capoeira in the world that continues the lineage of regional styled capoeira (Almeida et al. 2013: 1352; Assunção 2005: 194).

The capoeira introduced into Russia by the nationwide organisation INBI was capoeira of no particular style. The organisation was established in 1987 and according to its website it specialises in "practices and traditions that have been accumulated by cultures of different nations of the world" (INBI World 2017). Capoeiristas would usually describe INBI as an organisation promoting various ‘ethnic practices’ by organising classes and occasional workshops with instructors from abroad, such as Brazilian capoeira masters. Early capoeira was taught by a couple of male instructors in Ufa’s INBI one of whom is particularly notorious as many of the first angoleiros in Ufa encountered the practice through his teachings:

_The thing is that he’s from out of nowhere, he never practised capoeira. He went to one seminar … He didn’t have any experience, of teaching classes, no plan … Yeah so
roughly speaking we were doing ginga for 40 minutes and the kind of ginga that, damn, it’s best for no one to do. I mean it’s when a ginga just kills you. (Y)

It wasn’t in depth, just some basics. Yeah we’d learn ginga to some music. Actually there was no music on the instruments. None. Because the instructor who was teaching he just didn’t know how to play. (G)

J: …it wasn’t clear what was going on there. It wasn’t really capoeira.
I: Was this that famous instructor who only taught ginga?
J: Yeah he would… We would do some strange cartwheels then he would tell us to stand, we’d stand, to be quiet, in silence. Well, all kinds of strange exercises. Well, it’s because he practised tai chi and maybe he tried to combine it.

The organisation’s instructor had no knowledge of capoeira beyond the basic movements. Yet he was giving classes, most likely because there was no one else more experienced and the students did not know any better. This is not an unusual occurrence in transnational capoeira in which fraudulent instructors are occasionally found (Almeida et al. 2013: 1352). According to Almeida et al., digital technologies today enable even novice practitioners to verify more easily capoeira instructors’ authenticity by searching for their background and capoeira lineage online or by comparing their embodied performances to those of other instructors seen in online videos (Almeida et al. 2013: 1352–1353).

Angoleiros’ descriptions suggest that the interpretations that capoeira angola received in Russia during the first stages of transnational transmission were narrow and at times inaccurate. The musical aspect of capoeira was often overlooked in the films seen, video games played or the classes attended. The African-Brazilian practice had not yet fully opened up to the Russian bodies.

The Internet

Heidegger envisions and hopes for a future where “our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed” so that we will use technical devices when needed, without being dependant on them. “Let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher”, Heidegger describes. (Heidegger 1966: 54.) Our current relations to technological devices are not quite as relaxed and simple as Heidegger envisioned. Braidotti suggests that “our hand-held electronic devices” are “so powerful that we can barely keep up with them” (Braidotti 2013: 197). Moreover, Parviainen writes that “when our interaction with computers becomes more and more mundane, automatized, and embodied, we apparently no longer “use” devices, but our being and acting becomes part of their functions” (Parviainen 2017: 197). Instead of being simple means to higher ends, technological devices take on the function of ends in themselves, often controlling our lives more than they comfortably facilitate them.

Our social relations today are variously de-stabilised and mediated technologically, within a globally connected world (Braidotti 2006: 197). For example, according to political theorist Rachel Sanders, biometrical devices regulate female bodies in ways that may further increase gender inequality. "The rise of wearable biometric technologies has significant implications for the augmentation and co-extension of
biopower and patriarchal power”, Sanders writes (Sanders 2016: 38). Also Braidotti
notes that "hyper-reality does not wipe out class relations: it just intensifies them" (Braidotti 2006: 204). A good example of this is the visual type of social media like Instagram, where elites get to display their wealth to a wide, even a global audience (Monbiot 2013). By whatever norms we choose to evaluate the present state of technology and its impacts on our daily lives, it seems undeniable that “the material structures that mesh the contemporary human body differ vastly from those that existed a decade ago” (Roberts 2012: 2513). Living bodies, and not only human bodies, are being transformed at an incredible pace.

At this moment the Internet is one aspect of technology on which capoeira angola groups in Russia are particularly dependent for their continuing existence. The discourses on immateriality of different practices today are applicable to the transnational spread of capoeira angola. Immaterial processes rely on “the circulation of information, ideas, images, and affect through our bodies in ways that are difficult to see and measure”, writes Blackman (2008: 134). It is indeed not possible to see holistically how capoeira angola spreads through online images, videos and affect through the Internet to places like Ufa in Russia or Maputo in Mozambique. One can hardly even quantitatively measure the number of transnational practitioners of capoeira angola as practitioners constantly fluctuate and move between online and offline realities.

Now capoeira is more advanced than before and because of that, and now the means of communication are advanced. “What is capoeira?” “Oh here: ‘tap, tap, tap, tap, tap’, here: Capoeira, Youtube – here, watch what is capoeira.” (E)

E communicates in isolated words and sounds how capoeira can be described today with the use of technology such as, online videos of the practice found on Youtube. E notes that in our environment it is no longer necessary to explain the practice in words as it can be immediately shown to someone on the screen of one’s smartphone.

Without the globally connected screens, interaction of bodies with capoeira angola in Russia can appear quite lonely. No Brazilian master of capoeira angola has ever lived in Russia. The master of the group in Ufa used to come for a week’s visit every year and the group in Samara occasionally receives young teachers of capoeira angola from Brazil or Europe. Otherwise, the bodies in Samara and Ufa are left on their own to learn the practice. I have frequently discussed with the participants whether the groups would remain active in their relative isolation in Samara and Ufa without the Internet. Not all capoeiristas agree that the Internet has been indispensable for the spread of capoeira angola in Russia: “Youtube is all well and good but we didn’t learn (capoeira) by watching it”, says N.

Even when there was no Internet, there was still ‘word of mouth’. Someone said something, another person heard it, became interested and began to dig deeper. Because there are after all these curious minds that cling on to one word and become interested in it. They start to dig out new material, looking for something, finding something out. (P)

"The Internet wasn’t very widespread, that’s why we’d search through our acquaintances for information about capoeira”, says E as he talks about the early 2000’s in Ukraine where he was living at the time. N believes that finding out about
and practising capoeira angola without the presence of the Internet would have been more intriguing:

> It would be even more interesting. To dig for that information, we’d re-write it, forward it from one (person) to another. … It’d be such a like “Oh! I’ve found some more of this and that! Like I found also this kind of article!” (N)

While I agree with N and P that there are always individuals who are curious and passionate about new cultural practices, I wonder whether such persons would be able to create sustainable groups of capoeira angola in Samara and Ufa without the help of the Internet. Counterfactually speaking, even if the two groups would come to exist without the Internet, their practice of capoeira angola would likely be very different to what it is today. G’s and U’s words support this view:

> Before, in the 1990’s, when there was still no Internet, clubs of karate, judo and so on were emerging. And there it was often so that like a despot trainer, everyone listens to him and so on. But how accurately he introduces the philosophy, that’s a question. Because people cannot compare and they only have one source of information… (G)

> Well, capoeira it after all, it leans on a cultural frame, specifically speaking: Brazilian. That is, all the songs, all..., all videos, everything, everything. Music, all this you can watch only on the Internet. That is, well, where else? So to learn based on videos, downloading texts, listening to music. It’s all on the Internet, in short. That is, the Internet plays a really, really big role. (U)

Consider M’s beginnings with the practice. Her mother initially mentioned the word capoeira as a potentially interesting form of dance:

> I immediately forgot this word ‘capoeira’, it was this strange word. I sat behind the computer and wrote ‘dances with elements of martial arts’ on Yandex. Yandex gave me thousands of links to capoeira. (M)

Yandex is the Russian version of Google, just as Vkontakte is the Russian version of Facebook (Baran & Stock 2015: 12). Without the search engine M might never have found capoeira in Ufa as even the very word of the practice was difficult to remember. F relates how her mother can never remember the word capoeira and instead playfully calls the practice KPRF which stands for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. "Oh so you’re going to another one of your KPRF meetings," F’s mum would say when F would pack for a class of capoeira. Most Russian practitioners found capoeira online through the exact same channels:

> I: How did you precisely find a group of angola?
> H: On Vkontakte. I found three groups: ABADA, angola and this Cordão de Ouro. I started just examining there who does what, watching video clips on Youtube, looking at games of masters there.

> Online, through the social network Vkontakte I got acquainted with one of the guys who practised capoeira in a group of angola. (Q)
A group in Vkontakte, that’s pretty much it, there are no other ways. … Till this day like popularisation of capoeira, it’s in Vkontakte. Yeah, really, 90 percent like, of everything connected with groups is there. (O)

I was interested in these ethnic cultures… I Googled capoeira and realised that capoeira is great. "With music – wow, totally awesome! Well, well, do we have it in Samara?" So there is (a group) in Samara and so it worked out that I found it and went there. Like that, capoeira won out over wushu. That’s why I came, started practising. (D)

Online videos also play an important role for bodies getting involved with the practice:

I watched a video. So not even photos (but), a video. I liked the process of the game itself. I can’t say what exactly interested me. I just decided that I need to try it. (P)

Videos enable one to see capoeira in motion and thus to get a more holistic impression of the practice. Discovering differences between capoeira angola and other styles occasionally happens through watching videos as well:

I didn’t even see it live so it was just that at some point I watched all sorts of videos on Youtube. I realised that I’m watching angola videos that I’m not at all interested in how ABADA plays, how all those contemporâneans play. (N)

The interview excerpts suggest that the role of the Internet has been indispensable for the emergence of the capoeira angola groups in Russia. Perhaps it is above all online videos that provide avenues of ‘contagious communication’ or ‘emotional contagion’ for the capoeiristas in Russia as emotions are passed on between bodies through the Internet (Blackman on contagious communication 2008: 46–47, 137).

The Internet seems to enable the capoeiristas’ "imagination to roam within other global locales" without leaving their homes or towns (Gruner-Domic 2011: 478). The citation of a roaming imagination comes from social anthropologist Sandra Gruner-Domic who describes an Argentinian artist leading a transnational bohemian lifestyle, engaging with individuals with common interests from around the world. Some of the angoleiros in Russian could be described in similar ways, especially in their engagement with the Internet rather than in physical global travelling. Many of the capoeiristas are involved in different online communities:

V: Yeah in social media, on Vkontakte, on Facebook, you have groups and friends of capoeira.
Z: And also all these photos of you in embarrassing, strange poses.
V: (laughs) Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Sharing stories, photographs and videos of capoeira experiences makes the angoleiros in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod tangibly aware that they are not alone in practising this unusual art-form. Online capoeira communities compensate for the absence of diverse offline capoeira angola communities in Russia.

Perhaps technology in the form of smartphones, tablets and their constant online connection encourages us, as Heidegger might put it, 'to escape ourselves' as we chase the latest post, the latest online photograph, thus, furthering ourselves from our own
living bodies (Heidegger in Klemola 1990: 21). Heidegger critiques a mass society in which "in utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every Other is like the next" (Heidegger 1962: 164). According to this thinking we lose our uniqueness and blend into one mass through the consumption of same public services or products. As we saw above, Russian bodies connect to capoeira angola at first through similar, if not identical, channels. One film, one video game, one social network and one search engine usually introduce capoeira angola to Russian bodies in a mass society. Instead of having the opportunity to make unique new beginnings, each body in our late capitalist setting tends to adapt to a more general, as if set in stone, way of doing things (Irigaray 2017).

An Angolan Learning Capoeira Angola in Russia

Some global influences do lead to surprising new initiatives on a local level. While a national setting such as that of contemporary Russia may be conservative, global cultural currents have some capacity to infiltrate it. One young man’s story in Ufa is a good example of global mobility that can at times be unexpected. "We had this charismatic character. He managed to keep an audience (/a group of members) around himself", T recalls. "As they say, he is the legend who saw capoeira for the first time in Ufa!" P says and laughs. The young man was a student from Angola who came to study in Ufa’s State Petroleum Technological University for five years. The paradox is that he never encountered the practice of capoeira angola in his home country but only when moving to Russia.

N who at the time of her interview was planning to move to Angola said that "Angola in fact is not that connected to capoeira." Indeed, when we met later in 2016 and she was showing us photographs from Angola where she had been working as a translator, she said that during a stay of several months she had encountered only one angoleiro who is residing in the capital, Luanda. J also says that:

\[
\text{I was acquainted with many Africans precisely in Ufa and very few people knew about…} \\
\text{In Angola, there isn’t that much capoeira, in Angola itself, in let’s say Luanda now. (J)}
\]

Capoeira researchers, like anthropologist J. Lowell Lewis, also find it difficult to "support claims, prominent among the students of Mestre Pastinha, for a unitary Angolan origin of capoeira", despite the name 'capoeira angola' given to the practice, allegedly associated with the zebra dance of Angolan origin, called ngolo (Lewis 1992: 25–26).

According to Desch-Obi, in places like Rio de Janeiro "more than 80 percent of enslaved Africans came from the Angola region, and the largest number of these from southern Angola" (Desch-Obi 2012: 215). He describes how people of southern Angola had developed "unique martial arts, including forms of head butting and a foot fighting art called engolo" prior to the invasion of the Portuguese and their African allies of the region (Desch-Obi 2012: 214). Engolo (or ngolo/n’golo) is seen as a prototype of capoeira by a number of capoeira angola mestres and practitioners and the transition from engolo to capoeira is often framed in terms of ‘tradition’ (Downey 2005: 64–66).

\[
\text{A: Tradition, well it’s probably a preservation of certain customs that are passed on} \\
\text{with time from generation to generation. Customs that need to be respected also by}
\]
capoeiristas. Not only those of capoeira angola but also the visiting (capoeiristas) from other groups. That is, they (traditions) need to be known and followed.

I: Can they be changed? Like these habits, rules?
A: Well, drastically, I think not, then it will disappear. Anyway something with time, anyway something changes but the basis, the basis remains. It’s like language, yeah? Into it, in any case, come words from other languages there, like some Western, international words. But the language remains.

"The sheer act of handing on a tradition introduces change", writes also Squarcini (Squarcini 2011: 33). Both A and Squarcini seem to suggest that innovation, renewal of customs, occurs organically even when it is not artificially imposed. The handing on of the customs of capoeira angola occurs on a global level today, to the extent that potentially more Russian bodies relate to capoeira angola than Angolan bodies do.

Even though the Angolan student in Ufa could not help the Russian practitioners understand the ‘traditions’ of capoeira angola he did concretely help the group in terms of linguistic translation. G describes how he helped the group establish first contacts with the Brazilian capoeira mestre:

G: Well, and so there we already got to know mestre directly. So we exchanged contacts. We had a young man here, he spoke good Portuguese and so he started being in touch with him (mestre). He was a student from Africa at the Oil University.
I: He was from Angola?
G: Yes.
I: So it means he was your …
G: Translator. And so through him everything then began. Like he set up contact with mestre and we started then to think how to organise his visit.

Without a translator, angoleiros in Ufa may never have established a lasting contact with a Brazilian mestre. The same case has been in Samara where one of the founding members of the group spoke Portuguese and could communicate with Brazilian capoeiristas.

S points out that the Angolan student enabled the first angoleiros to get direct messages from the capoeira mestre across an INBI seminar that the organisation’s staff would likely have mistranslated.

He is from Angola so Portuguese is his native language and he was translating for us, because of that they could communicate and INBI couldn’t control that in any way because none of them knew Portuguese. (S)

In addition to his important contribution as a translator, the young man also took the role of an instructor in the early phase of the group’s development: "So we already had two instructors, that was, in the very beginning it was G", and the Angolan student, says K.

It is often not easy for students from African countries to live in Russia, not only due to climatic and cultural differences but also due to overt and occasionally violent racism (Pilkington 2010; Sotkasiira 2016: 12–13, 85–88). The attitude towards capoeira angola as a black practice is often derogatory in Russia. D candidly talks about some spectators of capoeira on the streets of Samara "I just know these people and I also socialise with them, I know their attitude towards things like capoeira – well, it’s like
having a look at the monkeys". Moving in African-Brazilian ways is associated with movements of monkeys by some Russian onlookers. "It's not particularly pleasant. (So and you) kind of understand that the majority of people come exactly with that thought in mind." D believes that capoeira is associated with primitivism in many Russian eyes which is reminiscent of the kind of primitivism that was associated in the European perception of capoeira in the nineteenth century Brazil. Desch-Obi quotes an English observer in Rio in the early nineteenth century who had come across capoeira players: "they are full of action, capering and throwing their arms and legs about like monkeys during their quarrels" (Desch-Obi 2012: 215).

The analytical move in new materialism is to "eliminate presuppositions about agents" (Coole 2013: 457). While comparisons between African people and monkeys historically have extremely strong, negative racist connotations, body scholars today increasingly note that we are all part human and non-human. Game talks of humans as creatures, that is, "mixed beings", and Haraway refers to us as critters (Game 2001: 2; Haraway 2015b). From this perspective, mixing humans with animals or other beings to make a derogatory statement, seems rather outdated. Haraway proposes a new kinship system in which our relations to siblings, relatives are reconsidered (Braidotti on Haraway 2006: 203). Hemingway's view of porpoises as 'our brothers' is an example of such a reconsidered kinship system. Racist comments comparing humans to animals rest on the assumption that the two belong in separate categories, with humans superior and the rest inferior. In Haraway’s treatment of "other than humans", Braidotti sees that "the classical 'other than' the human are (...) emancipated from the category of pejorative difference and shown forth in a more positive light" (Braidotti 2006: 204).

The attitudes of Russian angoleiros towards skin colour and Africa are reflective of their historical socio-cultural context. K briefly mentions the Angolan student during his interview: "There he was, our African". Boltovskaya describes how in Soviet Russia black Africans who lived in Moscow and St. Petersburg as students, diplomats or state visitors were not considered as 'the other' because they were not part of the capitalist bloc, but they were also not considered as 'our people' (Boltovskaya 2010: 96). K's words suggest a continuation of this thinking. While the Angolan student is 'our' person in K's eyes, he is nonetheless 'our African', thus simultaneously an insider and an outsider.

Some participants suggest that their attitude towards race has been transformed through the practice of capoeira:

Well, we live in Russia, so and… after beginning to practise capoeira, well I’ve, how to… I’ll formulate it. I don’t think that… if I didn’t practice capoeira, I wouldn’t have the opportunity to socialise with black people. That is, I can’t imagine a situation in life that would lead to (that)… Now I socialise without thinking about it at all. (V)

V describes how she and a couple of capoeiristas from another city once went to a shop in Samara. A friend of theirs, "a big, black guy", was with them. It took her a while to realise that the reason all of the cashier ladies were staring at them was because of him. V notes that none of the angoleiros paid any attention to his skin colour and she also wasn’t thinking about the issue until she noticed all the glares in the shop.

I don’t have that attitude towards him and generally towards… well, we’re all just humans. So… But if you think about it – that there are very few of them in Russia at
the moment. I see students who are from Africa on exchange but it’s only very small numbers. (V)

It is a paradox that "the image of Africa and Africans generated by Russian media remains negative," as Boltovskaya puts it. "Africa is described as a poor, hopeless continent characterised by AIDS and hunger," she writes. (Boltovskaya 2010: 96.) After all, Russia has the same or higher percentages of HIV and AIDS infections per population as many African countries (e.g. in WHO 2009). Despite Russia’s oil and gas wealth, almost twenty million of its inhabitants live in poverty (RFERL 2017). The increasingly state-controlled Russian media appears to create stark socio-cultural distinctions artificially, be it between Russia and Africa or Russia and the West, that are empirically difficult to substantiate (Rosenholm et al. 2010; Tolz 2017). Thus Russian bodies practising capoeira angola are permeated by various global as well as national and regional influences, some of which are contradictory, like the African heritage that is viewed positively within capoeira angola communities and largely negatively by Russian mass media.

Plenty of attention has been paid to skin colour in studies of the body and its socio-cultural implications. Most often such references to skin are part of discussions about racism and identity (e.g. in Casanova & Jafar 2013; Lipiäinen 2017). However, skin is also, in a proprioceptive sense, an "instrument of communication that allows us to sense and feel in the world" (Blackman 2008: 86). In body studies this important and immediate socio-cultural function of skin is often overshadowed by discourses related to race and its colonialist/postcolonialist implications. Regardless of its colour, skin possesses what psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu calls "skin knowledge" that is vital for our being and functioning in the world (in Blackman 2008: 86). A focus on a subtler proprioceptive body can help us go beyond the old discourses of e.g. race, based on skin colour, opening up more nuanced aspects of body that emphasise commonality rather than the differentiation of human bodies. Irrespective of our cultural background or language skills, we all, including animals sense and feel the surroundings through our skin that is "simultaneously internal and external, as well as permeable and impermeable" (Blackman 2008: 87). Relations between bodies and practice are mediated by – among other factors – the skin.

3.5 REMOTE PALM TREES

*Capoeira it’s a very good, well, a very good reason for people from Brazil to come to Europe. To move. Well it’s, this really good opportunity. (U)*

In her book *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*, Tsing questions earlier depictions of globalisation in terms of smooth, ongoing flows of goods, ideas and people across the globe. Instead, she points out that global mobility is rarely an unhindered, easily flowing, process. "How we run depends on what shoes we have to run in," Tsing writes. While elites of the world might be running in newly bought, comfortable Adidas, most of the Russian angoleiros own cheaper brands of sneakers. "Insufficient funds, late buses, security searches, and informal lines of segregation hold up our travel", Tsing continues. (Tsing 2005: 5.) Relative poverty prevents many capoeiristas from travelling outside of and within Russia in order to attend capoeira angola events. According to the 2016 statistics of the Russian Federal
Agency for Tourism, approximately a third of the Russian population travels abroad for tourism purposes annually, with the majority of trips being made to other post-Soviet states (Russiatourism 2016). It was also mentioned in the field that a holiday trip to Egypt or Thailand can be cheaper from Samara or Ufa than a trip to the Eastern end of Russia to destinations like Kamchatka or Altai in Siberia. Mobility of bodies today is anything but straightforward.

In the literature on cultural globalisation – particularly from the 1990s – one often encounters statements to the effect that the whole world is on the move, that there are increasing flows of people and goods (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Augé 1995; Hannerz 1996). But in this age of globalisation most of the interviewees in Samara and Ufa remain locally attached. "X has been living on the same side of the Oktiabr’skii prospect all of his life.", I wrote describing the life of one practitioner (fieldnotes 12.3.2014). His "parents live in the same apartment building on a higher floor", I wrote on another day as I was staying with X and his wife on their living room couch for two weeks (fieldnotes 17.3.2014). While many researchers of cultural globalisation have referred to static commitments and local belongingness as things of the past (e.g. Appadurai 1996: 191; Hannerz 1996: 4), for many Russian capoeiristas these are the dominant characteristics of their present. Therefore, the interconnectedness of Russian bodies and an African-Brazilian practice does not necessarily imply global mobility.

Unlike cosmopolitan birds that migrate huge distances without the need for passports, visas and funding, human mobility is limited by borders of all sorts: bureaucratic, financial, political, historical (paraphrasing Nagai on cosmopolitan animals, in Nagai et al. 2015). Brazil is not cheap to visit from Samara and Ufa and out of the 25 interviewees only four practitioners have been there. Interestingly, all four are females. Out of the interviewees, eleven have never been abroad by the year 2016. "In general, I’ve never been abroad, not once" says B who is 21 years old.

In a popular Soviet novel, The Little Golden Calf, written by Ilia Il’f and Evgenii Petrov and published in 1931, the main character Ostap Bender dreams of leaving the New Economic Policy of the Soviet Union that prevents him from becoming a millionaire. Bender wants to go somewhere far and his childhood dream is Rio de Janeiro, "the city with palms and ficus trees on every balcony", where one could enjoy "refreshing drinks, watching ocean liners, and stroll under the palm trees in (one’s) white trousers" (Il’f & Petrov 1962: 338). In post-Soviet Russia, many of the Russian capoeiristas still dream of rather than actually go to Brazil:

$$L: \text{I now have a dream to go to Brazil (laughs).}$$
$$I: \text{Before you didn’t have that?}$$
$$L: \text{I wanted to go to Brazil but not that much. I… it was some kind of distant dream and I wasn’t trying to achieve it. Now I’m fully getting ready. Preparing psychologically my parents that I will go to Brazil.}$$

L said this in early spring 2014 before the drastic fall of the rouble later the same year. When we met again in 2016 she, like most of the other capoeiristas with similar dreams, had not yet been to Brazil.

"In three years I want to go to Brazil! I already made a wish to go to Brazil when I’m thirty", R said in 2013 and in 2016 she had still not been abroad and it did not seem that she would be able to travel in the near future.
One weakness is that I can’t go to Brazil. That’s a really big minus for an instructor, for a leader. Because well, you also occasionally need to be at these conferences, well it’s considered an obligation, not an obligation, but it would be good. To be in general in Brazil, to charge on that energy. I can’t always even go to the seminars that take place here in Russia. That’s a very weak point of our group. Thank God, other girls occasionally travel. (R)

According to another practitioner, U, going to Brazil is essential for any angoleiro:

U: Well, I think that every person who practices capoeira angola, must absolutely visit Brazil. Well, I think without that, it’s not possible. Well, there, well, just in some other place you won’t get what you can get there.

I: What can you get there?

U: Well there it’s just in the air! That is, you walk there, well, imagine... What kind of an example to give you? For example, someone is interested in Russian folklore, he sits at home, plays a balalaika, or I don’t know... On the Internet, he learns some songs, sitting in the city, at home. But then he decides and goes to a village, to visit old babushkas, who are, I don’t know, the bearers, the protectors of the songs. He comes and starts socialising with them. Somehow like that (laughs).

R’s and U’s words suggest that one cannot have a full understanding of capoeira angola without travelling to Brazil. In order to accurately translate capoeira angola, one ought to physically, not only online, spend time in Brazil. But most Russian bodies are unable to do this which implies that their relation to the practice is permanently deficient due to lack of travelling.

Ostap Bender never happily makes it to Rio de Janeiro as that kind of ending would be unacceptable in Soviet Russian literature in the 1930’s. Instead, as Bender attempts to flee the Soviet Union he is caught at the Romanian border where he is deprived of all of his wealth and is sent back ‘home’ – the place where he does not want to be. S’s story of her attempt to move to Brazil has a similarly unhappy ending to that of Ostap Bender:

I really wanted to leave to Brazil and (laughs) after... and during fifth year of university, I was working and I managed to save a not very large sum of money. And at that time I definitely didn’t yet know that you can’t trust the words of Brazilians. One of my acquaintances promised me an invitation to the university for teaching Russian language. He was, well he is also now, the president of a youth association in one of the universities in Belo Horizonte. He promised me that invitation and I began to organise all the documents because I needed a visa. I spent all my savings on getting all these things done because I had to pay for the preparation of this invitation, formalisation of the visa. The tourist company gave it (the visa) to me and I immediately began, immediately after the university, almost in two days, I began to work for a bank in order to save some money and fly away. But at that stage when I already had all the documents ready, I didn’t have this invitation. He really... and he disappeared. First he told me that ”Yes, yes, yes, that’s it, and that’s it, I’ll send everything to you tomorrow”. But then it turned out that he had at that point gone for a long-term work trip to Italy and

21 Balalaika is a Russian stringed instrument. Babushka means grandmother in Russian.
he said "Sorry". At that point I had to face the fact that, at the moment, I won’t be able to go to Brazil. (S)

Those few angoleiros who manage to travel to Brazil usually spend several weeks or even months in the country. V went for the first time to Brazil with another capoeirista from her group. She had spent one month and her friend approximately three months there. V mainly practised capoeira during her stay: "Well and there we also trained and after Salvador we went to Rio, there we also practised with a capoeira angola group." When asked whether V would like to go back to Brazil, she replies: "Well, when I was there I was thinking that if I do come the next time then most likely it won’t be soon because after all it’s quite far away." Based on several accounts, capoeiristas come to realise during their stays in Brazil, that it is not the exotic paradise that they imagined it to be. N, for instance, showed us photographs of Salvador da Bahia and commented how much poverty and trash there is on the streets in comparison to her home town in Russia which is also rather polluted.

It is not only the lack of money that limits travel to Brazil but also the lack of time or company. Z notes that she has not been able to find anyone to go with her to Brazil: "To go alone… I won’t go. To me that’s scary", she says. M was also daunted to visit a capoeira angola group on her own when she was in Toronto with her parents:

> When I went there, it’s after all a foreign city, beyond the ocean, a foreign group. I thought: "How will I go there?" Yet, well, when I came there and heard the sounds of berimbau and guys are doing ginga, I just relaxed. It was great! (M)

The familiar non-verbal aspects of capoeira enabled M to enjoy her time in the Canadian group even though her English is not that fluent. T has also visited other capoeira angola groups abroad and has immensely enjoyed some of the visits:

> Basically it’s a habit yeah, you go somewhere on a work trip, visit the angoleiros. If you can’t find angoleiros, visit whoever you can find. And like this I came to Dresden… I was just floating on air there. I came there and already on the first night I felt like I came home. As if my family greeted me. Well, that just means that it was something unforgettable. (T)

E similarly tends to travel a lot for work and he too has the habit of visiting new capoeira groups wherever he goes:

> Wherever I would be, I always look for capoeira… I went to Arkhangel’sk for work, I had a couple of days off, I went online (tapped): "capoeira in Arkhangel’sk", found a phone number, called, said: "Hello, I’m a capoeirista from St. Petersburg." "Oh! Our friend! Come on over to our training." And so we met, became friends. (E)

Relations between Russian bodies and capoeira practice open up alternative pathways for the bodies to encounter people in new locations. Anthropologist and philosopher Anne Marie-Mol notes that the body (in medicine) is manipulated with the various practices in which it participates. Since manipulation "tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies" (Mol 2002 in Blackman 2008: 124). Similarly, the angoleiros’ reality seems to multiply through their practice of capoeira angola and its many side effects that impact, for instance, one’s travelling.
Not every angoleiro dreams of leaving their home like Ostap Bender. Some eagerly travel around Russia and its neighbouring countries without necessarily wanting to go elsewhere:

I: Have you been to Brazil?
O: No. Well, actually, I don’t especially plan to. Really. … In Brazil it’s just, just chaos.

I have been doing absolutely all sorts of tourism. … Now that we have two cars in the family we also do road trips. Last summer we drove with friends to Crimea. (P)

I can’t say that I now, I don’t know why, I don’t want to go so much to Brazil like I did before. Before it was some kind of a super peak of activity, a peak of interest. But now it has somehow subsided. Like maybe it’s not so necessary. (F)

Some of the interviewees have travelled abroad and remained unimpressed like W who had spent a short summer holiday with his family in Turkey when he was 10: “I liked it but the heat was unbearable. You’re walking, the sand is scorching, you’re jumping, looking for a spot where there is shade so that you can jump on it.” Summers in parts of Russia can certainly also be very hot. One June evening in Samara I wrote: “it’s too hot for reading, for thinking, for writing … it’s night time now and it’s still +28 degrees” (fieldnotes 17.6.2013).

At times, angoleiros are critical of touristic global travelling:

I was reading a book about, well, about these tribes in Africa, in South America. And civilised people well, let’s say they came to the tribe of Masai and brought with them not only well, how to say, knowledge about other continents, (but) something else also… I don’t know: weapons, alcohol, like that… Yeah and that had a very bad influence on the tribe. And it happens that in some tribes are organised some, some sort of (laughs) rituals, I don’t know, dances – for show. Not because it has to be done, that it was always done so, they believe in it, but because tourists came there with their cameras and it needs to be displayed for money. I think that’s very sad. (B)

Such remarks suggest that not all bodies in Russia want to ”selfishly purloin African-Brazilian culture” as some researchers characterise white foreigners’ involvement in capoeira (e.g. Joseph 2008: 207). Russian angoleiros are also well aware of their own troubled local contexts and the commitments that they require:

This city also raised me, I grew up in it and became who I am precisely here, in this city. So why shouldn’t I improve it? To start... change, no, how to say. ’Start changing the world beginning with yourself’, as they say. (H)

The practice of capoeira angola appears to be one way of transforming oneself and as H points out, potentially also allowing parts of one’s surroundings to be transformed.

D like H, never having travelled abroad, does not idealise the prospect of moving away from Russia:

I don’t plan to immigrate. Ideally, my future (laughs) is this kind of cosmopolitanism. It is neither to be attached to Russia, nor to any other country. That is, the place of residence is not that significant. (D)
Perhaps like the transnational yoga practitioners studied by anthropologist Sarah Strauss, some capoeira angola practitioners in Russia "seek a globally relevant model for living a good life" (Strauss 2002: 249) rather than a purely local or a national model. Authors on cosmopolitanism have assumed that it is the globally mobile individuals who can be considered to be cosmopolitans (Hannerz 1996; Werbner 1999). However, current researchers of transnationalism are increasingly arguing that "cosmopolitanism is not exclusively found among elites or mobile individuals" (Gruner-Domic 2011: 476). From this viewpoint, D could indeed lead a cosmopolitan lifestyle, facilitated by technology, without ever leaving Russia.

Capoeiristas’ attachments vary from feeling special obligation to one’s city to feeling no obligation to any part of the world. S expresses the constantly fluctuating relationship to one’s home: “Today everything is going wrong; I want to leave. Tomorrow everything is OK, well, so it means that I’m fine here too.” The desire to go to Brazil may result not only from the remote country’s attractiveness but also from the occasional difficulties in one’s own environment and the wish to escape them as far as possible, as Ostap Bender’s story exemplifies. Since most of the Russian bodies do not travel to Brazil to experience capoeira angola and the teachings of the mestres there in person, they rely on capoeira instructors’ interpretations of the practice. Many are thus entangled with the African-Brazilian practice, through mediating bodies.

**Special Events**

During conversations and interviews with the participants, seminars held with Brazilian capoeira masters and teachers were repeatedly pointed out as important events for the learning of capoeira angola.

_I think that a seminar given by a master, well, I’ve just felt it myself, that a seminar, feeling-wise, it gives some kind of charge of capoeira optimism, for a very long period of time._ (E)

A capoeira seminar given by a mestre in person offers more to the participating bodies than visual materials of the practice that can be found online. A seminar offers an affective experience that appeals to the body’s sensations holistically. Rare capoeira angola seminars and workshops have also been significant for the development of angola groups in Russia.

_We first started to imitate there some kind of angola, then there was a seminar in Moscow with a teacher. It was there that, there were some first things that we really learned. Then already in spring there was a seminar with mestre, also in Moscow, and already kind of everything began for real._ (N)

The first seminars of capoeira angola were held in Moscow, therefore, it was only those who were able to travel to the capital who caught the first glimpses of the practice in Russia.

_Mestres_ would normally visit the groups once a year: “Well, when the group was official, when everything was still OK, mestre visited every year in May” U notes. In the case of one group, before their mestre’s annual arrival in Russia, the group’s leader would put extra effort to teach others certain movements and musical skills: “He taught us, well, he first taught us samba movements before the arrival of mestre. Well, so that
we could at least a little bit yeah..." says W. In this way, seminars can boost group efforts even before their occurrence. When they do occur, seminars usually last from a week-end to a whole week. The events tend to be quite intensive: "There, training went on for the entire day, that is... you arrive at 12 noon and you leave around 8–9 p.m.", W describes. Most angoleiros would be drained by the end of the training day.

M recalls how several of their group members once went to Moscow to attend a seminar given by a master and how surprised they were by his rough style of playing. M suggests that it was especially good for her instructor and other more experienced players to attend the event: "When you're the best player of capoeira in Ufa you need to see where to grow further." Seminars offer an opportunity for Russian angoleiros to develop their bodily skills without leaving Russia, to see new sequences and to be physically challenged by more experienced players. Even a short game with a Brazilian master can make a strong impression on a practitioner. H describes his first game with a *mestre* of their transnational group during a seminar:

> In roda we didn’t get to play together during the first seminar. Well, somehow it just didn’t work out. We played with him during the training. So it was a training jogo22. We (played) maybe for just a minute and a half, two minutes, something like that. But it was very cool. (H)

In addition to playing with the teacher during seminars angoleiros have the privilege to play with many new capoeiristas whose style and sequences may vary from their own. "I really liked the seminar with the (Brazilian) instructor because I saw other guys, guys from other cities and from other groups. I got new experience", says A. There is much more diversity to movement and expression during the seminars in comparison to the weekly capoeira classes of the small groups in which the players are well familiar with each other's style (also in Stephens & Delamont 2010: 117). Capoeiristas D and N discuss how capoeira angola would be practised in Russia if there would be no seminars held with *mestres* and Brazilian instructors in the country:

> N: I think that it would surely, possibly, die out much sooner or it would transform into something like... Well, it would again be much more difficult but a chance to survive would still theoretically be there, maybe. But it would of course be like... sadder.
> D: I think it would be something else then, after all.
> N: Well, yeah, it would transform into something...

The emergence of particular types of relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola partially depends on teachers who pass on the skills of the practice. This topic will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Usually only some group members are able to travel to other Russian cities to attend an event that involves transportation and attendance costs. "I've been only to Samara. Went there for a seminar. That's about it. The rest of the time, here in Ufa", says K who has not yet travelled neither to Moscow nor to St. Petersburg.

> I'd like for more masters to come here to us to Ufa. That is, that we'd have seminars. So that some would even stay here for... Then the development would be faster in Ufa. About the other cities I can't say anything. I've never been (there). (L)

22 'A game' in Portuguese.
Capoeiristas in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod usually need to save money in order to cover the costs of travelling to another city as well as to pay for the seminar. However, accommodation tends to be free of charge as visiting angoleiros stay with the local practitioners, most often on the floor or couches of the hosts’ apartments. A young family I once visited, whose father is a capoeirista and an instructor, lives in a small studio apartment, fitting the parents, their daughter and dog all into one living room that also serves as their bedroom. In spite of the very restricted space, the family accommodated a male capoeirista in their living room during one seminar. Apparently the only problem with the visit was the visitor’s loud snoring during the night that kept the entire family awake, including the dog.

S describes her experiences with visiting angoleiros during a seminar:

*I was living back then in a student residence room with a girl. We had three guys there sleeping on the floor. You’d wake up and the whole floor is full of young men! (laughs)*

*It was just… My sister was wondering “How do you do that? You don’t even know them.” But I told her: “But they’re capoeiristas!”* (S)

Anthropologist Helena Wulff observed inter-gender physical closeness in the world of ballet where practitioners are accustomed to physical proximity through their dancing (Wulff 1998: 111–112). A similar observation applies to the more experienced capoeiristas who are not necessarily shy to share rooms and daily routines with practitioners of the opposite sex.

At times the accommodation organised for the seminars is austere. During a large seminar with a well-known Brazilian mestre in St. Petersburg, that drew participants not only from around Russia but also Ukraine and Finland, there was no water and barely working electricity in a capoeirista’s friend’s apartment that was under renovation (fieldnotes 12.6.2013).

*In fact, there was quite an atmospheric accommodation (laughs). Because it was an apartment in the old part of the city, this kind of house that had a Dostoevskian feel. Like there was the apartment like somehow, well definitely old, with unfinished renovation. There, in half of the rooms, in most of the rooms, there was no light. So there was just bare floor on which people would directly put their sleeping bags.* (N)

U like N remarks on the inconvenient conditions of the accommodation provided on the one hand, but also notes the good atmosphere that exists despite all the inconveniences:

*Well, usually some kind of accommodation is always offered but the only thing is that it’s of course (these kinds of) Spartan conditions. That is, you’re asked to bring your own mat, sleeping bag. You can sleep on the floor well, in a room. … but it’s great because you’re hanging out with everyone, it’s somehow fun there.* (U)

Regardless of the ‘Spartan conditions’, many angoleiros have very positive impressions of spending several nights with other fellow capoeiristas. Relations between practitioners are not restricted to capoeira classes and events.

Even when a group of capoeira angola disappears and some of its old members still want to continue the practice, it is usually the seminars that offer a solution: "I always plan on going to a seminar. Well, because I want my life to be connected to

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capoeira... Well, because it gives me a whole lot of something, that is, it gives above all life's energy," U says. Attending a capoeira event offline, with one's living body, enables the practitioners to experience the energy of capoeira in ways that do not seem possible online. Relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola demand both online and offline experiences.

3.6 LEARNING THE COLONIAL LANGUAGE

"In what voices do the colonised speak – their own, or in accents borrowed from their masters?" Loomba asks (Loomba 1998: 231). African slaves spoke a variety of languages and their mixtures on the coast of West Africa and in Brazil (Assunção 2005: 35). Ethnomusicologist Juan Diego Diaz writes that "Nago (a variant of Yoruba) was lingua franca among Africans and creoles during most of the 19th century" in Bahia (Diaz 2015: 5). Such variants of African languages were forcefully displaced by European Portuguese. Today, the verbal meanings of capoeira angola are expressed in the colonial language of Portuguese that has by now assumed the form of Brazilian Portuguese. Therefore, capoeira angola is a practice in which neither Russian nor the arguably 'global' English can take the Russian bodies very far in understanding the verbal meanings of the practice.

Most capoeiristas in Russia speak little or no Portuguese. Unlike the English language, Portuguese is completely absent from Russian street scenes. The use of English words is widespread, for example, in everyday advertisements across urban Russia. In just one photograph taken in a mall in Moscow there is a variety of English words: 'gold', 'premium' written in Latin letters in front of food stands and words like 'business lunch' and 'fast food' written in Cyrillic letters (photo 2.3.2014). It is difficult to maintain Portuguese language skills without a Brazilian capoeira teacher's constant presence in Russia. When visiting a seminar in Samara, held with a young Brazilian teacher, M recalls her difficulties with Portuguese: "That was precisely that moment when I really regretted that I don't know Portuguese... The teacher doesn't speak English, he doesn't speak Russian – obviously!" Especially during seminars language skills are badly needed. M tells of another seminar that she attended in Moscow. For one day of training she forgot to bring her soft sneakers along and the mestre was not pleased with her incomplete uniform:

He came up to me several times and asked "Why am I not wearing sneakers?" And because back then I didn't know Portuguese at all, well, I was practising capoeira for half a year and I didn't... and my English too became stunned at that point. (M)

M did not manage to explain to the Brazilian master that she knew that sneakers are part of the uniform but in her morning rush to the training she simply forgot to take them along. Now M is an avid learner of Portuguese, in part through singing:

Songs in Portuguese have been added to my repertoire of songs, the ones that I just sing on everyday basis. While before I used to sing only Russian rock now I also sing in Portuguese everything that I can. (M)

R, in turn, provided accommodation to a Brazilian teacher visiting their group from London.
He was staying at my place. Thanks to him I learned… I overcame a little the language barrier because I had to speak Portuguese with him. Usually I’d (only) be like “Oi”, mestre!”. But here I had to explain where, what, something is, what to eat and so on. (R)

Despite the fact that most Russian angoleiros do not speak Portuguese, most of them warmly welcome opportunities to learn the language, particularly from native speakers.

When interviewing angoleiros, they described their language skills like this: "Well I basically don’t. I know some words… what am I saying? I basically don’t", says Z who knows French and that skill somewhat helps her with Portuguese. "I can understand Portuguese more or less but to speak, to improvise, I can’t. For me it’s absolutely inaccessible. I don’t think that it hinders anything," O says in reference to learning capoeira song lyrics. V, in turn, notes that "Well, I probably understand around 60 percent but I almost don’t speak (at all)." However, during one Portuguese class, V demonstrated a rather rich vocabulary despite the humble evaluation of her own language skills (fieldnotes 23.3.2014).

C describes her struggles in learning basic Portuguese:

The most difficult thing was to memorise the names of the movements. Meia lua, let’s say, that was very difficult for me to remember at first. I was constantly asking the names of the instruments. I couldn’t remember because there was immediately many (different ones): berimbau, pandeiro. I was asking. Well, I actually still don’t know the names of the moves.

… I don’t know English. I used to study German in school but that was like forced (on us). Our teacher was very strict. I had to memorise… (C)

Some of the participants have had bad experiences with language learning in school after which they are not eager to learn new languages in a classroom setting.

Angoleiro A took Portuguese lessons for a few weeks that were also accompanied by Portuguese learning within her capoeira group:

I even took some notes there, tried to learn it somehow. So it was interesting and especially when N was, well in parallel, was teaching. There was this diving into the language. But unfortunately it’s all gone now. (A)

As the classes of Portuguese terminated, so did A’s learning of the language as she did not have enough motivation to study Portuguese on her own. Another group’s instructor teaches weekly Portuguese classes to capoeiristas. No Portuguese textbook was used during classes in 2014, but by 2016 a textbook and other teaching aids had been acquired. In 2014, it was mainly lyrics of capoeira songs and for instance, a book by Paulo Coelho that were used for learning basic vocabulary. The instructor also makes use of online Brazilian karaoke videos.

In many ways the Internet facilitates both language learning and transnational communication for the Russian angoleiros. Capoeiristas who want to communicate with Brazilian and other non-Russian speaking practitioners without knowing

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23 ‘Hi’ in Portuguese.
Portuguese or English frequently make use of Google translator in their online messages. Some capoeiristas also use online sites for language learning:

T has recommended me a very interesting site. It's called livemocha.com. Well it's this social network where you can learn several languages. Several languages, I think there are 21 or 23 languages there. The classes there take place live, some testing exercises with cards. Then there are exercises where you need to write a text, where you read a text and that you read it on like a microphone, (and it is) checked by native speakers. (P)

The Internet plays a crucial role for translating capoeira angola transnationally. N, whose Portuguese is fluent, has read lots of material about capoeira online in Portuguese, Russian and English languages. She notes that "the best sources and the more convenient ones to read for me are in Portuguese".

The symbolic meanings of capoeira angola cannot be Google translated and there are indeed many nuances of the practice that are missed by bodies not fluent in Portuguese, who have not travelled to Brazil or who are not in close contact with Portuguese speaking practitioners. In one of the Portuguese language classes, Russian capoeiristas were going through the lyrics of a song called 'Vou dizer a meu senhor que a manteiga derramou.'

| Vou dizer a meu senhor | I am going to tell my master |
| Que a manteiga derramou | That the butter has spilled |
| A manteiga não é minha | The butter is not mine |
| A manteiga é de íoíó | The butter belongs to the master |

According to Assunção, this is the best-known song in capoeira that explicitly portrays the relationship between a slave and his master. It "conveys the malice of the slave. He relates an accident but at the same time one feels that he is gloating over what happened because he stresses that the butter does not belong to him, but to the master." (Assunção 2007: 208.) However, in class in Russia the instructor's translation of the lyrics made "them sound very primitive" because he only translated the literal meaning without expanding on the semiotics (fieldnotes 16.3.2014). When I practised capoeira angola in London, our Brazilian instructor would variously try to explain the hidden meaning behind the seemingly simple, repetitive lyrics. In Portuguese classes of one capoeira group in Russia this often did not happen. Instead, the depth and value of the words was lost as the participants merely had a laugh at the repetitiveness of the simple words.

"You understand what they (i.e. the songs) mean, well when it's translated from Portuguese to Russian. But in reality the song is not about that", says E from another group of capoeira.

The songs are not so simple. Yeah like "oi sim sim sim, oi não, não, não"24, yeah it's simple seemingly, upon first glance. But if you dig deeper, there you can uncover some kinds of roots of African culture, still that side when, well, when slaves were brought in and they were masking their well, worldview, their views, they masked them and hid them. (E)

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24 A song well-known to all capoeira beginners due to the repetitive, easy-to-learn lyrics of the chorus: "Oh yes, yes, yes, oh no, no, no".
There is notable variation between capoeira angola groups in Russia in their language skills and commitment to musicality but all angoleiros learn to play instruments and to sing in Portuguese.

Specific capoeira songs are used in particular occasions or the timing of the *roda* (Lewis 1992: 162–163). N notes that it is important to know not only the correct melody and meaning of each song but also to know when it is appropriate to sing it:

> Well, ideally, it’s melody, translation and some kind of context into which this song fits. So let’s say that it’s a teasing song or then, I don’t know, the opposite. That is, like to understand where you can concretely apply it. (N)

The songs sung in capoeira angola, their content, rhythm and mood are meant to directly impact the movement of the pair playing in a circle: "The principle of responding in chorus and singing along, learning the music is one of the first skills", says S. "Because music is the priority (in comparison to) the physical qualities." One person leads the singing in the *roda* and all other participants respond to her or him with the chorus. There is an ongoing dialogue in the singing that sometimes includes improvised responses.

> I used to sing only when being drunk, my throat would ache… But otherwise no, I wouldn’t sing. In fact, it’s really interesting, very healthy, because here you’re sober. Here you have people in front of you who are listening to you. (Y)

In capoeira angola a body is expected not only to sing but also to listen to others singing and to respond. During one of his classes, G said to the participants: "One of the most important things in capoeira is the ability to combine rhythm with movement" (fieldnotes 10.5.2016). G first teaches only movements to beginners and focuses on singing and instrument playing only later once the beginner starts to show interest in them. This seems like a successful tactic in the Russian context where many beginners would otherwise be overwhelmed with new things to learn. However, some of his group members have not committed to learning basic songs and understanding their meaning despite having practised capoeira for several years:

> During the five years of practising capoeira, I haven’t had the desire to really learn a ladainha. But every time before a seminar I feel, I have this feeling of guilt. That I have not learned a ladainha. Before every seminar there is a feeling of guilt that I haven’t learnt Portuguese. (Q)

*Ladainha*, as we saw in chapter two, is the opening litany in a capoeira *roda*. According to O: "Well, one has to know a ladainha. Definitely." To intimately relate to capoeira, a Russian body must master a whole set of completely new skills.

One instructor teaches music and physical movements side by side to the beginners. I have witnessed particularly children being very excited about learning new songs and playing instruments in her group. In the other group children are not given the chance to play instruments as their instructors only focus on physical aspects of the practice. Even in that group, during one children’s class, a little boy spontaneously started singing a capoeira song that he had probably heard from a CD player, and all the other children picked up the simple song as they accompanied the boy in singing.
In another class I wrote that "kids pick up lyrics very quickly" when describing the learning of the song ‘Tem dendê’ (fieldnotes 26.11.2013). The ease of relating to a new language and practice is influenced by a body’s age.

Occasionally the instructors’ words suggest that learning a new language enables the emergence of a new identity. N says that capoeira “gave me a chance to express myself, yeah? Also with the languages, or the language.” Brazilian Portuguese provides a new intonation for the bodies that have lived in Brazil, as well as a new vocabulary to express oneself with. N’s manner of speaking Russian often sounded Brazilian Portuguese in her intonation, at least to my ear. Embodying new sounds and intonations allows capoeiristas perhaps to satisfy “the desire to become other” (Dumoulié 2010: 22), at least, during the capoeira angola classes.

In one of his classes, G referred to voice as an "instrument of self-development" as he also called voice "our weapon" during the musical portion of the class (fieldnotes 11.3.2015). Indeed, as researchers note, capoeira is not only fought with limbs but also with words and their symbolisms (Dumoulié 2010: 18; Lewis 1992: 169–173). In capoeira voice is not just a weapon against the colonisers or whites, but can also be a weapon against one’s own fears:

> We always have to sing in front of different people, to tell something, to ask something. Conquering one’s own anxiety, yeah? Well, it helps a lot in life. Because if you’re in a seminar, singing in front of twenty, thirty people, yeah, someone may have laughed (at you) but you understand that OK, so he laughs but then also just like you he’ll have a raspy voice and that’s fine. After all, everyone understands that well, we’re not perfect, and we try. (Y)

While angoleiros in Russia can improvise in their movements, it is almost impossible for them to do so while singing due to language constraints. “Unfortunately, I cannot improvise because I don’t know the language so well” U says. Singing in and listening to an unfamiliar language is difficult for most bodies.

> Of course it’s very important to understand what you are singing, to improvise. Which is something I don’t do. I don’t know… for me it’s very difficult not knowing the language, even sometimes just to sing. You know the words but you don’t always understand at all what they’re about. Like that and to study a language, it’s also a big task. (D)

G notes that many of the messages during a seminar with a Brazilian teacher are lost without the knowledge of Portuguese:

> Well, as a whole like you won’t feel anything, you won’t feel the meanings of the songs, you won’t feel through a translator what the visiting mestre is trying to transmit. The most important thing is that you won’t feel even the humor that sometimes slips through. (G)

Even when there is a fluent Portuguese speaker in a group, she or he can hardly verbally improvise either, since others will not know how to respond. Therefore, the group as a whole must know the language in order to improvise while singing collectively. I have only heard some simple improvisations during classes in Russia like the changing of name Catarina in a capoeira song into Evelina, the name of one local angoleiro.
Musical aspects of capoeira are not, however, only expressed and captured in lyrics but also in the melodies and the rhythm of the songs that reverberate in the bodies of the participants. Our bodies vibrate with the music we hear, writes Klemola (Klemola 2004: 166). There is plenty of exciting recent literature concentrating on body and rhythm (e.g. Henriques, Tiainen & Väliaho 2014). Game contemplates whether rhythmic movements, such as sea waves, connect not only humans to animals, like horses, "but also to earth, air and sea, a maternal sea of our origins?" (Game 2001: 2). Each sound and minor alterations in the environment impact our being, whether or not we are tangibly aware of this. Relationality can be extremely subtle.

Whereas U likes the repetitiveness of capoeira angola music, O who plays the guitar, among other instruments, and performs musically outside of capoeira, finds the repetitive rhythm of capoeira too monotonous:

\[\text{The whole point is that you play evenly, monotonously, with the same quality of sound, not louder, not quieter. The more monotonous it is, the better. And for me, as a musician, this is a dead end.} \] (O)

O enjoys the variations he can play with viola (the highest pitched berimbau) and the variety he can bring to his singing, but the beat of the drum and the pandeiro are often – or in some angola groups: always – rather monotonous. Rosa notes that the movement of players in capoeira roda are however always oscillating in rhythm as they "move in and out of sync with their partner" (Rosa 2015: 118). According to Rosa, "angoleiros move rhythmically in accordance with their internal cadence, their partner’s tempo, and external sounds", thus combining a variety of sources and inspirations for the rhythm of movement at a specific moment (Rosa 2015: 118).

N points out that "very often even some Brazilians themselves, masters themselves, can interpret the songs very differently". Meanings of words, like those of movements, in capoeira angola are being constantly negotiated. Language too is an ongoing process within the African-Brazilian practice. Most Russian bodies earnestly try to learn, to understand the practice. When like Q they fail to learn an essential aspect of the art, like a ladainha, they feel guilty. Very often this guilt is experienced when facing one’s instructor or worse yet the Brazilian mestre. For whom then are the angoleiros learning capoeira angola? Are the bodies, their voices, transformed for the angoleiros themselves or for some imagined authority? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

### 3.7 WELLS OF SILENCE

Many female and feminist thinkers emphasise the importance of listening and of silence. A corporeal turn in academia "asks us first of all to be silent", according to Sheets-Johnstone. By being silent we are able to notice movements within our own bodies and movement of the surrounding world. (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: xviii.) Capoeira has until recently been an art transmitted from one body to the next without much written record (Taylor 2007: 82). In this way, we could argue that like many dances, capoeira is a primarily non-verbal art-form (Silvennoinen 2007: 7). There is

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a "silent' process of learning through practical engagement or apprenticeship", as Gieser writes (Gieser 2008: 314), in capoeira classes.

I often found that a capoeira angola class offered respite from talkativeness. Beginnings of classes often involve a dance studio "slowly filling up with little talk in the air" (fieldnotes 4.3.2014). During the classes there would be: "Organic socialising; always just a bit at a time and then back to the moves. Talking is like an interlude." (Fieldnotes 4.3.2014). A class in Nizhnii Novgorod began and ended without much speaking, the instructor "just plainly started the class by telling us to run in a circle and ended it with a thank you and brief clapping" (fieldnotes 14.11.2013). During one class in a park, I wrote "no words at all, occasionally N would say 'iê' and give some guidance" (fieldnotes 1.7.2013). Lao-Tzu suggests that it is a great skill to teach others without words (Lao-Tzu 1993: 43). When describing Japanese martial arts, Klemola, writes that a teacher of a budo class would "teach by showing, not talking or analysing the details of the technique". In this kind of class, all of the student's senses should be alert in order to grasp the teaching that goes unspoken. (Klemola 2004: 102.)

When a person begins to feel the interaction of a game, I don't even need to say anything anymore. They begin (asking) themselves: "what was it that you were doing last time'? Like chamada or something else that you start to explain. And then that's it, you don't say anything else. The person will eventually ask more himself. And he'll ask more and will be interested. (G)

G's pedagogical style involves little words and many illustrative, concrete actions as examples given to others.

During musical portions of classes, several participants who would stutter or be very shy when speaking would confidently lead a song without a second thought. In the Brazilian context, writes Browning, "capoeira, like samba, is an alternative language to the dominant one" (Browning 1995: 93). Capoeira angola may also offer some of the more introverted bodies alternative ways of communicating, such as through movement or singing. "Well, it's totally unbelievable because it's communication through movement. Literally", says F. During a seminar with a Brazilian instructor, beginner A did not speak much Portuguese, yet the instructor's guidance was clear enough through his gestures:

If he just, well, came up then it's this, language of gestures (laughs), it's international. So there generally everything was clear. I talked to him, he showed me with signs and showed me how to do this or that movement. (A)

"I don't think about anything and it is very good", says an interviewee in Metcalfe's and Game's article as he describes his recreational running experiences (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 301). Without the need for constant talking, capoeira classes and events also provide the space for a potential lack of thinking. Researchers today seem to be more and more aware of the importance of non-verbal experiences and their epistemological importance for research: 'Embodied (affective) empathy appears to

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26 'iê' is the sound made in the beginning of the roda as the lead singer starts the ladainha. According to Sosa, the sound is associated with "the religiosity of capoeira because it is a call for Ogum, for him to give permission for the roda to start". Ogum is a "male orixá associated with iron and warfare." (Sosa 2006: 18, 30.) A brief 'iê' is also uttered in some capoeira classes to catch the participants' attention.
be strongest when intellectual reasoning is relinquished and the individual enters a state of quiet receptivity, when some movement or improvisation is implicitly known rather than verbalised” (Meekums 2012: 63).

With so many Western works associating the very human condition with the ability for speech (e.g. Arendt 1958), it can be a relief to realise that there is no inherent, natural-universalist, pressure for humans constantly and eloquently to express themselves in words. According to cultural studies scholar, Hannele Koivunen, as much as 90 percent of humans’ interaction is other than verbal communication (in Silvennoinen 2007: 14). We are much more than words, studies of the body and capoeira have reassured me. "Without talking, the players at the center of the circle generate playful dialogues of perception, intuition, and imagination with one another”, writes Rosa about capoeira (Rosa 2015: 107).

"Western culture" has privileged "talk and text as legitimate forms of communication" writes sociologist Alexandra Howson (Howson 2005: 81). Eastern traditions, by contrast, have frequently mocked excessive speech (Klemola 2004: 135). Heidegger suggests that in daily chatter what matters is not so much what is being said but rather the very continuity of speech, regardless of its content (Heidegger in Klemola 1990: 23). Irigaray, who as a long-term practitioner of yoga pays attention to breathing in her philosophical work, argues that "people who do not breathe, or who breathe poorly, cannot stop speaking” (Irigaray 2002a: 50–51): a very different perspective to the one that prevails in our speech-glorifying society. Keeping up certain processes for their own sake, be it talking, emailing or messaging define the values of our age in the early twenty-first century. That such processes cannot be indefinitely interrupted seems to be a dogma in our socio-cultural environment.

Howson points out that "there may be no words or language to name and communicate certain forms of experience, particularly physical sensation and its contribution to subjectivity." (Howson 2005: 81). Many experiences and gestures do not have verbal translations or as Heidegger puts it "they have not yet been translated into speech" (Heidegger in Klemola 2004: 31). Yet, kinaesthetic gestures, sounds, touch, are of no lesser worth than words in communication between humans (Anttila 2009). In fact, "embodied knowledge is never as precise or controlled as spoken language, which is why it often reveals more", writes Silvennoinen (Silvennoinen 2007: 7). Not saying a word serves many functions in a game of capoeira. It helps to make the content of the game between two persons more elusive and unpredictable than it would be in the presence of verbal communication. In a class, I once noted that it is "difficult to read the intentions of R in her meia lua movements” as R’s next moves would usually be "masked by various theatrical gestures" (fieldnotes 4.5.2016).

Angoleiros around the world are connected by similar kinaesthetic, somatic experiences even if their languages never coincide.

In a game, even if you’re playing with a person who completely, you see for the first time, he’s from a different country, you don’t know what language he even speaks.
Generally, a complete stranger. But when you play with him, it turns out that you somehow connect. (R)

Words are not necessarily needed to translate the sound of the berimbau or to translate a look of one’s partner in play. Q does not speak Portuguese but she has developed a sensibility towards the movements of capoeira and their subtle meanings.

There are some very simple elements that tell you how experienced the person is. But again, not so much about how long he practices capoeira but how well he understands the language of communication. (Q)

When I ask O to describe the sound of berimbau, he struggles to express it in words. Perhaps this is precisely because O is one of the best berimbau players among angoleiros in Russia. In the end, O is unable to talk about the sound of the instrument:

Look, I how, in principle I’m musical, for me, for me it’s easier (to express myself) through music. … Damn it, it’s very difficult for me actually, I can’t. (O)

Blackman’s words that "the somatically felt body has aliveness and vitality that is literally felt or sensed but cannot necessarily be articulated" are closely applicable to O’s inability to articulate the sound of the instrument that he plays so fluently (Blackman 2008: 30). The most intimate and fluent relations between a practice and a body are often non-linguistic.

Picking up and adapting Benjamin’s question regarding translation, how accurately do Russian bodies interpret capoeira angola? The idea that there would be one authentic form of capoeira which could be accurately interpreted is very problematic. Like most beginnings, capoeira’s origins are "shrouded in darkness and mystery" (Arendt on origins 1971: 202), and the practice’s early development is as controversial as its origins are mysterious (Assunção 2005: 5–31; Lewis 1992: 18–50). There are in fact only interpretations of what capoeira has been and what capoeira angola potentially might be. In that respect, the Russian capoeiristas are participating in this collective, by now transnational, process of interpreting the practice. Whether or not they have an equal right to interpretation as the Brazilian practitioners do is a normative matter to which I will return in the next chapter. Unlike an original text written by an author that is the one accurate version, capoeira has few written, or otherwise ‘set in stone’, documents to which its new transnational interpretations can be compared. It is a practice that lives above all in the bodies, the voices of angoleiros, who are now found all over the world.

The bodies of Russian angoleiros rise out of an environment that, perhaps contrary to what one might expect, is in many ways propitious for a holistic understanding of capoeira. Like colonial Brazil, Russia has had its own form of widespread slavery (formally called serfdom) that lasted until 1861. Today’s Russia, much like Brazil, experiences poverty among a large proportion of the population and its own ethnic tensions, in addition to overt racism. Many capoeiristas in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod experience difficulties related to income and ethnicity on a daily basis. The Russian authorities, such as the police, are commonly distrusted by the wider population (Ledeneva 2006: 26, 70). So while some Brazilian capoeiristas
argue that foreign practitioners, and particularly those who are white, cannot relate to the everyday difficulties of Brazilians’ urban, low-income lives. The example of Russian angoleiros challenges such assumptions. On balance, the rough Russian context seems rather fertile ground for the cunning, street-wise art of capoeira angola, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Russian population is white and has little, if any, experience of African-Brazilian culture.

Yet however fitting the wider environment might be, capoeira angola has occasionally been misinterpreted in Russia, especially in the early phases of the introduction of the practice. A Hollywood film or a video game that brought capoeira to many practitioners’ screens portrayed the practice in one-dimensional ways. Some of the early instructors taught only narrow aspects of capoeira with the musical features being completely left out. In some groups, the range of the practice still appears to be somewhat narrow, in particular due to limitations in language skills. Without a fluent Portuguese speaker in a group, the lyrics of capoeira songs or words of a visiting mestre tend to lose their deeper meaning. In this way, not knowing Portuguese forces some angoleiros to remain superficial in their practice even if they have practised angola for years.

There are all these songs with double meanings, triple meanings. I only know the first, the first level, yeah? … Brazilians themselves don’t know a lot of that… So I now started learning Russian music… I understand the meaning of the words but what does it mean? (O)

Even knowing a language, as O knows Russian, his native tongue, does not always guarantee that one understands the hidden meanings found in its poetry or songs.

Technology is increasingly making a difference in how capoeira translates transnationally. Online communities make it easier to maintain contact with other capoeiristas and online translators enable to get basic messages across. Capoeiristas in Russia make an extensive use of the Internet in finding capoeira angola, in watching it online in the form of videos, films and photographs. Music, basic information about capoeira, and both Portuguese and English language classes, are found online, and to some extent compensate for the inability of many capoeiristas to travel, as well as for the absence of Brazilian teachers in Samara, St. Petersburg, Ufa and Nizhnii Novgorod. Offline, face to face contacts nevertheless remain very important. The rare seminars with capoeira angola teachers and mestres coming from abroad are highlighted by angoleiros as being special and significant events. The Internet does not replace a personal experience felt in one’s body when playing capoeira with a new person. While language skills play a tremendous role in transmitting the meanings of capoeira angola as accurately as possible, non-verbal contact with others is equally important. Inter-cultural entanglements are not limited to discursive practices.
Individual bodies are given various cultural symbols that are in turn socially manipulated. Such use of the body gives rise to relationships of power. (Lock 1993: 136.) The important and recently raised question of ‘what the body can do?’ within transdisciplinary body studies is a question of power and regulation (Blackman 2008: 133). Someone always decides, or has in the past decided, on the parameters of how each of us lives in our own body; how we may act, sleep and even breathe (Mauss 1973). The passing on of the bodily practice of capoeira is no exception and we may therefore ponder who has the right to decide what kind of bodily practice is transmitted under the banner of capoeira angola?

In this chapter, I will discuss different forms of authority that influence the relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola. Firstly, potential roots of hierarchical relations will be considered. After that, the focus will be placed on the different ways in which bodies are controlled. Thereafter, inequalities within the communities of capoeira angola will be discussed. A section on the importance of passing on experience from body to body will then follow. Defiance of authority will also be considered through the example of one capoeira group in Russia. Lastly, the role of gender and women in capoeira angola will be explored. The kind of body that participates in the practice of capoeira angola makes a difference in the extent to which the hierarchical structures of the practice embrace the body. The ongoing processes, or the socio-cultural constructions, of gender, race, nationality and class that characterise each body, impact the body’s relations with the practice of capoeira.
Mestres of capoeira angola have a special role in transmitting the African-Brazilian practice worldwide. Bodies in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod often unconditionally submit themselves to the teachings of Brazilian male masters as there is a widespread transnational acceptance of the legitimacy of their authority. Heidegger notes that tradition can be seen as a master whose authority is potent yet invisible in its self-evidence:

When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it 'transmits' is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have had such an origin... (Heidegger 1962: 43).

Concepts like authority precisely become self-evident to the extent that we forget to wonder about their origins. In order to be aware and critical of tradition's mastery, thinkers like Arendt who have been influenced by Heidegger's thought, tend to uproot the origins of their main categories and concepts.

As a thinker who is strongly interested in beginnings and origins, Arendt attempts to trace the origins of the division of individuals into those who rule and those who obey. In The Human Condition Arendt proposes that such divisions have stemmed from Ancient Greek thinking in which free, spontaneous action of individuals had to be curtailed in order to create collective order, safety and certainty. Since human action, when it is free, is unpredictable and each deed is irreversible, such activity is dangerous and hence, in view of Plato and his Western successors it must be controlled by dividing people into those who think and decide, and those who obey and act. (Arendt 1958: 222.) Arendt believes that such collective safety and order comes at the price of freedom in a community that rests on the assumption that "men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey" (Arendt 1958: 222). Feminist sociologist Joan Acker suggests that today "controls that ensure compliance with inequality regimes have also become more effective and perhaps more various" (Acker 2006: 459).

Arendt’s Western-centric view on the phenomenon of rulership is not empirically convincing if one considers ancient societies of modern India and China and the various insights that they too offered about the division into commanders and servants (e.g. Lao-Tzu 1993: 32–33, 53, 57–58; Squarcini 2011). However, Arendt’s idea is interesting on a theoretical level. It suggests that fear of spontaneity and freedom is what drives us to obey and to command others. Philosopher Isaiah Berlin also describes how "classical English political philosophers" have distrusted "natural' freedom" because they believed that "human purposes and activities do not automatically harmonize with one another" but that instead, chaos ensues from unbounded collective freedom (Berlin 1958: 3). Fears about the correlation of freedom and chaos run contrary to, for instance, Lao-Tzu’s thinking that "the more prohibitions and rules, the poorer people become" (Lao-Tzu 1993: 57). Lao-Tzu seems to trust spontaneous self-organisation much more than thinkers like Rousseau, Hobbes, or for that matter, Confucius (Lao-Tzu 1993: x-xii).

The African-Brazilian practice of capoeira combines both bodily spontaneity and social control. The movements of capoeira angola are improvised in pairs, offering a channel for bodily spontaneity. But within capoeira angola there are hierarchies which divide individuals into those who have more and those who have less authority,
something that in turn creates controlling mechanisms for the practising bodies. From this perspective, practising capoeira angola is neither wholly spontaneous, nor entirely free. Social theorist Max Weber proposes that authority (also 'rule' or 'domination' in his context) is "the probability that certain specific commands will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (Weber 1978: 212). It is not enough to divide individuals into rulers and the ruled for social relations to be sufficiently controlled and predictable: if the system is to operate smoothly there is an important need to make the ruling class seem legitimate to the ruled.

Arendt argues against such claims that "the civilized world of power relations and the master/slave dialectic are based on hatred, on pure violence and barbarity" (Dumoulié 2010: 19). Arendt conversely sees that social inequalities originate from historical inability of human communities to come up with humane ways of dealing with our capacity for free action. It is not due to hatred or malevolence that for instance, slave owners committed violence but due to their ignorance and inability to act otherwise, according to Arendt. Action in Arendt's sense is political and it requires a free public sphere, trust in promises and forgiveness in order to flourish. Such conditions are very challenging to create and sustain. (Arendt 1958.) Arendt's understanding of the potential roots of social inequality offers an interesting perspective on the hierarchies that exist within capoeira angola.

### 4.1 Controlling Bodies

According to Braidotti, our contemporary culture sponsors "high-tech clean and efficient bodies" (Braidotti 2006: 201). Our bodies are encouraged to function in ways similar to the most up-to-date machine that is visually and performance-wise nothing less than perfect (i.e. currently trendy). This sets very strange tasks for an organic body that, as Bennett notes, is infinitely more than a machine: "a cosmos of lively materiality". An ideology whose controlling metaphors reduce the body to a machine or a computer serves ultimately to restrict body's rich potentialities, like breath, intuition, self-realisation and spontaneity. Certainly our bodies today are not purely organic or 'natural' in that the very water and food we consume is chemically polluted. We may indeed have "techno-bodies", as Haraway and Braidotti put it, but that does not mean that bodies can be reduced to technology alone (Braidotti 2006: 202). Despite the chemical medications that we may regularly feed ourselves or the virtual environments in which our daily lives are embedded, our bodies are capable of laughter, of letting go and acting out of character.

Who gets to decide 'what the body can do' is not only determined externally of the body but simultaneously within it. The invisible power of bureaucratic tentacles and everyday governmentality manages our "embodied subjectivities" (Coole & Frost 2010: 27). Thinkers as various as Weber, Kafka and Foucault have discussed in detail the subtleties of power that are ingrained into the very tissues of our body (e.g. Foucault in Blackman 2008, in Braidotti 2006, in Sanders 2016; Kafka 2009; Weber 1978). Philosopher Michel Foucault is endlessly cited by social scientists for his ideas on how "norms and regulatory ideals become incorporated into subjects' internal forms of self-monitoring and self-regulation" (Blackman 2008: 25). Feminist thinkers, such as Haraway draw on Foucault's ideas about docile bodies in order to further explore, from a less androcentric view, how such bodies are manipulated and are made knowable within the wider social system (Braidotti 2006: 198). Today
there are increasingly pessimistic predictions on how practices that produce bodies in accordance with self-tracking norms are on the rise, thus, further increasing our "conduct-regulating capacities" (Sanders 2016: 7).

Tambornino notes that even instincts "are an uncertain mixture of nature and convention" (Tambornino 2002: 8). Authoritative masters of the body are not only found at the top of hierarchies of certain practices but also within the socialised, self-regulating bodies that act according to dominant social values and norms. For example, Scharff notes that "competition is not only other-directed under neoliberalism, but also directed at the self" (Scharff 2016: 107). The vast concept of neoliberalism, mentioned by Scharff, can be seen as an economic free market policy on the one hand, and a logic of governmentality, on the other (Ortner 2016: 52). In the form of governmentality, neoliberalism can be understood as the "dominant political rationality of the late 20th and early 21st centuries" (Sanders 2016: 5). Scharff suggests that "the neoliberal self is an entrepreneurial self" in that within the neoliberal logic of governmentality, enterprise is "extended to all forms of conduct" (Scharff 2016: 108). The entrepreneurial self is reflected in ambitious, calculative, and personally responsible behaviour (Scharff 2016: 109). The idea of treating ourselves as businesses to be managed implies self-ownership, i.e. viewing the body as private property of a distinct subject. Such a relationship to one's body necessarily impacts how one relates to others and to bodily practices.

Many texts dealing with the body today focus explicitly on what could be called "body management", focusing on a variety of aspects including fashion, weight management and social status (Casanova & Jafar 2013; Sanders 2016). The widespread interest in body management, according to Blackman, points to how bodily expression has increasingly become a matter of "individual emotional control throughout industrialized societies" (Blackman 2008: 51). The contemporary body is not primarily somatically experienced so much as internally controlled by the neoliberal individual, for example, in the form of constant muscular and emotional tension (Shusterman 2008: 169–170). Following sociologist Norbert Elias, Blackman notes that "the norms of emotional control are such that individuals … are required to experience themselves as separate from others" (Blackman 2008: 51). Bodies in neoliberal patriarchy are seen as isolated units rather than as relational processes.

In an article in the most widely circulated Finnish newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, changing ideals of the body are discussed by an author who suggests that "now vitality is admired, not Kate-Moss-like lethargy". The text focuses on the current trend of having a fit body and the clothes, like tight yoga pants, that go with it. The author notes how female celebrities today become an inspiration to others by showing how "through tough training you can rule the world, or at least your own body". It is the ruling of the body that matters more than feeling or experiencing the body. Throughout the brief article, the author highlights the pressure of staying in control in order to maintain an ideal fitness body: "Couture body is not achieved by declining food but it is earned with tough, physical work. That is why it is a sign of success." (Hirvonen 2016.) The old glorification of tough labour appears still to dominate even the most recent of body trends.

Klemola argues that sports organisations often justify their physical activity to the state in order to get funding, by pointing out that healthier individuals tend to work more, thus not costing as much to the state as the sickly, less sporty, ones (Klemola 1990: 68). As well as being a method of getting fit, labour can also be the very purpose for getting fit as physical movement allegedly makes us more efficient, less costly, jobholders. Most of our activities today are viewed through the prism of waged labour, including even leisurely sports (Veijola & Jokinen 1994: 127).
It is particularly women’s sense of self-discipline and “normative femininity” that appears to be escalating. Today’s increasingly technologically surveilled world pushes women’s bodies to be perfect in everything: job, diet, hair, clothes, giving birth to and raising children, driving, make-up, speaking, shaving, managing, exercising: the list is endless (Sanders 2016: 4, 6). In fact, cultural theorists Rosalind Gill and Scharff succinctly summarise that women are expected to regulate every aspect of their conduct (Gill & Scharff 2011: 7). Late capitalist patriarchy sets ever more pressure on women while concealing ever more powerfully its own authority.

Bodily self-discipline is central for some practitioners and groups of capoeira angola in Russia. Upon adopting a new, non-angola, style of capoeira G began to increasingly portray the practice as a method of self-control: “our main task is to control our own space” he would say at the end of class as he would list “the resumé of today’s training” going briefly, efficiently, through the achievements of the class as if ticking off a shopping list (fieldnotes 10.5.2016). When asked what made their capoeira angola group in the early stages of its existence so “pathetic”, as he described it, O replies that they were missing: “organisation, level of organisation, it’s the level of discipline, it’s the level of any kind of planning, future perspectives, management”. O likes to do things well and he seems to excel particularly in playing the berimbau in improvisational, innovative ways. U notes that:

O has risen to such a level that when we were at a seminar, in the summer, he played berimbau next to mestre in a roda. Well, that is, that says a lot (laughs). That is, mestre didn’t drive him away with a stick, he (O) was sitting and playing. That is awesome! (U)

The mestre U mentions is among the best-known, and is renowned worldwide for his precision and strictness. When we once visited his academy in Salvador with another angoleiro, the students of the mestre were doing perfect handstands, in apparently perfect synchronicity, just as a class warm-up.

Capoeira angola mestres could be seen as the “producers of symbolic systems” (Bourdieu in Squarcini 2011: 18) that determine how one controls one’s body in capoeira practice. The authority of Brazilian mestres is often left unquestioned both by practitioners and researchers of capoeira.

In capoeira angola there is a lot of this awful patriarchy when there’s that “I said, do it this way!” All that “this capoeira angola is wrong, that is right”, yeah? Well, I don’t know; who knows what’s right? Someone who lives in Brazil? Who was maybe born in Bahia…? (J)

Many Russian practitioners are critical of the hierarchies that exist within the world of capoeira yet most interviewees believe that capoeira angola mestres’ authority is legitimate in guiding their bodily practice.

Many researchers who study capoeira are active practitioners. Some of the best known authors on capoeira are instructors or even masters of the practice (e.g. Greg Downey, Nestor Capoeira). This poses challenges for research of capoeira as many authors opt to respect authoritative figures at the expense of critically examining their overall influence on the practice in a multi-dimensional way. Well-known and much-quoted authors like Downey and Lewis dedicate their seminal books on capoeira to their mestres (Downey 2005: xiii; Lewis 1992). Many other researchers of capoeira follow suit in thanking capoeira mestres in their works (e.g. Assunção 2005: xii-xiii; Griffith 2010: v; Reis 2005; Rosa 2015: Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: xi). Entire doctoral
dissertations have been written about the biographies of capoeira angola mestres (e.g. Angulo 2008). Brazilian masters and teachers of capoeira are usually the key informants for the researchers just mentioned, whose works understandably convey a sense of indebtedness to their principal sources of information. Moreover, researchers who actively practice capoeira are indebted to their mestres for their skills in capoeira.

Some female ethnographers do critically discuss capoeira mestres’ influences on the practice (e.g. Aceti 2013: 152; Delamont 2006; De Campos et al. 2010). Delamont, for instance, has never practised capoeira and this gives her an advantageous outsider’s perspective on power relations within the practice, even if it simultaneously distances her from direct bodily experiences of capoeira.

This research has not relied on Brazilian mestres for direct information or teaching. Instead, my key informants have been young Russian capoeiristas. This is why I do not use the names of any mestres in this dissertation but rather refer to all the capoeira masters as mestre (also changing specific names to the generic ‘mestre’ in interviewees’ quotes). During my three years of capoeira angola practice (2006–2009) I attended a variety of capoeira angola events and classes in the UK, Brazil and the United States. The classes were often taught by well-known Brazilian mestres and teachers of angola. Our group in London did not have a fixed master as we were predominantly taught by a young Brazilian male teacher. Conducting research for this dissertation as a non-practitioner, with several years without practice in between, has enabled me to examine capoeira angola somewhat from the outside. In this way I aim to combine perspectives on capoeira here by examining the practice both from within – emic – and from the outside – etic (Almeida et al. 2013: 1349).

From a more distanced position the authority of Brazilian mestres seems by no means unquestionable. To paraphrase Weber: do capoeiristas in Russia wish to submit their bodies to the persons in power in capoeira angola? (Weber 1978: 214). And if so, why?

4.2 INEQUALITIES IN CAPOEIRA ANGOLA

In capoeira, there is no gender difference. That is, you can be a woman, a man, whoever. There is, I don’t know, even (your) complexion doesn’t matter, and age too. That is definitely really great. (U)

As soon as you get a certificate, the relationship inside this system, it changes. You’re no longer just a partner but you immediately become, you take your place in this, this… That is, you’re immediately told “So listen: do this, this, this and this…” That is, how is it? Russians (would) say “they’re tightening the screws”. That is, the pressure increases, like that, and it’s like, well in little things but anyway. (G)

Many angoleiros in their interviews paint a picture of capoeira angola as a practice in which everyone is equal, as U says above. "Capoeira, like mestre Pastinha would say… it’s for everyone. Well, for men and women, like elderly and children", says E. Capoeira angola classes are indeed open for all who can pay the class fee. Of course, the costs already limit the number of potential attenders. Furthermore, as soon as it comes to making decisions about the group or the practice, inequalities tend to come into the frame, as G points out.

"All organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities", writes Acker (Acker 2006: 443). It is debatable just how noticeable such
inequalities are for the bodies in Russia even when they do exist in some forms within capoeira angola. Tambornino proposes that "when exploring corporeality and politics, the challenge is to focus on those practices and types of experience that do not lend themselves to explicit, conscious attention" (Tambornino 2002: 3). Sanders writes that, for instance, patriarchy today tends to be "dispersed and largely invisible" as it is reproduced "through glamourized norms rather than through gender-based prohibitions" (Sanders 2016: 6). Similarly, in the transnational networks of capoeira angola, inequalities are not necessarily reproduced blatantly but using soft means that reinforce the authority of the bodies currently in power.

Inequalities within capoeira angola can be visible when looking at the instrument players in a roda. Rosa points out that each instrument within the bateria is assigned a certain importance (Rosa 2015: 101). Whereas, the berimbau is seen as an important instrument, the reco-reco and the agogô are perceived to be more trivial. If one looks at photographs of capoeira rodas found in several capoeira ethnographies, one will quickly notice that it is usually the older, black men who are playing the berimbau while women, sometimes Asian or Caucasian, are relegated to play the less demanding, less important instruments (e.g. in Rosa 2015; Downey 2005). The hierarchical structure of the practitioners, according to G, is based "not even on specific rules but on some kind of brotherhood". Groups of capoeira angola worldwide usually follow the principle of hierarchy in which both gerontocracy and patriarchy are thoroughly enmeshed (Lewis 1992: 160, 173–175). Within this hierarchy, we could argue that the Russian angoleiros are placed into a "racially and nationally subordinated position" (expression by Gruner-Domic 2011: 485).

Some of the exclusionary practices within the circles of capoeira angola are paradoxically reminiscent of colonialist logic: "One of the most striking contradictions about colonialism is that it both needs to 'civilise' its 'others', and to fix them into perpetual 'otherness'". (Loomba 1998: 173). Brazilian mestres pass on their experience of capoeira to the white practitioners in Russia while often emphasising how different these practitioners are from Brazilian angoleiros (also in De Campos et al. 2010). Loomba discusses the colonial relationship between India and Britain as resting on the Indians’ sense of inferiority: "their recognition of the perpetual gap between themselves and the 'real thing'", thus ensuring Indians’ subjection (Loomba 1998: 173). Russian practitioners of capoeira angola often feel that the Brazilian mestre’s or teacher’s embodiment of the practice is "the real thing" that they cannot easily reach with their own bodies. In this respect, relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola are as if constantly lacking authenticity and legitimacy.

The hierarchies found in capoeira angola are not inequalities organised purely according to age, race, ethnicity, class or gender but rather all of these factors thoroughly interlinked as analysts of intersectionality would suggest about inequality regimes as a whole (Acker 2012: 214). Some Brazilian mestres charge foreign angoleiros in Brazil higher fees for their attendance in capoeira events, in comparison to the fees that the local participants pay. Nationality or ethnicity of an angoleiro is linked to her or his social class and therefore the ability to cover certain capoeira costs. "Leaders who repeatedly tout capoeira as the embodiment of freedom for African slaves and central to the struggle for economic and racial equality for all people in Brazil also engage in performances of racist stereotypes." (Almeida et al. 2013: 1355). As we saw in the previous chapter, despite their white skins, most Russian bodies are not necessarily economically better off than many Brazilian angoleiros. The participants in Samara and Ufa frequently talked about how they need to save money in order to visit capoeira seminars even within Russia. Thus, Russian practitioners may experience
a burden of actively participating in capoeira angola as it involves a variety of costs that they often cannot afford.

One group’s organisers in Russia transfer a regular fee to cover the insurance cost of their mestres in Brazil: "We care for our mestres, we want them to be OK" said one of the instructors as an explanation (fieldnotes 18.6.2013). It is common for researchers of capoeira to describe how capoeira teachers and mestres struggle to make a living solely by teaching the art-form (Almeida et al. 2013: 1355; Wesolowski 2012: 83; Lewis 1992: 75). As we saw earlier, the style of capoeira angola is not particularly commercial when compared to other, better advertised and at times better organised styles of practice. Demanding that foreign students pay an insurance fee for the mestres is probably one of the coping mechanisms in the struggle to professionalise capoeira. However, not all transnational practitioners can cope with paying such fees. The cost of a capoeira class in Russia was around 100–200 rubles in 2016. This was only about two euros at the time, due to the fall of the Russian currency in 2014. Perhaps the gradual demise of capoeira angola style in Russia can be at least partially explained by the economic stagnation that began in Russia that year, drastically increasing prices to the extent that many practitioners could no longer afford to participate actively in capoeira.

The ways in which transnational bodily practices are embedded in global capitalism has been extensively described from a multitude of disciplinary perspectives and with a multitude of empirical examples (e.g. Almeida et al. 2013; Strauss 2002). Practices like Indian yoga, African-Brazilian capoeira or Japanese zazen are marketed, sold and consumed like any other commodity. "Capoeira groups are businesses in a competitive sport and culture market" writes a group of four international scholars (Almeida et al. 2013: 1355). What is especially perplexing about commodifying so-called 'holistic spiritual practices' like capoeira, yoga or zazen is that their very ideologies tend to resist materialism, greed and other capitalist vices. A capoeira mestre will often give a long talk at the end of class or seminar about capoeira’s goals of emancipation and resistance. After the speech he will often advertise his CDs, t-shirts or instruments that are for sale (Brito 2012). This contradiction is very common in transnational practices that criticise commercial attitudes while simultaneously embracing them (e.g. Strauss on Sivananda yoga 2002: 233).

Capoeira angola mestres are caught in a contradictory position as they are on the one hand, expected to embody some kind of liberty from hegemonic constraints, at times even spirituality, but on the other hand, they are expected to dedicate their life to capoeira angola and therefore, to make a living with the practice. U describes what makes someone a master of capoeira: "Well, it is a person who has really dedicated his whole life to it. That is his whole life is given to it." The balancing act between ideological resistance and practical survival is surely not easy.

There are no clear mechanisms for determining how and to whom the title of mestre is accorded within capoeira communities (Delamont 2009: 54; Rosenthal 2009; Wesolowski 2012: 2). There is no set amount of years or formal examinations needed in capoeira angola to be promoted to a mestre. One of the transnationally best-known mestres of capoeira angola gained the status at the age of just twenty-six (Angulo 2008: 167–168). In her interview N notes that in their transnational network of capoeira angola, new instructors and mestres are elected: "For example, to become a treinel, at least two votes (of the network’s mestres) are needed… And a contra-mestre, a mestre, I think, requires all three votes." This particular capoeira network has several mestres and more unanimous votes are needed in order to promote a capoeirista to the titles of a mestre or an instructor (contra-mestre) than to the lower title of a trainer (referred to as treinel in some angola groups). In other groups, an experienced student can be
promoted to become a *treinel* and thereafter to become a *contra-mestre* by her or his own master/s. The highest status of a *mestre* is usually more difficult to earn in that it requires a wider acceptance within the circles of capoeira (Wesolowski 2012).

N describes her understanding of the different statuses within capoeira angola:

> Treinel is someone who can teach the classes. … Someone with whom beginners can be left, like “Train them!” . Maybe in some of these cases, (treinel) can also like lead the roda… A contra-mestre is the person who can substitute for the mestre in all cases… When he (contra-mestre) becomes completely independent, when he doesn’t require any kind of like leadership, then he becomes a mestre. … Here, also, some kind of organisational issues are very highly valued. That is, how much of a contribution you bring in, how much you participate in these processes. That’s why it’s not enough to be a great player. That is, or to be a great musician. Here you also need to somehow contribute. (N)

By contribution N is referring above all to the time and effort spent on helping the overall capoeira community in promoting its practice, in organising *rodas* and other capoeira events. Although, regular monetary contribution to the *mestres* is also not uncommon among *treinels*, as we already saw.

> Well, to become a treinel, the ways that I’ve seen here, they’re very subjective, (they) depend on the master. Very subjective. There are no objective criteria here. (G)

There are no capoeira angola *mestres* or *contra-mestres* residing in Russia, or of Russian nationality. There are, or have been, several individuals promoted to the status of *treinel* in Russia. U points out how difficult it is to take even that first step up the hierarchical structure of capoeira angola. She notes several criteria that are required of someone to become a *treinel*:

> Ten years of practice, being all the time, going all the time to Brazil, being really good in everything: in movements and in music, socialising with mestre. There is a lot of what is needed. … Not easily achievable (laughs) for a regular person. (U)

G says that their network had four *treinels* in Russia, when it was still active in the country:

> And I can’t say that all four contributed equally to the development. Well, well, in no way was there an equal contribution. So, that’s why I wouldn’t say that here are some clear criteria. But one of them is: personality. How you personally interact with the master. Moreover, you don’t always even need to teach classes, not always need to promote some kind of development. But if you’re close (to the master), that will decide. (G)

Personal traits, proximity to *mestre*, are the more decisive factors in G’s view, in the movement up capoeira’s hierarchy, than the skills of a practitioner. The promotions, mentioned by G, suggest that Portuguese language skills and staying in touch with the *mestre* play an important role in status advancement. G, who has a rather introverted personality, found it problematic that having worked the most on teaching and sustaining a group of capoeira angola in his city, he was viewed to be on the same level of competence as the less committed capoeiristas by his *mestre*.
This extroverted world of ours is one where "white men are the normal and natural top leaders" (Acker 2006: 459). From this perspective, capoeira angola mestres are something of an exception. Until recently, capoeira angola was overwhelmingly a practice directed by black, Brazilian men (Lewis 1992: 73). Joseph also adds that "the majority of mestres are dark-skinned men from a lower class background" (Joseph 2008: 199-200). A white European man first became a capoeira angola mestre in 2010 in Britain (Granada 2015: 310). In 1992 Lewis wrote that "very few women study or play capoeira in Salvador" and that "I never encountered a female mestre" (Lewis 1992: 73). By 2019 this is no longer the case. There are now many females practising capoeira angola in Salvador and around the world. There are also several capoeira angola female mestres in Brazil and even more female contra-mestras and treinels around the world.

The first group of capoeira angola in Russia, in fact, began with the initiative of a local female in Moscow and was later supported by another female. I am not aware of there yet being a non-Brazilian female mestra of capoeira angola and angoleiros whom I had asked in Russia also did not know of any.

I don’t know. It’s a difficult question. Because maybe there are some groups, I don’t know about some groups but I don’t think that there are. I haven’t found one. I can’t give any example. (N)

The authority of African-Brazilian men as the leaders of capoeira angola has not been challenged by women or foreigners until very recently. Gradually women and non-Brazilians are making their way to the top of the capoeira angola hierarchy as "another heritage emerges and makes claims on anyone listening, anyone attuned" (Haraway 2015a: 8). It is too early to say how such transnational changes in leadership may or may not affect the practice of capoeira angola and the many bodies with which that practice is entangled.

Mestres of capoeira angola do not form a harmonious whole amongst themselves. Instead, capoeira leaders are notorious for their continuous debates and conflicts over the practice and its norms (Almeida et al. 2013: 1335; Delamont 2009: 54; Wesolowski 2012).

When a person has already achieved a certain level – and he is most likely to be a man – this kind of (desire) arises in him, to be better, to out-do the others. (U)

There are so many personal relationships, tensions, conflicts. Sooo many! So many. In Europe, in Brazil, everywhere. Ego, ego, ego. Capoeira angola develops ego. That’s the truth. Unfortunately, that’s how it is. (O)

Downey describes how he was not allowed to attend different mestres’ classes in Salvador even as a participating researcher. He had to choose only one academy, whose classes he was required to attend regularly. (Downey 2005: 52–53.) This is illustrative of the competitiveness that exists among many mestres of capoeira angola. From the perspective of a global capitalist environment such behaviour is anything but exceptional. "In a culture that glorifies individual material success and applauds extreme competitive behaviour in pursuit of success, inequality becomes a sign of success for those who win", notes Acker who suggests that inequality is more legitimate in our context than equality (Acker 2006: 459).
In spite of the competitive wider environment, the existing feuds between mestres come as a surprise to many Russian beginners in capoeira:

*Once I was talking with my girlfriends and they were telling me that, well, in some groups there is this, somewhere at the very top, there is this fearsome politics! This "who goes where, who doesn’t go where", that "some decide, others don’t decide". I listened to them and thought "Damn it! There’s politics also here!" (M)*

It is probably an unrealistic expectation that the world of capoeira practice be apolitical that causes M’s disappointment. Malkki describes how the international humanitarian organisation Red Cross is also frequently "expected to be "ethical" but not "political"" (Malkki 2015: 203). There is little reason to expect the transnational networks of capoeira to lack political inclinations. But the Russian practitioners are physically located far from the conflicts of Brazilian mestres and the so called "Bahian capoeira aristocracy" of the North-Eastern Brazilian state (Almeida et al. 2013: 1354).

The overall status of a mestre is contingent on the socio-cultural context:

*If he comes here now, even if mestre himself arrives here to Ufa, not a single person will go to him. Because words like great master, grande mestre, to ordinary people here they don’t mean anything. They’ll say “so what?” (G)*

The mestre mentioned by G is one of the transnationally best-known masters of capoeira angola. G notes that not only is this master’s name unknown in Ufa but the overall concept of a grande mestre is rather empty in Russia. According to Assunção, the term mestre is frequently misunderstood when translated into English:

*Mestre in Portuguese designates a master in a trade, a handicraft or an art, and someone who teaches his skills to others. It expresses profound respect for the person so addressed. … in English master also means the slave owner, whereas in Portuguese another word, senhor (lord), is used for that purpose. (Assunção 2005: 194)*

The connotations of words master in English and mestre in Portuguese are different. Assunção’s description implies that there is no contradiction between capoeira’s overarching aim towards freedom from dominant hegemonies, on the one hand, and the inequalities that exist within the world of capoeira, on the other hand. While a colonial, as well as postcolonial, master-slave relationship is based on force, an artisan-like mestre-discipulo (master-disciple) relationship is based on the presumed wisdom of the mestre and the disciple’s voluntary wish to learn.

In another cultural context, Klemola observes that a master of tai chi is not "merely a technical example but is an example with his whole personality" (Klemola 2004: 126). A similar observation is made by Tavi, who writes that the best way for a yoga teacher to pass on experience is through her or his daily presence, rather than by purely giving technical instruction (Tavi 2014: 141). When bodies encounter a mestre in Russia during a seminar they are not merely in contact with his knowledge of the techniques of capoeira, but also with his whole personality. It is precisely the personalities of mestres and teachers that are frequently discussed among practitioners in Russia.
Impressions of Leaders

Weber suggests that patriarchy is a form of traditional type of authority that gains its status through the force of historical continuity (Weber 1978: 231). Russian society is often described as being supportive of idealised and unquestioned forms of personalised male authority. In an article written during the Cold War era, an American political scientist and historian Robert C. Tucker opens his text with a premise that the Russian peasants who underwent Soviet industrialisation and collectivisation brought with them into the new Soviet society "residues of the traditional peasant mentality, including respect for personal authority, whether it emanated from the immediate boss or from the head of the party and state" (Tucker 1979: 347). The view that particular strands of the Russian public, for example, youth, or the Orthodox Christian community, are uniquely susceptible to patriarchal authoritarianism is widely discussed also today (e.g. Diuk 2012: 68-70; Kizenko 2013).

Salmenniemi describes how in Russia, the social sphere is usually associated with femininity and the political sphere with masculinity. In a very concrete sense, it is often women in Russia who organise civic activities while it is men who decide on national and regional issues in Russian politics (Salmenniemi 2008: 88, 225). In the Russian context, ordinary men are arguably viewed by the public to be weak, passive, while the few exceptional men who are in the position of leadership are "represented as ideal – typically strong and active" (Salmenniemi 2005: 740). For women there is no equivalent dichotomy as in Salmenniemi's study women are perceived to hold an "active and altruistic" agency regardless of whether they are leaders. Salmenniemi's Russian informants, both females and males, repeatedly point out that a man is expected to be a leader in the country's public sphere (Salmenniemi 2005: 740).

Gender hierarchies and male leadership are seen to be 'natural' in dominant Russian discourses, according to some researchers (e.g. Holmgren 2013: 537; Salmenniemi 2005: 744). Certain scholars attribute the discourses to the influence of the Russian government, which according to Holmgren has overtly displayed "heterosexist machismo" particularly since 2011, impacting the wider public opinion (Holmgren 2013: 537). Feminist researcher Janet E. Johnson agrees that recent governmental developments in Russia impose increasingly patriarchal, conservative and intolerant attitudes towards gender within society at large, in what she calls 'gender neotraditionalism' (Johnson 2009: 38-39). Relationality of Russian bodies and capoeira angola reflects this neotraditional environment.

Some of the participants present rather conservative views on leadership in their interviews:

*The leader of the group most importantly makes all the decisions. …the main things are these two, that he makes the decisions and stays in touch with the master. During seminars he can for example, well that is, like invite a master for a seminar. Only a leader of the group can do that. (R)*

R proposes that the organiser, or the leader, of a capoeira group can make decisions without consulting other members. B is a female who had been practising capoeira angola for approximately ten months during the time of her interview. When asked about the teaching style of their instructor, she replies:
Well, I really like that (our) instructor, without any hints from us, he definitely understands everything but he always listens to our wishes and the training well, it always brings benefit. (B)

B has plenty of faith in her capoeira instructor even though, or maybe precisely because, she has only known him for several months. The capoeirista believes that the instructor "understands everything", that "he always listens" and that his teaching "always brings benefit".

When E’s wife, who is proficient in judo, came to visit his capoeira class, she was shocked at the familiarity that existed between the instructor and the participants in their group.

When she came to capoeira, she said "Oh! What’s this? It’s just chaos! It’s, it’s, it’s all bad…” That is, the instructor, he must be an instructor… So that is, the instructor said, the student did. The instructor said, the student couldn’t do, still do it. Like that. But that "Your instructor is a friend, that’s really bad." That like undermines the authority, well like the authority of the instructor. (E)

Some bodily practices in Russia, such as judo, rely on more formal instructor-student relations than capoeira angola. Heroic narratives of capoeira masters and teachers are nevertheless, widely present also among the practitioners of capoeira angola.

"For me they are authoritative figures", says O as he mentions one particular mestre and calls him "as a whole well, just a master of masters". “He’s, well, our highest teacher” another young male practitioner characterises the mestre of their group.

What I like about him is that he’s also just this bright, positive mass of energy who understands that… well, capoeira is not just some specific boundaries, yeah? It’s communality. (Y)

Among all other positive characteristics, like in B’s earlier quote in reference to their teacher, Y also suggests that a mestre has a good understanding of how things really are. Capoeira leaders frequently build up a picture of themselves as all knowing that the Russian bodies seem to reproduce in their discourses. Delamont describes how a Brazilian mestre of another style of capoeira would lecture his students in the UK on the importance of trusting him and committing to him fully or else to leave the group. The mestre would appeal to his 15 years’ experience as a capoeirista to justify such an ultimatum. (Delamont 2006: 169.)

During conversations and interviews, particularly some of the female angoleiros in Russia would provide idealised, occasionally somewhat dramatic, accounts of their male mestres:

Mestre had sent me an invite to become his friend on Facebook. I just experienced an explosion of emotions! "Ooh my mestre sent me a friend request!" For several days I was under a strong impression. Of course, I accepted the request. I was just afraid to send him a request myself because it seemed to me that we didn’t know each other. (M)

M’s mestre contacted her just by clicking on a friend request on Facebook. Yet this detached and seemingly bodily distanced approach caused M to experience "an explosion of emotions", an intense bodily experience that lasted for days.
Both females, M and U, decidedly argue against my scepticism over mestres’ authority as they both note, in separate interviews, that mestres obtain their status for a reason:

*If it’s a mestre then he already has authority. Well, it’s that after all not just anyone from the street becomes a mestre. Yeah? (U)*

*I understand that he hasn’t been called a master for nothing. It took him a very long time to get to it. And then he’s this wonderful, positive, this joyous, bright, open person that there can’t even be any second thoughts (about him). And sometimes I think that well, occasionally there are some difficulties in life or some fears about making some decision. I remember master, I remember how he plays on the berimbau or in a circle and I realise that all these difficulties are nonsense! You can cope with anything. He really inspires me. (M)*

Another female describes her experiences and impressions of an angola seminar: "I didn’t really understand much there in Portuguese. Obviously I was completely delighted with mestre (laughs), as always (laughs)", says R. Although she half-jokingly praises the mestre, it was common for R to discuss Brazilian male teachers in a tone of infatuation.

Sociologist Danielle Hedegard depicts her fieldwork with a capoeira group in Salvador where the majority of beginners were white, foreign females and the experienced students were mainly local, dark-skinned males (all apparently heterosexual). Hedegard portrays the mainly North American females’ participation in capoeira as a form of tourism that seeks exotic cultural experiences. The visiting practitioners in Hedegard’s work are interested more in flirtation and sexual encounters than in capoeira and the local men seem happy to accommodate these interests. (Hedegard 2013.) From this viewpoint, male mestres and teachers of capoeira may attract transnational practitioners not only with their skills but also with their looks and conformity to cultural stereotypes. Impressions of capoeira teachers are embodied experiences that are characterised by attractions, aversions and all sorts of emotions in between.

Male practitioners in Russia also expect great things from Brazilian capoeira teachers just because they are Brazilian: "He’s Brazilian himself! He pumps up the audience, (with) all that energy", says T who associates being Brazilian with being very energetic. Joseph, like many other authors on capoeira, discusses the "stereotypes of male blackness" that include "machismo, rhythmic prowess, athletic aptitude and corporeal fluidity" (Joseph 2008: 204). Some of these stereotypes fit well with Russia’s present image of an ideal, ‘hypermasculine‘, male: athletically fit macho, like the judo-playing president Vladimir Putin in contrast to the heavily drinking, out of shape, president of the 1990’s Russia, Boris Yeltsin (Wood on Putin 2016). Many practitioners seem to associate being Brazilian with being an exceptional male, as opposed an ordinary Russian man associated, as mentioned earlier, with weakness and passivity. From this point of view, a Brazilian capoeira mestre or teacher falls into the category of a male leader in the Russian eyes, the one who is exceptionally active and strong. This is an interesting position if one remembers the negative attitudes towards Africa and black skin in today’s Russia, discussed in the previous chapter. An African-Brazilian leader embodies authority rather ambivalently in the Russian context.

When a Brazilian male capoeira teacher left St. Petersburg, the group there lost many of its new members who apparently attended the capoeira classes primarily
because of his exotic presence (fieldnotes 9.10.2012). Capoeira passed on by a Brazilian teacher may seem more authentic than when taught by a Russian teacher (on authenticity: Hedegard 2013). U mentions that an instructor creates the general mood of the group, its energy. In Russia capoeira angola practitioners are very few in number. Their collectives are therefore fragile without a transnational mestre or a teacher, someone to unite them to his wider network of angoleiros, and so to feed the practitioners’ experiences in capoeira both on and offline. Y had spent several years not training capoeira because to his knowledge there were no other capoeiristas in his city. He notes that by virtue of being a small group of isolated capoeiristas, the practitioners need to stay close together:

_We realise that, well, we’re tiny birds so we have to stick close together because there’s no one other than us. If we fall out of our nest, then we’ll be all alone. Yeah. That’s why we need to help each other._ (Y)

Brazilian instructors are at times seen as pacifiers and unifiers of capoeira practitioners. During a summer picnic in a park, one group’s members discussed a conflictual capoeira angola group in another Russian city. Capoeiristas seemed to agree that the presence of a Brazilian teacher in the city would help to unify the divided group as it would prevent further disputes over leadership. During the same picnic, all stories told about the recently held capoeira angola seminars in Moscow and St. Petersburg, which one of the group’s members attended, revolved around the mestres, their plans and visions for capoeira groups. It was one of my first days of doing fieldwork in the city and I was thoroughly disappointed that instead of talking about their own plans for the group, the angoleiros were gossiping about the conflicts of other groups and were above all interested in the Brazilian masters. (Fieldnotes 12.6.2013.)

Philosopher Judith Butler, following Louis Althusser’s thinking, argues that it is social authorities who create social beings in the first place (Butler 1995). Continuing this thought, we could say that without masters of capoeira angola there would be no practitioners of the art-form in the first place. “The more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously,” writes Butler (Butler 1995: 14) as a seeming continuation of Foucault’s thinking according to which as human capabilities grow, power relations become intensified (Sanders 2016: 1). As the practitioners’ bodies become increasingly experienced in capoeira angola, they simultaneously become increasingly subjected to the norms of the practice.

As we learn and even master certain bodily techniques our body necessarily excludes other potential ways of being and moving in what Downey, following Nikolai Bernstein’s work, calls the ‘reducing degrees of freedom’ (Downey 2008: 207–208). The more experienced a capoeirista is, the more she or he can improvise in the movements but at the same time, as Butler points out, every mastery of a practice occurs within a certain frame that arguably functions as a kind of cage of subjection. The masters of capoeira develop the habit of moving in various cunning ways but ways that are nevertheless limited to the peculiar frame of capoeira angola. Ahmed notes that “repetition is not neutral work” as it “orients the body in some ways rather than others” (Ahmed 2010: 247). The range of movement of capoeira mestres in a game is simultaneously wider and narrower than those of other practitioners as expansion of bodily capacities in some directions, “might in turn restrict what we can do in others”, Ahmed points out (Ahmed 2010: 252).
One practitioner sees the main worth of a *mestre* to lie precisely in his unique skills:

> What do the masters master? That they can with any person, even if he entered the roda for the first time, but anyway he (mestre) will find a common language with him (beginner) and will show at least somehow watchable, that kind of interesting, game. (H)

In my view, H somewhat idealises mestres’ capacity to always find a common language with other players. While practising capoeira angola myself I witnessed many games where mestres did not find common language with other players but attempted to display superiority even with complete beginners. Lewis notes that a *mestre* "cannot afford to be merely a friend, but must sometimes, even frequently, take the role of adversary in order to teach the harsh lessons of *malícia.*" (Lewis 1992: 77). A *mestre* displaying his superiority in a game with a beginner may in fact be a technique of teaching a student the cunningness of a capoeira game. But just how far can a practitioner trust a *mestre* to act in the student’s interests, without questioning the teacher’s authority?

> Well, you respect your parents, who gave birth to you, educated you, spent some of their money, time on you. So basically it’s pretty much the same thing (here). That is, *mestre,* he comes over, he spends… (LI)

The comparison of a capoeira *mestre* to one’s parents suggests that at least some capoeiristas in Russia feel close, almost familial, affinity to their physically distant mestres.

Most angoleiros in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod see their mestres to be unimposing and open: "We really liked him because he’s very easy to be with" says S. "He didn’t close off from basic questions like the leadership of INBI (did)." In comparison to the capoeira instructions coming from the organisation INBI, a Brazilian *mestre* was seen as a better choice for an instructor by S and her friends. Some of the youngest capoeiristas also mentioned that in comparison to their school teachers, the mestre’s as well as their capoeira instructor’s teaching styles appeared very flexible and relaxed. E notes that he would not be friends with his school teachers and sports instructors, as he has been with some capoeira teachers and masters:

> When I was, well not for a long time, when I was practising on a trampoline (laughs), I didn’t drink beer with my instructor (of acrobatics). Very clearly like that. With my teachers in school I didn’t drink beer, well, and I didn’t even drink milkshakes (with them). (E)

From the perspective of the Russian environment where teachers are set as authoritative figures (Schweisfurth 2002: 57–58) and leaders in cultural organisations are unwilling to be open with students, African-Brazilian male mestres may seem approachable and not that rigidly authoritative.

> In this respect mestre is also great. He never pressured anyone that strictly, didn’t force anything but as a result anyway everyone starts to develop with time. So giving time for people themselves to grasp it all. (G).
However, as the angoleiros of G’s group became increasingly experienced, their *mestre* began to put pressure on the participants to pay fees and to follow his plans of action for the future. This led to the group’s decision to leave their Brazilian master as we will see later in this chapter.

There is an ongoing tension between obedience towards and resistance against capoeira angola leaders. When asked what he dislikes most about capoeira, X answers:

> I don’t like when “Ooh, the master allowed me to sing! I’m now the coolest!” … *The attitude towards masters, that they’re held on the same level with, I don’t know who, like gods or something.*

X describes how some of the other group members are shocked to hear that he would not be able to sing a *ladainha* to their *mestre* during a seminar: """"How will you say to the master that you don’t know a *ladainha*?!"""" """"Well, I’ll just say it."""" X portrays himself as a rebel in the group by not aiming to please the *mestre* during the seminars. The impressions of teachers are certainly not static, they alter from sensations of admiration to dislike and vice versa.

U describes the tensions that can exist within groups of capoeira in their attitudes towards *mestres*:

> The guys were complaining that, that mestre doesn’t help them there… That there’s no dialogue with him or something. But I think again that it depends on us. (U)

In her interview U repeatedly says that she does not want to blame their *mestre* for any of the weaknesses of their capoeira angola group as she sees that the local practitioners have the main responsibility for maintaining the group and its classes vibrant. In a self-regulating manner, many Russian angoleiros appear to put responsibility on themselves prior to any outside authoritative figures. E reflects on the responsibilities of a *mestre* and how they probably extend also to all capoeira instructors, including E himself:

> He (mestre) says: “I’m going here, if you want to come with me, let’s go. I’ll show you the way.” *This is the kind of role that a master has. And not only a master but also an instructor. In principle, I guess.* (E)

The way, or the connection, between capoeira and bodies is arguably paved by several leaders: masters, teachers and instructors of the practice.

Organisers of capoeira groups frequently invited me to carry out fieldwork in Russia during the seminars when visiting teachers would be there. Russian angoleiros were often puzzled as to why I wanted to observe their group when the *mestre* or other Brazilian teachers were absent. Weekly capoeira classes did not seem to be worthy of research like the special events with visiting instructors. While I was precisely interested in the mundane, weekly capoeira classes, capoeiristas were much more intrigued by their offline encounters with visiting *mestres* and teachers.

> Well of course a master is a person who knows more than you. That is, it’s a person like of… knowledge. So this this, what kind of role does he have? It’s to be a guide. To be this, you know, light at the end of the tunnel on which you can direct yourself and reach your own understanding of capoeira. (E)
Unequal relations of bodies to capoeira angola can be partly explained by a body’s experience in the practice.

4.3 PASSING ON EXPERIENCE

The living encounter of two and more bodies is technologically irreplaceable. This is particularly the case, when the task is to transmit bodily experience from one body to another. Irigaray offers a description of what it means to share experience: "To learn, in the best of cases, is to learn from someone’s experience. To teach is to transmit experience." (Irigaray 2002a: 58). Teaching according to Irigaray is not the transmission of information but of direct experience. This is frequently underlined in the practice of yoga where it is said that a teacher should transmit the content of the practice rather than merely its physical form (Tavi 2014: 141). As we saw earlier, the bodily techniques of capoeira angola are often passed on to others non-verbally. The instructor not only illustrates movements with her or his body but illustrates movements with emotion, with a certain mood that resonates in the students’ bodies. Therefore, while we may be sceptical of claims to authoritative status, the importance of having a guide or several guides in acquiring bodily techniques should also be considered.

Bodies are not only guided by external senses (exteroception): sight, hearing, smell, taste and feeling, but also by proprioceptive senses. These internal senses are arguably: balance, kinaesthesia, sense of posture as well as feelings of pain, thirst and hunger. (Klemola 2004: 78; Wikipedia: proprioception.) Irigaray’s writings make me, however, wonder whether pleasure is not an additional internal sense. "The concept of kinesthesia refers to a body which is sentient and which moves and engages with the world through a form of corporeal consciousness" writes Blackman (Blackman 2008: 83). Downey’s work suggests that such corporeal consciousness can be developed or transformed with practice (Downey 2005: 33). Metcalfe and Game write that if one is engaged in a certain practice on a regular basis then for the practice to transform the individual, one has to simply "await a transformation that cannot be guaranteed" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 302). Close relations with a practice may transform the ways in which we use our external and internal senses.

Bodily senses do not work in isolation from each other but rather form "networked connections and processes" that are referred to as synaesthesia (Blackman 2008: 84). When training a capoeira sequence in a pair, a practitioner sees that her or his instructor is doing a chamada and through holistic sensorial feedback of seeing and proprioceptively imitating, hearing the music, the practitioner’s body attempts movements and bodily expressions through synaesthesia. There is a "form of 'cross-modal sensorial exchange'" occurring in our bodies as a kind of internal feedback system (Sobchack in Blackman 2008: 84). The bodies are anything but 'blank slates' upon which capoeira angola teachers imprint new sensations and habits. The existing characteristics of the body are crucial in how the teachings are processed and networked within and between the individuals’ senses.

Teachers of capoeira angola have an important role in guiding not only how practitioners’ bodies move but also how they begin to experience the internal states of their own bodies in the form of balance or sense of posture.

*He took me by the hand, as in mestre (laughs) – it sounds like some (laughs) some kind of sect. And he just said to do an aú. I didn’t want to do it because I was scared. But*
(he) just like took (my hand) and like, like: "Let’s go" (laughs). Well, and I did it, it shocked me that I could do it. I had never, ever done it, in my entire life! And after that, this kind of an ascent began for me (laughs). (U)

The mestre’s forceful trust in U, made her body carry out a cartwheel (au) as a surprise to herself. This bodily experience opened up a new phase in U’s learning of capoeira movements. Metcalfe and Game note that a change in a person, involved in a bodily practice, can be "brought about by the practice and not the practitioner" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 302). This underlines one of the main premises of this work, namely, that both practice and body are subjects.

After attending capoeira classes of different teachers, T realised that while his first Russian capoeira instructor taught movements as separate exercises, focusing only on some limbs at a time, a Brazilian capoeira master had a more holistic approach to movement:

Mestre teaches us to dance with the whole body. I remember that moment when we were taught to first move our legs, then to hold our hands in different positions… But here you just look at him and absorb it all as a whole. And when you move using the whole body then it works so that – it works! When you start moving (body parts) separately, it doesn’t work. (T)

While visually a movement may appear similar, internally one senses a difference of whether a samba step is carried out with only a part of the body or with the entire being.

I honestly can’t imagine how it was earlier because let’s say … they were after all starting to practise when there was no capoeira in Ufa at all. They started practising themselves. How? How could they train without an instructor and without a mestre? It’s really difficult for me to imagine that (laughs). (P)

Even though there are no Brazilian teachers or mestres living in Ufa now, P sees that the situation is different than it was in the early 2000’s when there was no capoeira angola group in the city and no transnational connections to a mestre. J notes the state of their group’s physical practice before their encounter with a Brazilian mestre:

I realised that we’re practising some nonsense. We completely didn’t understand what we were doing. Meaning that all these movements that we were learning to do, all that ginga, all that… well, we were just doing something wrong. (J)

The INBI instructor with no experience in capoeira only taught a few aspects of the practice and even those, like the ginga mentioned in the previous chapter, were not always accurate.

It’s important after all that it would be in accordance with what was before. That is, there is a certain sense in that. Well, that is, it’s not creativity to some extent but it’s more of a preservation of history. (U)

Many Russian practitioners note it is the continuity of capoeira’s customs rather than innovation that should be valued. Mestre’s guidance is seen to be crucial for the
preservation of the practice. Researchers describe how learning in capoeira occurs through bodily imitation, rather than through memorisation of information (Downey 2008). Klemola notes that bodily practices in general, be it a certain dance or tai chi, are learned through imitation that usually involves little or no reflection at all (Klemola 2004: 95). Practitioners in Russia agree with this view: "At first everyone imitates the masters, right?", J says. One of the mestres has a clearly patterned opening of class that all of his students in Russia follow. I observed three instructors of the same capoeira network in three different Russian cities whose stretching routine was almost identical.

During one of the classes, capoeira instructor had given a sequence to practise in changing pairs but in his own games he occasionally added chamadas to the sequence as a brief break and a display of malicia. The other practitioners gradually started imitating the instructor's way of playing, even though they received no verbal instructions to do chamadas (fieldnotes 19.11.2013). The chamada movements that were outlined in chapter two are usually bewildering to beginners and it is often through direct imitation of the instructor or a partner that angoleiros begin to try chamadas. Their bodies initiate something that their thoughts fail to understand or that their emotions do not yet know how to relate to.

In his ethnography, Downey tells of an incident in a capoeira class in Salvador where he was learning to do a handstand (bananeira). After half an hour of failed attempts, an assisting instructor came up to give him some mainly corporeal guidance but he also verbally said to Downey "Just stand up!" and the line got stuck in the ethnographer's head. "I could not find physically, with my own body and movements, what he was telling me to do, although I could understand what he said", writes Downey (Downey 2005: 47). It took him several months of training the handstand to physically realise what the instructor was saying as the words and action gradually coincided in the movement and Downey 'stood up' onto his hands. Q also describes her early difficulties with learning the ginga movement: "Then someone said to me: "Do a triangle."" The image of a triangle helped Q visualise the movement in a new way that facilitated her learning. In my fieldnotes I wrote that instructors would frequently point out small details in exercises to the participants, such as, the influence of weight shifting in different movements (fieldnotes 19.11.2013). Detailed, personalised comments, uttered at the right time, by a more experienced practitioner are crucial for the development of bodily skills.

M describes how her instructor's few guiding words and his mere presence have made a big difference for the practice:

M: I'd come onto my head and realise that like I need to already go further, that is, to lift the legs. I can do what I like but I realise that I need to go further, that I need to descend, descend into a bridge from this position.
I: That's scary.
M: I was afraid. And one time there was a class, I came up to G and said: "Listen", I said "well I know that I'm ready, that's it, I'm ready. (But) I'm scared. What, how, how, do you do it?" He says: "Just bend your knees".
I: And that helped, yeah?
M: And I just got onto my head, bent my knees and there everything just naturally and easily fell into a bridge.
I: Like that, the right words at the right time.
M: It really helps when you go up to an instructor and say: "I'm going to do this now; you just stay nearby. I feel calmer that way".
In M’s example, the instructor’s physical nearness is needed for the practitioner to feel safe. If M would start to fall the wrong way, the instructor could potentially catch her and correct the posture.

The significance of bodily guidance and support, described by various angoleiros, is a good reminder that we often need the presence of another being in order to learn "to become in tune with" our own bodies (Game 2001: 3). Game describes how that other being does not necessarily have to be human, it can also be a horse that teaches us to let go and to trust our own bodies. The passing of bodily experience is not something that occurs between humans alone. It is questionable whether technology in the near future will be able to replace the physical, immediate exchange of bodily experience of capoeiristas in classes. Currently there are live online classes like that of yoga where an instructor gives immediate feedback to the student as the two connect through screens (e.g. yogaia.com). Perhaps transnational online capoeira angola classes will also be offered soon.

Why is it very important to organise events with masters? Not so that a person would come here and show you a new movement. That can be done also online. "Master, record some movement and send it to me." (E)

One can surely learn a movement using Youtube videos or other online material but to pass on and to receive certain bodily experiences holistically, to have a living person inspire the body into a specific motion, is perhaps more difficult online.

Teaching Style

The ways in which Russian instructors teach capoeira angola classes varies a lot from group to group. The differences may in part result from the instructors’ diverse backgrounds. One of the instructors is a part-time teacher at a college and he is conscious of his own pedagogical style. He describes his approach towards a beginner in capoeira:

… Anyway, it’s a different culture. He (beginner) is not quite used to it yet. After he trains, I see that even these most aggressive young men, who come closed off, they gradually start – half a year they practice – and they start to sing along to what is playing. He’s already like “Oh, I heard that!” and starts to hum along and I’m already thinking: “There, now we can already begin”. I place a pandeiro in his hands, he’ll play a bit, start to sing. Everything like… here you need to be sensitive to people. Like that. Slowly explaining. (G)

G is meticulous in his own movements and instrument playing and he is usually well focused on how his students practice capoeira. "Well, obviously if G is playing then… you need to look at how he’s playing. Because he plays great and definitely serves as an example. Very sharp movements, like that", T describes. Another practitioner suggests that in the angola style as a whole, plenty of attention is paid to precision of movement and gestures, including when playing instruments. "In angola, there is a very conscientious attitude towards learning, towards how the right hand is working
there, the left hand, the *caxixi*\(^{27}\), all the angles…,” says O as he describes how the skill of playing the *berimbau* is passed on.

G’s style of passing on experience could be described as authoritative: ”Well, here G decides everything and what he decides – that’s how it’ll generally be – in theory”, T notes. G’s teaching style, however, like those of other Russian instructors, changes with time and experience in capoeira. He was not always the only teacher of the group as G gradually acquired the position of a leader. Q describes the beginnings of their group, how there were several young women and men organising it and teaching the classes at first. The founding members did not view G as the group’s leader, it is those who joined the capoeira group later on that ”singled him out of the whole group as the trainer”, says Q. By the time I was carrying out fieldwork with the group, G was the unquestionable teacher and leader of the group. This transformation happened with time, particularly as the other founding members left the group.

The instructor of another group is an engineer whose parents are teachers at a village school. Her teaching style is different to G’s. During her interview she describes her outlook on learning in capoeira angola:

> You managed to do some movement that you couldn’t do before. So instead of (saying): “I don’t know, I can’t do anything!” You kind of work without pausing. And it’s really good that in capoeira there isn’t that kind of, well at least in capoeira angola, there isn’t that kind of system that there (if) you haven’t passed all the standards – “get up and leave!”. So the skills of each person are respected and the time that’s needed to learn something. (R)

Working without pausing aptly describes R’s lifestyle that I came to observe as I lived with her for a month and for another shorter period later on. If she is not at work, she is always going to hobbies, friends’, cleaning at home or inviting someone over. I did not once see R simply relaxing in her own apartment.

During classes with complete beginners, R’s approach to instruction tends to be rather strict and at times impatient. R would get frustrated with some of the younger beginners during the warm-up: ”Don’t you know how to do push-ups or what?” she would say mockingly (fieldnotes 26.11.2013). R frequently pointed out detailed mistakes in movements instead of encouraging the students by noting what they managed to do right. When a teen-aged male beginner was begging R to play the drum (*atabaque*) during a musical part of a class, R for some reason refused to let him, obviously discouraging the otherwise exceptionally enthusiastic practitioner. While observing this class I imagined how G would have been happy to give the male the *atabaque* so as to strengthen the beginner’s interest in capoeira.

> G, when he gives knowledge, he gives it precisely to you. That is, he doesn’t let you go until you’ve managed to do it. That is, if you don’t understand yet, he waits until you understand. (W)

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\(^{27}\) A small percussion instrument that is held simultaneously while playing the *berimbau*. *Caxixi* consists of a closed basket with a flat bottom filled with seeds or other small particles. (See Picture 4. Wikipedia: *caxixi*).
One of R’s male students, D, points out, during our conversation with him and A, that R cares a lot about her classes and brings much effort into them even if she is not as playful as some other instructors:

A: Well, R, I think she teaches more strictly. You can’t play around with her like with N (laughs). (If) with N I can’t do something – “Well, let me help you…” (N would say).
D: R has a strong sense of responsibility… R is concerned (/worries) about the training.

While G works part-time at a college, his wife works full-time at a bank, prepares him breakfast, lunch and dinner at home. In contrast, R works full-time at a factory and no one cooks for her at home. She usually comes tired to capoeira classes after a full day at work while G frequently spends his days at home prior to classes. These kinds of lifestyle differences possibly have some impact on one’s teaching disposition. Moreover, R was forced into the position of an instructor by circumstances:

My role kind of again changed just recently. N decided that she travels too much and after talking with master they kind of decided to appoint instead… Well that is, the instructor, the leader of the group, should be constantly with the group, master said so and that he appointed someone else… Well, she suggested me and he, because master already knew me, he said ”Well, yes, yes”. (R)

It sounds like the decision of appointing R as the group’s new instructor was almost made without her consent by the group’s existing leader and their mestre. Unsurprisingly then R often struggles with rather than enjoys the teaching process:

Sometimes it happens that we have this mixed group. That is, beginners and veterans. And you don’t know what to give them because like for one it is not interesting and for the other it’s too difficult. (R)

I once attended a flamenco class taught by R’s best friend who was one of the pioneers of capoeira in Samara before injuring her shoulders and stopping practising. The friend’s teaching approach was tough and authoritative which made me wonder whether R was in part emulating her friend’s style of teaching during capoeira classes. Relations between just one body and practice are incredibly multi-layered with numerous intertwined influences that are constantly in flux. R’s family background, her professional life, her friends, are just some of the factors that impact her relations with capoeira angola.

It is not enough to have plenty of personal experience in capoeira angola in order to teach the practice well. A body also needs to find a way of clearly passing the experience on to others:

One instructor in Moscow for example, he is a white capoeirista, he could give (classes) ten times more comprehensibly than any Brazilian. Seminars with him were the most active, the most like…the best. There are instructors like … (names a Brazilian teacher), he’s a great example. That is, there are many Brazilians, they can do a lot of things, they know lots but they don’t know how to teach, at all. (O)

O’s impressions show just how difficult it can be to guide the bodies of others in a class or a seminar setting. Realising the weight of responsibility of instructing capoeira
angola, most bodies in Samara, Ufa and St. Petersburg are not keen to become capoeira instructors:

_I need to actually get more experience myself before starting to teach because now (if) I start well, like how to say it? Well, I have my own impression of capoeira but it’s entirely possible that it’s not yet, well how to… that it can be more multi-dimensional, let’s say. Yeah if I take on a group now then they will be learning to see capoeira with my eyes, the ones I’ll give to them. It’s a really big responsibility._ (H)

F discusses the pressure that falls on a capoeira instructor’s shoulders. Even though she has been asked "a thousand times" to start teaching capoeira, she has always refused thus far because she feels that the duty would require too much of her:

_So far as I think that I’m a responsible person, I would feel pressured by it. That is, when I agree to do something, I try to keep to the agreement. If I don’t stick to something, it starts to corrode me from within. …even with my husband I’m thinking "Damn, he’s hungry there. Ai, ai, ai, ai" There, and here everybody is hungry. Everyone needs information, everyone expects (something) of you. And also: everyone expects a certain standard from you. That is, you have to meet the standards! You don’t want to, it’s not your will, (but) you have to meet the expectations. What kind of an instructor are you who doesn’t know anything? Doesn’t know how to do anything? And what if he suddenly doesn’t feel like it, and he even gained five kilos – ew! What kind of an instructor… _ (F)

Also the female initiator of capoeira angola in Russia, in Moscow, according to N, never aspired to become a capoeira instructor or a leader. Rather she was personally intrigued by capoeira and found out a lot about it:

_In fact, she never even wanted to be this kind of a trainer. It’s just that there was no one else and like because of that she – and she likely knew (capoeira) better than anyone else. She is exactly like that. It’s that kind of person who likes to dig deep into a topic and she knew her way around all that. But physically, she is a little not, she couldn’t manage to keep it all up._ (N)

Y who now teaches children’s classes did not feel ready to be an instructor when he was younger:

_How old was I at that point? Well like 18–20. The whole thing just fell apart quickly because I had other interests. I was interested in practising myself, in having someone else teach me._ (Y)

N mentioned several times during our conversations that she would prefer to be taught capoeira by someone rather than teach it herself. She, like R, was also forced by circumstances to become an instructor. Their group began with three males and N being in charge, teaching the classes together. But gradually: "it so happened that like we had less and less boys" says R. As the three founding males left the group,
well like, N of course didn’t expect that she’d be left alone in the leadership of the group. Like there were so many guys. So like “well, just let them lead”. It turned out that she was left alone. (R)

As long as there were male organisers it was assumed that N could teach on the sidelines. It is only when the three men left that the female had to step into the limelight. However, the story of another group suggests that the same thing can occur the other way around as G too ended up being an instructor after the female founders of the group gradually left.

Thus, becoming a capoeira angola group leader is often a sum of unanticipated circumstances. The position is not seen as a glamorous status of authority but rather as a big responsibility that many would gladly give up if another teacher were to come along. Financially being a group’s leader can be burdensome as she or he usually pays for space hire when there are not enough fees paid by class attendants to cover the costs. Several instructors in Russia have eventually decided to quit teaching capoeira because it had become financially too costly. In turn, the small circles of capoeira angola do not survive without at least one person responsible for the practical organisation of weekly classes. “There is no leader and like everyone is like “Well, how?” – then for sure not many will stay with that”, says U.

Many times I observed how a teacher would be necessary for basic practicalities before, during and after capoeira classes: saying when to have a five-minute break or to switch partners (fieldnotes 27.3.2014); simply starting the class by saying “poehali!”

(28) (fieldnotes 18.3.2014). It is the local young instructors, with relatively little experience of their own, who tend to do most of the work in preparing and teaching the capoeira angola classes in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhni Novgorod. Yet it is usually the Brazilian mestres who are seen as ‘our highest teacher’ and who inspire the students the most. Perhaps, the more distant, out of reach, an authoritative figure is, the more impressive his status appears in one’s imagination.

4.4 LEAVING MESTRE

In 2015 one of the groups of capoeira angola in Russia made the decision to leave their Brazilian mestre and to become an independent group of capoeira. Later on, they decided to start practising another style of capoeira under the guidance of a younger Brazilian male instructor. When I visited the group in 2016 some of the practitioners were wondering about how the changes in the group would affect my research. Could I still study their classes now that they were no longer practising the style of angola? I had no idea how the empirical changes would affect my research at first. But as I began to spend time in the field, observing the new styled capoeira classes, I realised just how helpful it is to observe the classes of non-angola styled practice in order to better understand stylistic differences and to become better aware of some of the unique aspects of angola.

Unlike in some other places where capoeira groups are formed when a student leaves her or his own mestre to establish a new group (Almeida et al. 2013: 1352), the capoeira angola groups I studied in Russia all formed before a mestre was found.

28 ‘Let’s go’ in Russian.
G describes how their group initially came to practise the style of angola under the guidance of an African-Brazilian mestre:

We had a big group, he came, he saw it. We already had a group, we had the people. There was a contact person… So basically we had a group but no master. And we, so to say, asked that he would like, lead our direction. … There wasn’t much to choose from but we’re happy anyway. That is, there’s nothing like that someone would regret “why not someone else?” Now there is a huge amount of choice in other cities. You can choose your style, hundreds of masters there… You can even take a moment to think about where to go there… But we didn’t have that. It was somehow immediate. We liked him and we didn’t see anyone other than him. (G)

The mestre just happened to visit the Russian city and since he was the only capoeira mestre that they had ever seen, the group members were happy to ask him to be their leader. The choice of a teacher was not considered in detail, instead, it appears to have happened rather spontaneously.

In another group, the choice was more deliberate: "Then they like decided to practise capoeira angola. And well, N there really liked mestre.", R describes. Once the decision of the style of capoeira was made, one of the group's founding members made a conscious choice of a preferred mestre. It took the group a while before the transnational network of capoeira accepted them as a full-fledged member. In a third group of capoeira angola, the African-Brazilian mestre was considering whether or not to accept the group fully into his transnational capoeira network for over eight years. O compares this process of acceptance to the trial period of a new employee at a workplace:

When a person, when he gets a job, the first two months he has this period when he is being watched, is he working well or not there. Watching you, yeah? … Well, for us it was like that for about eight years. Always. … So it was always a bit incomplete. Like that. And at times (the role of) mestre in our group, I think, it was not very big. (O)

The African-Brazilian mestres do not always have a significant influence on the weekly bodily practice of angoleiros in Russia, nor do they influence the practice from the very beginning of the groups' formation. Nonetheless, all capoeira angola groups want to be affiliated with an African-Brazilian mestre because Russian capoeiristas do not see how else they could learn the art-form. G describes their group’s experiences after leaving the master and training as an independent group:

…to practise without a master and a lineage, it becomes, how to put it? It becomes this mess. Well this, lack of a system, lack of an academy. This kind of hanging out, like an amorphous, non-systemic thing. (G)

Being systematic and well-organised was important for G already when we met in 2013 when their group practised the style of angola. Many other angoleiros also express a desire for a more orderly and organised practice:

I really (want) for everything to be systematic. Like that. I’m not saying that it should be fitness, yeah? That is, stretching, flexing; like this group of muscles has been exercised,
now we’ll do these moves – no. But sometimes our trainings are without a structure. Like, as if, without preparation. (F)

It’s a strength of capoeira angola that the instructor is also looking for answers to the questions that he poses to himself and that you pose to him. He has several points, maybe, several points of view. On the one hand, that’s a strength. But on the other hand, it’s a weakness that like there’s no clear, that kind of, plan of teaching. That well, in contemporânea, that I definitely don’t like: “Today we learn meia lua de compasso\textsuperscript{29}, then tomorrow we pass an exam on meia lua de compasso, you have to do it like 30 times there. After tomorrow we learn that, that and that and at the end of the year, you take an exam. If you don’t pass the exam, then you don’t reach the next level.” But you do reach the next level! You reach the next level, well I think so, it’s my opinion, then when you realise that “I know how to do this move, and I can do it and I like doing it, I know why I’m doing it”. (E)

While E wishes that capoeira angola teaching would be accompanied with more clear and systematic guidelines on how to instruct the classes, he does not share the view of some other capoeira styles that skills and advances in the practice can be measured with exams. He suggests that each practitioner knows when she or he has learnt something based on their changing bodily skills and the overall understanding of the movements. This implies that the quality of interaction of bodies and capoeira angola cannot be easily measured in numbers such as grades.

G’s group eventually decided to leave their mestre of angola after a capoeira seminar during which the master simultaneously promoted three angoleiros to the status of treinels. The promoted angoleiros all belonged to the transnational network of the mestre but lived in different cities in Russia. After the promotion, the mestre and another visiting Brazilian contra-mestre began making plans for the angola groups in Russia, without consulting the local angoleiros. By the time of the seminar in 2015, G had already acquired some Portuguese language skills that helped him understand what the mestre and contra-mestre were talking about at the dinner table, something he had been unable to do earlier. G notes that the decision to leave the mestre lied in impressions and feelings of that seminar: “The reason was in sensations”, he says. “Like everything was cool but at the same time somehow just like people didn’t like the atmosphere, I guess… before that we usually brought only one mestre but here there were immediately two.” Being physically remote from Brazil and many European cities, many Russian angoleiros never or rarely see several capoeira angola masters and contra-mestres together, and their behaviour amongst themselves.

By the time I came to visit the group, a year had passed since they left the master and during shashlyk (barbecue in Russian) in a park I was surprised to hear that several group members were making fun of the angola style, its slowness, marginality and some were even making race related comments about one black practitioner of angola. For some capoeiristas a U-turn in attitude towards angola style seemed to have occurred.

How do angoleiros know how to play? Well, not all, (but) many: only softly… Like I’ve seen lots of when people come out to play and there’s also that thing, I don’t know if it’s a peculiarity of Russians or not Russians, they’re like even saying to others "Why

\textsuperscript{29}A fast kick in non-angola styles of capoeira.
are you playing like that? We don’t play like that. Our master taught only in this way. That’s wrong.” That is, they’re trying to paint all of capoeira into one, into two colours: yellow and black (laughs). But it (capoeira) is broader, damn it. That’s what I want to say. They come out, unable to do anything, for some reason they come out (to play), for some reason they come (to roda) and then they even leave upset. (G)

G’s attitude towards angoleiros had changed significantly since our previous meeting in 2014. He, like many others in his new group, views angola style as too soft, not allowing angoleiros who participate in common rodas to defend themselves against the attacks of practitioners of other styles.

G and a couple of other group members had met a young capoeira contra-mestre who partly inspired them to change style. G describes the contra-mestre:

That is, I just felt this energy, real kind of. That maybe for a long time I haven’t felt even among angoleiros. The way he plays, how he moves, his way of being. That is, he’s really how, like that kind of, you know? Like an animal moving and so on. That is there’s something even much more natural in him than in others, in angoleiros. There. But at the same time that is he, he can play fast. He’s got killer attacks and acrobatics and so on. … Seeing him, I realise “Oh! That is what I want.” That is, this is what is calling me now. What inspires me. And talking to guys, we like talked that, we’ll practice only there and with those people who inspire us. (G)

G’s capoeira group was no longer inspired by their angola mestre.

I observed capoeira classes of G’s group for several weeks in 2016 when the group was in a period of transition from angola style to what could be called contemporânea style. The new Brazilian contra-mestre with whom G wanted to align his group was undecided whether to accept the group as his own. G’s group was in a ‘trial period’, as O put it earlier. Nevertheless, the bodily aspects of the classes had changed in various ways with the rejection of capoeira angola style. For example, hands would be systematically used in defence movements unlike in the angola defences that mainly use evasion rather than confrontation as a bodily technique (Downey 2005: 188; Dumoulié 2010: 16). The group was already learning set sequences in preparation for the first belt exam as they were gradually moving into the belt gradation system (fieldnotes 31.5.2016). The basic movement of ginga had clearly transformed; I wrote that "the ginga is uniform, same hand gestures, fixed, from side to side” (fieldnotes 10.5.2016).

For me it was unusual not to keep the arms like this (bent, angular), not to have straight legs. Like that and like not a rigid but a softer ginga, a more relaxed ginga. It took me a very long time to get used to that. (E)

E describes his opposing corporeal transition from contemporânea to angola style several years ago. After practising the more angular capoeira contemporânea it was a challenge to embody the softer movements and postures of angola.

An overall new aesthetic was embraced by G’s group, with straight back, legs and fingers repetitively referred to as ‘good looking’ or ‘nice’ by the instructors (fieldnotes 10.5.2016). T would constantly remind the children attending his classes to keep their backs straight in ginga and other movements. The repetitive movements were also reflected in G’s constantly repetitive new words like "trajectory" or "synchrony". "Dois
a dois"\textsuperscript{30}, G would say "we’re moving in synchrony". (Fieldnotes 10.5.2016.) Structure, order and linearity had replaced the African aesthetics of polycentricity, groundedness and roundness that tend to define the angola style.

F makes a comparison between valuing similarity and synchronicity in Soviet society as well as in the style of capoeira contemporânea. She jokingly suggests that the contemporânea style can be appealing to the descendants of Soviet parents in whose blood allegedly the ideal of complete equality and similarity flows:

\begin{quote}
We had this ‘work-out ginga’! So that everything would be the same for everyone, so that everyone would do everything identically! … We had this stamping back then. But in that there’s also some charm, probably some kind of genetic memory starts working: like the Soviet Union – everyone is like everyone else! (laughs) “And now everyone sings!” Everyone together, a feeling of unity. (F)
\end{quote}

It is a unity of moving bodies that comes at the expense of their individual uniqueness.

During one of G’s new classes for the more advanced students, there were two females and eight males participating in a late evening training. While learning the so called ‘Bimba sequences’ of the regional styled capoeira, the participants would repeat the same high and fast kick, called \textit{martelo}, over and over again in changing pairs. The kicking foot would hit the side of the upper arm of the partner with a slapping sound. One of the practitioners commented, "today we have a mini fight club". Two men who were practising closest to me were indeed practising the kick mechanically, forcefully, causing each other pain and seemingly enjoying it. One of the men began to swear as the intensity of the kicks grew. G was walking from pair to pair observing the kicks and as he reached the male pair in front of me he said to them with an excited smile "Oh, do it!" as if encouraging the kicking person to hit the partner even harder. The class felt like a space for the display of tough masculinity, with the two women quietly staying in the background. It was sweat, swearing, tattoos, facial hair and the flexing of muscles that were at the foreground. (Fieldnotes 31.5.2016.)

During that same class, G at one point clapped his hands to get everyone’s attention and said: "Cool. Now there might arise that kind of well, like, a question: "Like, why so mean?"", G says in a low voice as if imitating a tough guy asking the question. "Yeah, like, during one training we get hit so much. But…” as G pauses for a moment, someone tries to say something but G decisively continues without letting anyone interrupt him: "who has been, who’s been in \textit{rodas} and seen that it can be hard-core, really. Sometimes it’s not even hard-core, it can be like, even an academy where that’s the norm. Tiny girls, like come out like that and they give you a \textit{martelo} against the body. If we, big guys, say "And why are you doing a \textit{martelo}? No, give me something softer", G mimics in a low voice with a grimace. "Well, that won’t be very… (implying ‘suitable’ or ‘good looking’)"). As G says this, many of the capoeiristas, both male and female laugh and some make comments. (Audio recording 31.5.2016.)

Not all male capoeiristas in Russia share G’s view that a ‘tiny girl’ should not be able to outwit a ‘big guy’.

\begin{quote}
In the 21st century, it seems to me, that there’s completely no reason (to say) that well, a woman can’t do something that a man can. There is, I agree, still men with old
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30}‘Two by two’ in Portuguese.
views, including at our work place, who say that "Well, but it’s, it’s a woman" – who works at the technical department, at our, well a pure technician. "It’s a woman after all! How can she know how a charging battery, a charger, is produced? That kind of thing can’t be! Your place is like to sit and order tickets, and sit and check technical recommendations, that’s it, nothing else." But no, she can, it’s Lena, her name is Lena. She can also fix a battery power supply. (E)

E’s words suggest that G’s outlook on gender roles is outdated.

The logic of achievement, aggression and competition became much more dominant in G’s group with the change of style. Klemola proposes that physical exercise can be carried out for four purposes: victory, health, self-expression and self-discovery. In sports, particularly professional sports, winning is the main purpose. (Klemola 1990: 60–62.) During the angola period G’s group engaged in play and in this way perhaps focused above all on self-expression and to some extent on health and self-discovery, in Klemola’s terms. There are many signs that the group leader became increasingly focused on maximising the physical capacities of his students above all other aims which is what Klemola associates with the ‘project of winning’ in bodily practices today (Klemola 1990: 54). In every class, capoeiristas stood on their hands for 45 seconds or more against the wall in order to perfect their handstands. For Klemola precision, quantitative calculation and constant comparison of oneself to others are hallmarks of a winning project (Klemola 1990: 63). According to E, a capoeira angola instructor will not tell angoleiros to do certain things as a contemporânea styled instructor would do:

He won’t say that “you have to know three attacks, like five escapes and to know how to do 50 push-ups.”

… The main thing is the attitude, you have to like internally understand like well, “I’m a capoeirista”. And in the process of the training like all the muscles you need will grow by themselves. In the process of a capoeira life. (E)

The new capoeira contemporânea classes turned the bodily practice into quantifiable achievement and results were measured in seconds and blows. The classes of capoeira angola described in chapter two follow a different kind of logic. The logic of G’s classes seemed to shift from playfulness and cunningness to sheer physical performance in the vein of ‘the tougher, the better’. Whereas playfulness in bodily movement tends to bring out feelings of joy and pleasure, Klemola notes, in movement that only aims at winning, joy and pleasure are reserved only for the winners (Klemola 1990: 67). A competitive practice shares joy less equally among all of the participants than a more playful practice does.

During fieldwork in Russia I was reading sports researchers’ Alex Channon’s and George Jennings’ article on martial arts. Their discussion of pain and injury immediately reminded me of G’s new style of teaching and training: “excruciating pain as a technique for engendering a specific ‘warrior’ mentality” (Channon & Jennings 2014: 780). The same human bodies can be used for playfulness and humour, as for causing pain and imagined versions of hyper-masculinity. Connectedness of bodies to capoeira angola potentially grants more playful processes than the relationality of bodies and other styles of capoeira.

The new style of capoeira practised by G’s group seems to exemplify the kind of capoeira classes that many angoleiros in Russia came across before finding a group of angola. O describes his first impressions of a contemporânea capoeira group:
I come over and see these guys are all muscles there. And uniforms and belts, all that. Like that … I understood that the idea of capoeira itself is close to me but that what is concretely happening here, it’s not my thing. (O)

As I was observing G’s last classes, I felt very much like O and I was happy to travel to the other group that was still practising angola style to participate in and observe their classes instead.

Very importantly, G’s group moved to associating capoeira with ‘whiter’ Brazilian culture rather than with black African-Brazilian folklore. The flyers advertising the capoeira classes, batucada, forro dancing and Portuguese language classes would have photographs of mainly white Brazilians smiling, young, tanned women with very little on and very muscular young men doing impressive acrobatics on a beach. The new, professional-looking flyers of the group seem to reproduce white, "male normativity that sustains gender inequality" (Sanders on gender 2016: 3). An angoleiro, U, from another group, provides a very different understanding of capoeira to G and his fellow male instructors, as she describes capoeira to include "dance, music, rhythm and play, and folklore." When I ask her whether she ever uses words like sports or fight to describe capoeira, U replies: "No. Well, because it’s not a sport and not a fight, really (laughs) … Well, I think that the main formulation is that it is more of a national folklore art."

In Soviet Russia, masculine identity was above all linked to paid work while "a man’s role in the domestic realm was culturally weak and parenthood was in practice identified with motherhood" (Salmenniemi 2008: 55). When I was once visiting G and his wife on a hot May afternoon, G’s wife was busy in their kitchen making a salad, pancakes and tea for us despite the heat and the fact that she was in the eighth month of pregnancy. G was sitting at the kitchen table, waiting to be served. The thought of helping his very pregnant wife in the heat did not appear even to cross his mind. Men’s domestic roles outlined by Salmenniemi appear to continue into the present, at least in some Russian homes. The body of a female, no matter in what condition, is supposed to labour in the kitchen while the man’s body is accustomed to resting there. This is a blatant example of woman being a servant of a male master. Such a relationship is very distant from intersubjective relations between the sexes that have been imagined by feminists like Irigaray.
**Interlude**

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There's too much confusion  
I can't get no relief

   Telling me to  
   Take it like a man  
   Take it like a man

   I can't

I don't understand  
I don't understand  
Please repeat whatever you just said  
Nothing's making sense

Who made these rules? We're so confused  
Easily led astray

   After winter, must come spring  
   Change, it comes eventually

Develop a negative into a positive picture

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31 Bob Dylan 1967; We Are Scientists 2005; Lauryn Hill 1998a.
4.5 WOMEN’S DAY

On the sixth of March, two days before the International Women’s Day, a male instructor gave a brief speech after a class in celebration of women’s role in capoeira. After the speech he gave Turkish Delights to all the females present. (Fieldnotes 6.3.2014.) Women’s Day (or ‘the Eighth of March’ as it is usually referred to in Russia) is a big celebration in the country, partly due to its socialist legacy (Boym 1994: 102; Iukina 2013: 40). The International Women’s Day was established in 1910 during the Second International and the day began to be celebrated in Russia in 1913 (Iukina 2013: 40). Later on, although the so-called ‘new Soviet woman’ was proclaimed to have equal rights to men, in practice she bore the double, if not the triple, burden of being a working woman, a mother and a hard-working wife at home (Saarinen et al. 2013: 6, 9, 135). Even though women’s emancipation was formally declared in the Soviet Union, it was not achieved in practice (Kozlova 2013: 91–92, 102).

Post-Soviet female angoleiros who were present during their instructor’s Women’s Day speech were, however, pleased with it:

For me capoeira hasn’t been something particularly masculine or feminine. Probably when you come out into the roda, there’s a different attitude towards you (as a female). But I liked how G said on the 8th of March that well, “You (ladies) give capoeira its own tone and it is thanks to you that the atmosphere is created. That if there was no you, capoeira would just be a fight.” Because also thanks to us, men manage to be more reserved, polite… (Q)

Q’s words capture well the common message conveyed in Women’s Day speeches in Russia. The woman is above all praised for what she offers to the man, for her achievements of balancing his ‘masculine qualities’. The instructor’s celebratory speech suggests that women’s presence pacifies the practice that would otherwise be too violent. Women allegedly make men act more decently, and it is partly for this that G thanks female angoleiros. But as G’s own daily habits have earlier illustrated, declaratory speeches and everyday actions are often distinct spheres that do not necessarily intersect. Irigaray notes that “unfortunately most patriarchal philosophical and religious traditions act in this way: they have substituted words for life”. She points out how continuous speech practised in patriarchal societies immobilises one’s breathing as we cannot simultaneously speak and breathe. (Irigaray 2002a: 51.) Men who give Women’s Day speeches in Russia both metaphorically and very concretely immobilise women with their speech and speeches.

Another male capoeirista describes women practitioners also in soft, ‘feminine’ terms. A woman, he says:

makes the atmosphere more cordial, softer, I guess. Yeah, that is there. Women bring that to capoeira, well, and how, also the same thing in life: cosiness, warmth. Yeah? That’s how it is. Well, how, not all of course but in general, yes. (I: I see.) Like if there would be a purely male group, it would be more difficult. (O)

Yet like almost all of the participants whom I asked about women’s role in capoeira, O simultaneously believes that there are no gendered differences in the practice:
It seems to me that in the world, I think that in capoeira of the 21st century, in Brazilian, and even more so in Russian, there is no, I don’t see the basis for any kind of gendered difference. (O)

It is curious to notice as an ethnographer how we humans constantly contradict ourselves in discourses or between discourses and actions. The concept of ‘liminal awareness’ in gender studies suggests that men frequently mobilise masculinities without being conscious of doing so (Martin 2003: 356). Gendered biases are not easy to decipher in one’s own actions and values. Many capoeiristas like to believe that everyone is in an equal position in the practice yet with their own implicit conduct, or gender assumptions, they participate in the continuous renewal of the many existent inequalities in capoeira angola. Gender-dependent bodily habits, like resting or, conversely, labouring in a Russian kitchen, become so ingrained that it is not an easy task to transform them, or even to notice them.

Women practising capoeira angola in Russia also tend to reproduce hetero male-centric discourses:

I’d like for us of course to have more folks, some more people. That our veterans would attend regularly. Because then, especially if guys would come, immediately kids would be like ‘so it’s not only for girls after all!’ They immediately understand that real men also practice capoeira (laughs). (R)

R’s short quote is revealing in many lengthy ways. Her ideal capoeira angola group is one with many participants and with as many experienced practitioners as possible. The idea is that newcomers would be more attracted to join in if there are many group members, especially men. It is experienced male capoeiristas that attract beginners and children the most in R’s view. So called ‘real men’ seem to hold special authority in capoeira in Russia.

Another female participant also suggests that there are intrinsic differences between women and men that should be taken into account when playing capoeira:

… So when he comes out (to play) with a woman in any case a man should move to another level. Well, not a weaker but – to understand that here, with her, like in life, a different language should be used (laughs). (Q)

Q somewhat jokingly suggests that men use a different language with women, implying that women and men communicate differently in life in general. "Key controls of female sexuality are located in the arena of "cultural tradition" particularly when women are expected to be the “guardians of tradition”", writes Katrak (Katrak 2006: 11). Anthropologist Miyako Inoue convincingly points out that "cultural tradition" is often an invented means created to reach certain political goals. In her work on the invented "women's language" in modern Japan, Inoue describes how constructed linguistic distinctions between women and men contribute to reinforcing the image of soft women and assertive men in Japan (Inoue 2002: 394). G’s women’s day speech aptly shows how the distinction between the softness of women and the assertiveness of men is constantly being reconstructed also in today’s Russia. In many ways, particular types of gender differences have become increasingly re-emphasised in the past decades in Russia (Johnson & Saarinen 2013: 549–550).
Inoue notes that during the modernisation of the Japanese state in the late 19th century, the government put a lot of effort into nationalising Japanese women into new types of citizens, based on the principles of "a good wife and wise mother" (Inoue 2002: 397). This gender role is very applicable to the ideal woman in today's increasingly conservative Russia where "traditional heteronormative gender roles" are being consolidated (Sanders on gender 2016: 6). According to Irigaray, the role of a wife and a mother is an "abstract duty" (Irigaray 1996a: 21). A woman sacrifices herself to this general task at the expense of her own uniqueness: "she must disappear as desire", writes Irigaray "unless it is abstract: the desire to be wife and mother" (Irigaray 1996a: 22). Women's private desires are sacrificed for the sake of the patriarchal order and the capital accumulating family unit that it has created (Irigaray 1996a: 22–23).

The scholar of gender and Russian studies, Rebecca Kay, suggests that "rigid traditional attitudes towards gender survived the Soviet experiment intact", thus, implying a sense of historical continuity of gender roles in Russia (Kay 2006: 211). Several, but not all, female capoeiristas live by the seemingly traditional principles. Inoue argues, however, that domestic ideals for women are by no means primordial. Instead, it is the modern capitalist society that often forces women into the maximally efficient position of a house manager who is a calculating, rational actor (Inoue 2002: 397). Inoue's work inspires critical consideration of the extent to which women's much declared 'traditional role' in today's Russia is historically continuous and to which it has been re-invented by the post-Soviet governments.

Irigaray importantly distinguishes 'feminine' from 'maternal', a link that is often considered 'natural' in the Russian context (Salmenniemi 2008: 55–56). Irigaray points out that "the accent put solely on the maternity of women is rather a masculine perspective". (Irigaray 2002a: 60.) Feminist thinkers have "long assumed that, as a coercive form of constraint, it is patriarchy and patriarchal power relations that have limited women's freedom by not making available to women the full range of options for actions that it affords men" (Grosz 2010: 151). Becoming a mother, a wife or a girlfriend can be an insurmountable obstacle for some females in carrying on with the practice of capoeira, at least according to one male capoeirista:

"Girls... well, girls are girls. Someone got married, but mainly they just left. "Ooh I have a new boyfriend, I’m leaving. I got married, I’m going away." It’s just that three girls who used to practise with me from the very beginning, they exactly got married and that’s it. And I was very – it was very sad for me. Well, that is, on the one hand I’m happy for them but it was very painful for me that they left because our circle already became like a kind of family. Because mestre always said that "You together, you should be a family. If you begin to leave each other, you already lose the connection." (J)

Instead of remaining with their 'capoeira family' some of the founding female members of the group left to apparently become "good wives and wise mothers". J is saddened that the women did not combine their new family lives with their hobby. Some of the females also simply had moved to other cities in Russia and discontinued capoeira practice because of that.

There are numerous examples of how capoeiristas in Russia embody gender roles assigned to the 'real women' and 'real men' in the Russian context. Most female practitioners describe how they came to practise capoeira as they searched for dance classes. In contrast, most men, were searching for martial arts prior to beginning the practice of capoeira. Three women describe their desire to dance:
I was just looking for something to do (laughs). I had some free time and I just had to do something with it. Actually I was looking for some kind of dances, I don’t know. I don’t even know how I found exactly the link to the group of capoeira in Ufa. I was searching for something tied to dancing. (P)

I was looking for classes, well, some kind of dance. To cut the story short, me and my friend wanted… wanted to learn how to dance. And we started searching on the Internet and I just, I just remembered that there’s capoeira and I typed it in the Internet, first with some mistakes (laughs). And well, anyway it came across, I got ‘capoeira Ufa’ and immediately our group came up. (B)

Everything began with that I decided to find for myself some… a zone of activity in order to like develop better – morally and physically. And I decided that I need to find dancing. (M)

A male practitioner, in turn, practised the martial art of aikido when there were no capoeira classes in his city.

I like aikido to this day. It’s also a very good, useful thing if you take into account that there too like energy is based for them, it’s also tied to a circle. The field of energy is also circular, around the centre, circular. And here too – the roda – yeah? Also a circle, also these circular movements. (Y)

While one group of capoeira angola in Russia is organised and instructed by women, another is guided by three men. As Q discusses groups of various styles of capoeira, and their participation in classes and events, Q tells me that it is because they are women that the organisers of one angola group do not play with capoeiristas of other styles. As women they are reluctant to compete with non-angoleiro players physically:

If there would be a guy, he’d definitely be bothered by the fact that there’s also someone else there and he’d want to compare strength. Definitely that’s how it would be. But girls they’re like “Ha! And so what?” Like N will go play with some guy who says that I’m stronger, she’ll never be able to say that “No, I’m stronger.” And if she does say that, then she’ll be immediately dropped (to the floor). That is, it doesn’t require much reasoning. That is, a dialogue or cunningness won’t help there. (Q)

According to Q, a woman can sustain a physical game of capoeira angola with a man, because there is a possibility of outsmarting him, but in the more strength-based game of other styles, malicia will not take the female angoleiro very far. In this view, women’s bodies can participate more narrowly in the art of capoeira. This undermines women’s authority in the eyes of men, whose allegedly stronger bodies can “immediately drop a woman onto the floor”. It is also through physical force that men maintain authoritative advantage in the leadership of capoeira.

The bodies of most women in capoeira classes reflect the kind of femininity that is advocated both by the Russian state and society. Female capoeiristas in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhni Novgorod usually have rather long hair that they tie and retie during capoeira classes. During summer musical classes outdoors some women would wear dresses and high heels while playing the berimbau and singing
Women would share R’s long skirt to change their trousers in a park after a capoeira training (fieldnotes 14.6.2013). During some classes, female participants would nearly all have some accessories (like a flower) in their hair and would wear tight t-shirts (fieldnotes 25.3.2014). There is plenty of room for feminine clothing and self-expression in capoeira classes in Russia.

But just as often, female angoleiros would come to classes with dirty hair, no make-up, wearing baggy low pants and large t-shirts (fieldnotes 4.5.2016). The instructor, N, has a somewhat masculine posture when sitting at the end of class and talking about an upcoming seminar (video 3.12.2013). Her mannerism as a whole is reminiscent of her Brazilian male mestre. Another instructor, S, would have similarly masculine ways of movement during classes although after class she would put on a pink puffy winter jacket and tie her hair into a girly ponytail (video and fieldnotes 14.11.2013). Both N and S usually sit after classes on the floor with their legs bent and widely spread, elbows around the knees with the backs curved. This is not the kind of posture that is easily possible with a short skirt and high heels on. Q’s sister told me that she had tried attending some capoeira angola classes but the movements were too masculine for her. The practice is seen as unusual by many Russian women and not necessarily attractive to those who want to engage in dances that are clearly identified as feminine in the Russian setting.

No amount of masculine bodily mannerism seems to make up for the fact that the female instructors in Russia are nonetheless women who are in the position of leadership that is usually assigned to men in their socio-cultural environment. Instructor R and I discuss this issue during her interview:

R: Another weakness is that we have few boys (laughs). It seems like if there would be more of them then we’d probably have more beginners.

I: Why do you think that precisely boys have such an important role in comparison to girls? Well why is it exactly that men attract beginners more than women do?

R: Well, I mean male beginners. Precisely only because of that. Because sometimes there are these rare occasions when some guy comes to us! It seems like “Come on, stay with us, bro!” But usually I’m there teaching with N or with V and of course afterwards he doesn’t return. He’ll go to ABADA where there are tons of guys, tons of kids. So that, it’s like during the first class or classes, like they judge not based on, on that well it’s capoeira of angola or that it’s not just jumps. They look (at it) like from the outside. If they see something slower, not that cool and there aren’t even any boys – they’ll go there. During the first class it’s difficult to understand that it’s like much deeper and so on. And that’s why boys, they could at least somehow influence, just with their presence (laughs) as an example.

The sheer presence of a male instructor or participant is important to male beginners in capoeira, according to R. Other women instructors seem to agree that the gender of a capoeira group’s leader plays a significant role in attracting new participants:

People come thinking “I’ll be awesome from the very first level.” And when they see with my example that “it’s a girl who does better (than me) and teaches me” some seemingly simple things, that pushes them away. So that’s why it looks like I now have a purely female group in the making. A group of women (laughs)! (S)
As G noted earlier in one of his new styled classes, it does not look good for a 'big guy' to get kicked by a 'tiny girl' without being able to defend himself or respond in kind.

It is the tough physical demands of capoeira that seem to require a male instructor in the eyes of some Russian beginners. Rosa writes that because capoeira movements "demand strength, courage, and control" they are "commonly associated with masculinity" (Rosa 2015: 112). R's younger sister once bluntly said that neither her sister nor the other female organiser of their capoeira group had sufficient charisma to attract newcomers (fieldnotes 24.6.2013). "The important thing is not that you are a man or a woman instructor, yeah? What's important is charisma.", E also argues. Such comments made me wonder whether a highly charismatic female would indeed be able to attract a large membership in Samara or Ufa and what kind of charisma that would entail in practice. Weber describes the legitimacy of authority stemming from personal charisma as being an early Christian idea of "the gift of grace" whereby, some unique qualities and skills quite literally fall upon an individual, inspiring special awe in others (Weber 1978: 216). According to my observations, a male instructor of another group is hard working and dedicated to capoeira but he is also quiet, occasionally even shy: and yet his classes attract many female and male beginners.

A variety of masculine perspectives influences women's practice of capoeira angola in some groups. In a group led by male instructors, women were given different kinds of push-up exercises than men during warm-up portions of the classes. It was taken as a given by male instructors that women simply cannot do push-ups with their legs straight like men (or perhaps that they should not do them so as not to become too muscular and therefore masculine). Women had to place their knees on the ground thus easing the exercise. What surprised me was that different push-up options were not given to both women and men but were as a matter of fact divided according to gender. While most capoeira movements would be divided according to the practitioners' experience, here, gender was the dividing line. Certainly many of the experienced women practitioners had more strength in their arms than novice men, I thought. It seemed to me that giving easier warm-up exercises to women could undermine their self-esteem and make them question their competence (paraphrasing Martin 2003: 359).

I asked about the push-ups from the group's main instructor, G, during one of our first talks to which he jokingly replied that it is easier for most women to do push-ups that way. A researcher of media studies, Katarina Kyrölä, notes how laughter can be used to keep unruly women 'in 'their place' by making them targets of ridicule, if they stray out of the way of conventional femininity" (Kyrölä 2010: 76). G did not display any interest in lingering on the topic of gender unlike other issues that we discussed during our walk around the city centre.

As I returned to the group in a few months and was observing one of G's warm-ups, he clearly directed women once again to do the kneeling push-ups and men to move with their legs straight without giving other options to either gender. I (perhaps intentionally) loudly commented to C, who was taking a rest next to me at the back of the studio, "Why should women do different kinds of push-ups?". C seemingly agreed with my bewilderment. G immediately called her to return to their circle to do the push-ups as he also commented that there shouldn't be any talking during class. He was obviously agitated by my comment, and I was agitated by his reaction (fieldnotes 25.3.2014). That was the only time that we clashed. The topic of gender was one of the few issues that I openly questioned during capoeira classes as well as outside of them in conversations with capoeiristas.
When I was staying at G’s and his wife’s place, the three of us would chat about all sorts of topics. During one conversation about marriage as I mentioned the lack of appeal that weddings have for me, G was quick to support my view as he noted that women in Russia demand weddings because they all want to play princesses. In that case he seemed overtly against excessive femininity and its demands. Yet he was reproducing stereotypical gender divisions with his instructions for carrying out distinct push-ups, reinforcing the view of women as ‘the weaker, tenderer half’. It is also possible that G simply dislikes what is called ‘svadebnye panty’ in Russian which one might translate as ‘wedding vanities’. Post-Soviet weddings in Russia are indeed quite a spectacle that often involve limousines and other decorated cars that form a procession, public display of the couple in urban areas, extensive photo shoots, women dressed quite literally as princesses, with shiny tiaras and white fur not being uncommon.

One summer day we were at a train station with another instructor, R, and her male cousin of our age. I had a backpack on me and R suggested that I should give it to her cousin so that he would carry our bags for us. From there we began a conversation about men’s obligations to women. R suggested that boyfriends should carry their girlfriends’ purses to help but even more so to show their affection. I was of the opinion that while a boyfriend may carry the light purse during the courting stage of the relationship, it will be the woman carrying the heavy grocery bags once the relationship gets serious. R’s cousin, a bit like G when talking about the push-ups, reacted jokingly to the whole conversation and he did not take sides in the discussion. He did carry R’s bag that was handed to him and he did not carry my backpack that was not given to him.

Most often classes of capoeira provide implicit rather than obvious examples of gender divisions. For instance, one of the youngest female practitioners was more timid than usual in classes where she was the only female. She would occasionally come up to me to chat and just stay nearby while the men would chat among themselves (fieldnotes 11.3.2014). In another city, S would teach classes of capoeira angola for one hour and a half rather than for two hours because she did not want to end them too late. S and her female students said that it is frightening for women to return home on their own to particular parts of the city late at night (fieldnotes 10.11.2013).

In comparative international terms violence by men against women is widespread in Russia and in Brazil. This comprises not only sexual assaults in the street but also what, in the case of intimate partnerships, is often referred to as domestic or family violence. However, researchers point out that accurate statistics on family violence are difficult to obtain. (E.g. Habigzang et al. 2013: 142; Zubkov 2013: 122; Stickley et al. 2008: 447–448.) Both in Brazil and Russia gender-based violence has not been a publicly, widely, acknowledged problem until rather recently as in both cultural contexts, domestic violence has been denied and interpreted as a private affair, for example, of a male disciplining a female (Hautzinger 2007; Johnson 2009: 2). In the Russian context, particularly during the post-Soviet transition period, mortality rates due to violence against women have increased (Stickley et al. 2008). Anthropologist Sarah Hautzinger writes that until the 1980’s Brazil had an international reputation as a country where "men who battered and even murdered their wives could get away with it" (Hautzinger 2007: 1). The police and other authorities, both in Russia and Brazil, have begun to take the widespread violence against women seriously only in the recent two or three decades.
A male practitioner describes their female instructor as: "Well, N, she's after all, you just feel that about her, that she's like, well even if (she's) not this trainer, but she's like this sail that constantly pulls the group", H says. Instead of a straightforward role of a capoeira trainer – that would easily be accorded to a male leader of a group – H comes up with a more poetic, romantic, description of N as a sail pulling the group forward. The metaphor once again suggests patient endurance as well as purity and softness, the features that are so often attributed to women in Russia – at least in speeches and interviews. The widespread physical violence against women in the country suggests however, that the constructed 'tenderness of women' is easily ignored by men when desired.

Channon and Jennings point out that martial arts and combat sports have the potential to empower and liberate women but that "such outcomes are never fully guaranteed" (Channon & Jennings 2014: 778). Indeed, there is plenty in capoeira angola that can empower women, for instance, in letting their voice be heard during singing, by strengthening their muscles and overall bodily resolve through the practice. However, out of all the female capoeiristas I met in Russia, only one, S, wanted to become a leader and she did eventually receive the title of treinelo from her Brazilian mestre. Yet, capoeira angola began in Russia with an initiative made by a woman in Moscow. U adds that another female was supporting the initiator's first steps in capoeira angola in Moscow. Both women are currently living abroad, one in Brazil and the other in Canada. I have not interviewed either of the two females but based on the impressions and memories of angoleiros in Samara and St. Petersburg, capoeira angola in Russia has been a spontaneous initiative firstly made by women.

S’s Story

S is one of the more experienced female angoleiros in Russia. When she began to practise she was the first woman in her group. As other young women began joining the group, S gave them 'the cold treatment'. In her own words, S would not talk to new female participants at first because they were "invading her territory". S enjoyed being the centre of attention among the male practitioners as the sole female. Both Q and S describe how initially the latter completely ignored the former in the beginning, with S not saying so much as hello to the novice who was trying to befriend with her. For these reasons, it is surprising that during her interview S says that it is particularly the role of women that should be highlighted in my research on capoeira in Russia:

In the frame of just the Russian groups, yeah, a very large role is played by the girls. Take even N as an example, yeah? She can tell so much, she’s seen already so much, knows so much and like that … when I was in Samara we used to chat a lot. (S)

S constructs a positive narrative of her relations with other female capoeiristas. Indeed, with time as S became an instructor herself, she was forced by circumstances to adopt a more positive attitude towards women practitioners as all the participants in her nascent group were young women.

S continues to describe the important role of women in capoeira angola:

This might not only be (applicable) to Russia but also to many groups of capoeira angola that I’ve seen. Despite the fact that everywhere classes are taught by men, the majority
of participating trainees are women. And in Russia this is very noticeable. Even if we take the group (...) which is headed by girls and where there are literally only two guys I think at the moment. In Ufa when I practised… during that time when I used to play really actively, a large part was also girls there. So… and I don’t know why that really is. If we take the people in Moscow who are in… who constantly travel somewhere, take part in different kinds of events, (they are) also girls. Precisely the role of a female in developing – that is, a very strong, driving force is given by girls. And I always wanted to visit these women’s’ conferences but this year unfortunately most likely it also won’t work out because it will take place on the Eighth of March in Berlin and Eighth of March is a holiday, so like there’s very much work here. So the problem is that for holidays they can’t… they just won’t let me go. (S)

S works as a coordinator at a taxi call centre, one that operates in different Russian cities, thus giving S the opportunity to work all around Russia. Her work is very intensive in terms of long and late working hours that hardly leave her any free time. Holidays are particularly busy working days for the call centre, meaning that S is unable to take, for instance, Women’s Day off. So while S’s male colleagues will surely give her flowers and speeches on the Eighth of March they "won’t let her go" to attend a women’s capoeira conference.

Authors on gender suggest that gender identity is "shifting, fluid, and contested rather than a ‘fixed essence’" (Martin 2003: 352). From this perspective, S is a great example of a typically multi-dimensional woman in today’s Russia. She is overworked, constantly busy, living in an apartment with her cat and changing boyfriends, her attitude towards women is ambivalent and contradictory, she alternates between the girly-cute femininity of her pink winter coat and her masculine postures in capoeira classes. She can be tender and sweet as the Eighth of March speeches expect her to be but she can also be strong and rude. Like most "real women and men", S defies any set, consistent type of character. Irigaray notes that each woman and man is "in the process of becoming" (Irigaray 1996a: 27). Living bodies, like practices, do not have fixed identities but are all constantly in motion.

Relations between capoeira angola and its practising bodies move through a variety of authoritative views. Both the practice and the bodies are embedded in a wider global neoliberal context in which bodies are taught to be self-reliant and maximally in control. The predominantly African-Brazilian male leaders of transnational capoeira angola appear to be stuck somewhere in between neoliberal and so called ‘traditional’ ways of guiding bodily experiences. The practice of capoeira angola is hierarchical and in many respects Russian bodies find themselves, if not at the bottom, then at the periphery of the hierarchy. Particularly Russian women in leadership positions within transnational capoeira stand out as doubly exceptional in that female and white bodies have until very recently not been in a position to master capoeira angola. The daily occurrences in the field described here clearly suggest the influence of both gender and race on Russian bodies’ participation in this transnational practice. Gender and race combine with other factors to grant or withhold firstly access to leadership positions and secondly the perceived legitimacy to remain in them.
There is, however, an important factor in the practice of capoeira angola that challenges the various authority types mentioned in this chapter. It is the amount and quality of experience that a body has in capoeira angola. Once a body has accumulated certain skills, she or he can increasingly improvise with the movements as well as the music. This capability to improvise means that one may act unpredictably and thus, defy the existing expectations and norms of the practice. An experienced body in capoeira angola may defy the traditional boundaries set by the race, gender and nationality of the practitioners, through the sheer accumulation of skills. Advanced, sensible, bodily skills, for instance, of a white, female, non-Brazilian body can be a way of challenging the existing hierarchies of capoeira. An increasingly experienced body is capable of letting go into a spontaneous manner of movement and expression. This capacity to let the body go and find its own ways, without the interference of calculative thinking or authoritative figures, is perhaps the most positive, creative way of defying authority. This includes the authority of self-control that also has to be abandoned in order to find some sort of freedom of movement.
5  LETTING GO INTO NEARNESS

The practice of capoeira angola and the bodies engaged in it, occasionally let go into each other’s nearness as they move in circular motions. The African-Brazilian practice opens up transnationally and surprisingly ends up in small basements of Samara and Ufa. The practitioners equally surprisingly let go into movements and sounds that are unfamiliar yet personally embodied. The relations between capoeira angola and its Russian practitioners are simultaneously distant and strange, as well as bodily near and familiar. A way of crossing the distance of cultural strangeness is a way of letting go into nearness of ‘the other’. The crossing over in the case of capoeira angola involves a concrete, lived, bodily stepping into. By letting go of the barriers created by seemingly distinct national histories and cultures, languages and the many social inequalities that these lead to in our imaginations, a practice and a body at times meet face-to-face without expectations of each other as they go on to explore one another through bodily movement.

Picture 5. Two bodies playing.

In this final chapter the question of how bodies and practice relate to one another will be addressed through a variety of themes that simultaneously summarise the key discussions of this ethnography. Firstly, we will look at how bodies and practice relate
to each other through the movement of 'letting go' that is antithetical to the theme of authoritative control of the previous chapter. The discussion also builds on chapters two and three in which both micro and macro dynamics of the practice and Russian bodies were described. Secondly, the physical places where capoeira is practised in Russia will be described. A portrayal of the locations where capoeira classes and events take place is a continuation to the micro descriptions of chapter two but it is also a wider discussion of engaging in 'freedom of movement' in very confined spaces. Thirdly, it will be discussed how capoeira angola classes offer refreshment to its participants by creating a partly imaginary microcosmos that is linked to sunny Brazil. This section builds on all the previous chapters as it deals with capoeira classes, their wider transnational environment and its authoritative views on body and practice. Fourthly, the topic of social resistance and its relevance for practising bodies in Russia will be considered as a continuation to the discussion on capoeira as a potential struggle for freedom. The fifth section of this chapter will focus on laughter as one way of letting go into nearness both of the body and practice. The chapter ends with a concluding section that outlines the contributions of this work and brings the many different strands of the dissertation together in order to address the research question.

Back in Inors on a sunny March morning T was teaching a children’s capoeira class at a local school. After the collective class with four children in a large school gym, T gave a personal training class to one of the students. He would occasionally teach this small girl and another boy some capoeira movements in the form of private lessons at their parents’ request. The large gym was no longer available for a private class so T had to look for another place within the school. The only available room that morning was the school’s performance hall. When the three of us came in, there was a group of older girls cleaning the auditorium floor for their upcoming belly dance rehearsals. Meanwhile, T and the girl were allowed to use the hall’s small stage for capoeira practice.

As they went up the stairs onto the school’s theatre stage and began to do basic capoeira moves the group of girls started looking at them, commenting on the movements and laughing. Capoeira was obviously not the kind of dancing that these girls were used to. Soon enough T’s student was hiding behind the stage curtains as she was embarrassed by the older girls’ attention. T and I tried to encourage her to ignore them and to focus on the training but the malevolent looks and whispers were too much for her. During the collective practice in the isolated large gym the little girl was incredibly open, joyful and full of energy in her movements and ways of socialising. Her body was admirably strong; the three boys could hardly keep up with her. It was painful to see how the older girls’ teasing made her close off and refuse to act.

Eventually the girls were done with mopping the floor and T and his student came down from the stage to practise in the auditorium where there was more space for movement. Occasionally some of the girls would return to the hall to pick up their dance dresses and they would exchange looks with the little girl. Instead of asking what the pair was practising, the girls opted to make fun of something they simply did not understand. Situations like this make the challenge of beginning something new concretely tangible. Here were two Russian bodies, in the peripheral neighbourhood of Inors, of all places, trying to learn an African-Brazilian practice at a local school, whose female pupils were not supportive of the initiative. The practice was seemingly too unusual for their imagination.
Dumoulié, like Desch-Obi, notes how the European colonial imagination viewed capoeira as a primitive practice. "The earliest forms of capoeira were branded 'barbarous', but it was the white world that was truly barbaric", Dumoulié argues (Dumoulié 2010: 19). One may similarly wonder who was truly 'strange' in the Inors school, the little girl trying something new on her own or the older girls ridiculing her in a group? As I was sitting on the stage looking at T's and the girl's training I wondered how long will she remain open and joyful in this environment? How soon will people like the older girls wear down her enthusiasm and make her equally doubtful and cynical towards everything new and unusual? But at that particular moment, on that March morning, capoeira classes seemed to offer something different to the little girl, something out of the dusty context of a Russian school with its dark furniture and heavy curtains. Perhaps the movements and the music of capoeira offered her a way of letting go of the surrounding constraints. Perhaps the practice offered her some kind of freedom. (Fieldnotes, videos, photographs 27.3.2014.)

The concept of 'freedom' is central to Western thought (Arendt 2006). Due to the vastness of the concept, many different understandings of freedom are "oftentimes in conflict with one another" (Goldman 2010: 57). I use the word 'freedom' throughout this dissertation as it is an intrinsic – albeit an elusive – element of the practice of capoeira angola. As with all of the concepts in this ethnography, I do not treat freedom in absolute terms. While dance researcher Danielle Goldman writes that in discussions of improvisation in dance the "precise meaning" of freedom "is rarely examined" (Goldman 2010: 2), I have at the outset of this work suggested that concepts rarely have precise meanings that are well-bounded. Instead, I treat concepts like freedom as processes that are constantly undergoing change and are always culturally specific. In her study on spontaneity in the women's piety movement in Egypt, anthropologist Saba Mahmood reflects on freedom as a contextual, rather than universal, practice. "Desire for freedom from social conventions is not an innate desire", writes Mahmood.

Any exploration of practices of freedom must consider, not only hierarchical structures of social relations, but also the architecture of the self, the interrelationship between its constituent elements that makes a particular imaginary of freedom possible. (Mahmood 2001: 845).

Mahmood concentrates on embodiment and her work suggests that there is no universal bodily experience of freedom (Mahmood 2001). Keeping cultural relativity in mind, in this chapter I propose to explore situated experiences of freedom in the light of a bodily 'letting go', particularly from Heidegger's, Arendt's, Lao-Tzu's, Patanjali's, and more recently from new materialist and from Klemola's Buddhism-influenced viewpoints.

New materialist theorists like Bennett are critical of the "hubristic human will to comprehensive knowledge and the violent human will to dominate and control", from an ecological point of view (Bennett 2010a: xvii). It is in the light of such critiques that I propose the notion of letting go as one remedy to the human will to dominate and control. Participants in the new materialist discourse see that the emergence of material is unpredictable and its development is not linear, thereby emphasising the elements of contingency and chance inherent in materiality. Bodies transform unpredictably, in swerves and swarms, rather than in linear progressions. (Coole 2013: 453.) Throughout this ethnography I have suggested that also relations between bodies and practice develop spontaneously, not in a pre-planned manner.
Heidegger uses the term *Gelassenheit* in reference to a letting be, by which he means something like opening up to a secret that can be discovered in no other way than by letting everything be (Heidegger in Klemola 1990: 30). In 'letting be' we are in a state of open receptivity, free from desire, a state which according to Heidegger brings us closest to "what we are looking for" (in Klemola 1990: 35). Allowing processes to happen rather than forcing them into being characterises Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit* (Heidegger in Klemola 1990: 32). Open-ended letting be can be an affirmative and empowering way of interacting with the wider environment and our own bodies (Braidotti on Haraway 2006: 201).

Following the philosopher Heraclitus, Heidegger proposes a going-into-nearness which in an embodied sense could mean the concrete going into one's body and experiencing the nearness of it. The nearness of the body is simultaneously obvious yet not at all trivial. (Heidegger 2010: 76, 87.) Furthermore, Heidegger adds that going-into-nearness "in no way means the essence of modern research, be it that of the natural sciences or be it historiological research" (Heidegger 2010: 88). With time, Heidegger distanced himself from Western phenomenological philosophy and seemingly opted for more experiential, intuitive sources of knowledge (Anderson in Heidegger 1966: 19; Pöggeler 1987: 49, 65). "Freedom rests in being able to let (Lassenkönnen), not in ordering and dominating" (Heidegger 2010: 125). This suggests that in order for body-practice relations to be 'free', in a late Heideggerian sense, the practice should not order and dominate the participating bodies, and the bodies should not order and dominate the practice. Instead, a reciprocal 'letting' should occur between bodies and practice for their relations to be characterised by freedom. This is how the practice and the bodies can approach intersubjective relations.

Parviainen uses the image of a jellyfish that is applicable both to Heidegger's understanding of letting be and to the practice of capoeira angola. Jellyfish are moved by the ocean's currents – a movement that requires receptivity and "courage to surrender to the unknown and unpredictable seafaring". At the same time, the movement of a jellyfish is not passive but kinaesthetically creative as the creature also moves by contracting and expanding its body as well as engages in waiting for its prey. (Parviainen 2006: 233–234.) Capoeira angola can be likened to 'the ocean's currents' and the bodies of Russian practitioners to jellyfish who creatively move within, and are also moved by, capoeira.

… seurauksista ei voi tietää mitään.
On vain nojattava kasvoillaan tuohon hänmentävään
luottamukseen, kauneuteen…
(… nothing can be known of the consequences.
One just has to lean one’s face into that confusing
trust, into beauty…) (Filander 2016: 61)

5.1 FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT?

Capoeira angola classes, as we saw in chapter two, allow their participants to broaden the scope of their bodily movements. As the bodies become more flexible and stronger, capoeiristas’ repertoire of movement becomes more diverse.
So I looked at my instructors, I looked at my mestre, and they, well, that is, I realised that I want to move as freely as this person. I want to know as much so that again, I could be free in my judgements. (E)

Grosz writes from a feminist perspective that freedom is "not primarily a capacity of mind but of body: it is linked to the body's capacity for movement, and thus its multiple possibilities of action" (Grosz 2010: 152). It is through our body that we experience freedom. Goldman critiques "the idea of freedom-as-achievement" as she notes that the overcoming of some oppressions does not lead to the elimination of other types of constraints (Goldman 2010: 3). Indeed, in chapter three we saw how the formal abolishment of slavery in Brazil in 1888 has not resulted in the elimination of racism in the country. While the scope of bodily movement and possibilities of action may broaden with practice in some directions, this does not mean that an absolute sort of freedom is being achieved.

Freedom is also the freedom to act out of character occasionally, according to Grosz, "in a manner that surprises" (Grosz 2010: 152). There are important works on body that pinpoint how jobholders today who follow neoliberal rationality also take time out daily. Metcalfe and Game's refreshing article shows the extent to which leisurely, outdoor activities can pull office workers out into environments and experiences where thinking becomes irrelevant (Metcalfe and Game 2014). However, Metcalfe and Game's understanding of thinking seems to preclude purely mental thinking as opposed to the embodied 'thinking in movement' that is proposed by Sheets-Johnstone. Parviainen notes that "...a dancer's body is not moved by the mind. Dancers do not order their bodies to move in a certain way, rather the movements erupt from the body, without special effort of the mind." (Parviainen 1998: 137.) Both Sheets-Johnstone and Parviainen emphasise that even when thoughts do not dictate specific movements, our bodily movement is nevertheless intelligent as the body has its own ways of knowing. Therefore, surprising initiatives made by the body are not mindless.

Once in Y's and his wife's kitchen after dinner we watched some videos of their capoeira group on a laptop. In one of the videos showing a seminar roda, Y was playing with a young Brazilian instructor. The game was very fast and acrobatic, no longer angola styled, and at one point the Brazilian capoeirista delivered a very fast, high kick from which Y escaped in a graceful, immediate posture, leaning far back with his knees bent and one hand on the floor. Y said that he had no idea how he managed to escape that kick, his body just reacted, without any mental planning. (Fieldnotes 28.5.2016.) Leaning on Sheets-Johnstone's concept of 'thinking in movement', Parviainen writes that "movement is not a result of a mental process which exists prior to the activity" (Parviainen 2003: 164). Her words accurately capture Y's embodied experience. The body itself has "kinetic intelligence" that guides its movements (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 489; Sheets-Johnstone in Parviainen 2003: 164).

Throughout his influential book Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty stresses that our bodies tend to function spontaneously on a daily basis, for instance, in perceiving objects outside the body or sensations within. He gives the example of being stung by a mosquito. According to Merleau-Ponty it does not require conscious decision-making on our part to scratch the stung spot or even to search for it on our body (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 121). Instead, we feel the sting proprioceptively in our bodies and scratch it without necessarily planning to, or contemplating what we are doing. The body scratching the mosquito sting is a great example of our mundane bodily
spontaneity. Merleau-Ponty’s spontaneity does not however imply unawareness but rather the moments when the body acts prior to symbolically analysing the action (Klemola 1990: 44). In his game of capoeira Y did not lose awareness at any stage but rather his thoughts were not controlling his body as he suddenly, in a surprise to his own thought processes, evaded the unexpected kick.

In a game of capoeira angola the player constantly tries to preserve her or his freedom of movement as the partner tries to constrain it. Dumoulié beautifully describes the free movement of capoeira:

*The capoeirista may even become like a leaf falling from a tree or water running over or round a rock in a stream, but whichever the case, the important thing is to forget, to abandon the rigid body of civilization* (Dumoulié 2010: 4).

Dumoulié interprets fluid movement in capoeira as an abandonment of civilisation. Authors on body consciousness like Anttila and Shusterman, however, note that the body’s free movements should not necessarily be opposed to civilisation (Anttila 2009; Shusterman 2008: 6–8). Falling like a leaf or running like water in a game of capoeira may be equally an act of abandonment as it is an act of a new discovery of something dormant in our bodies.

Freedom of movement can provide an angoleiro with a feeling of vitality: ”As we were running in a circle in the beginning of class, there was a feeling of speed, effort, physical freedom”, I wrote about my own bodily experiences in a class (fieldnotes 12.3.2014). When the body is less tense, its mind-emotions also have a chance to relax – to let go of certain inhibitions that are imposed by a late capitalist environment. ”Very often when you go, let’s say you’re walking somewhere in a park, you feel so much like standing on your hands!”, M exclaims. One semester M was preparing for her university exams and she had to spend most of the time studying indoors:

*Yeah, that was it – the end. And because I can’t be completely without movement, I’d take twenty minute jogs every evening. I’d come out of the house and like this I would run past the park. … And when I felt especially great running, I did all sorts of cartwheels on the way. Well, at that point I didn’t know how to do anything other than cartwheels. (M)*

M and I were sitting in a café next to her local park as she was telling me the story. When M’s whole being was constantly under pressure as she was preparing for exams, she needed movement as well as time spent outdoors. Irigaray suggests that by cultivating our bodies and by spending time in the vegetal world, we are able to return to the nearness, to the centre, of our own being. This can be particularly the case for women who experience immense pressure in a patriarchal setting. (Irigaray 2002a, 2002b, 2017.)

It is notorious that for the most part Russia is a country of long, cold winters, where a body cannot always easily step outside for a run in a park. Freedom of movement outdoors is restricted in the cold, slippery conditions of urban Russia as Benjamin noted in 1926 when he described the narrow, slippery sidewalks of Moscow that forced him to keep his muscles constantly tensed when walking (Benjamin 1985: 17, 31). In March 2014, also Ufa’s pavements were full of slush that had not been cleared away by city services. Another factor restricting movement during a cold winter is clothing. While winter in Russia is summer in Brazil where one can wear a light dress or shorts and a
t-shirt, in Samara and Ufa many women would wear fur coats, many warm layers and men would often be covered in black or brown leather coats (photos 2.3.2014). Women would often wear thick, woollen headscarves on the streets, especially in Ufa (photos 20.3.2014). The street clothing in wintery Russia often appeared conservative, heavy and serious to me, perhaps reflecting the wider mood of the Russian society today.

In a northern environment, attending a class of capoeira where one can wear just a t-shirt and move freely in light, warm conditions, offers a very stark contrast to the movements and clothing used outdoors in the snowy cold. However, in the summer, the atmosphere on the streets of Samara, St. Petersburg and Ufa is often the exact opposite. Bodies wear very colourful dresses, shirts and shorts, looking much more playful and bright, reflecting the weather. "Space literally changes according to whether it is hot or cold", Benjamin writes in his Moscow diary (Benjamin 1985: 35). It was often the capoeiristas in the parks who looked comparatively conservative in their clothing in the summer. While local yogis, basketball and volleyball players in the parks would wear tops and shorts, angoleiros would be in t-shirts tucked into their black, long trousers below which they would have socks and soft sneakers. In Russia bodily opportunities for moving freely outdoors, wearing comfortable and little clothes, vary greatly with the seasons. Relations of Russian bodies and capoeira angola are influenced by the cyclical variations of the environment.

As I have mentioned in chapter three, many angoleiros in Russia cannot afford to travel to tropical Brazil to attend capoeira angola events and classes of Brazilian mestres. Berlin notes that "if a man is too poor to afford something on which there is no legal ban – a loaf of bread, a journey around the world, recourse to the law courts – he is as little free to have it as he would be if it were forbidden him by law" (Berlin 1958: 3). In that sense, even though post-Soviet Russia’s borders are formally open to civilians, the national context of the bodies in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod frequently does not provide them with the financial opportunities for global travelling. There is much academic discussion about what the Russian state does to explicitly close down, for instance, NGOs in Russia (e.g. Flikke 2016; McFaul & Stoner-Weiss 2008; Sakwa 2014: 168–170) but less attention is paid to the much more widespread and implicit ways in which most ordinary Russians are prevented from action and freedom of movement due to systemic flaws.

The freedom to rest, not to move anywhere, is as essential as the freedom of movement (Heidegger on rest 1966: 67). A class of capoeira angola often enables one to just "stroll around a room, looking at the ceiling", as I noted in the beginning of one class. During most classes a warm-up would seemingly allow the participants to "process the day’s events". (Fieldnotes 27.3.2014.) After the warm-up, capoeiristas may move in more demanding, acrobatic ways, physically exerting themselves. This is the portion of capoeira practice that usually receives most attention in media and research (e.g. Delamont 2005; Joseph 2008). However, capoeira classes’ important value in our jobholders’ society also lies in the opportunity it gives to participants just to walk around, look at the ceiling and at times just rest while stretching or watch someone else’s game of capoeira.

**Voluntary Initiative**

_I think that a person himself should reach what he needs. To find it and reach it for himself._ (D)
The topic of acting or deciding voluntarily is closely linked to the grand 'Free Will versus Determinism' debate. "Only in the limiting case of the slave is formal subjection to authority absolutely involuntary," writes Weber (Weber 1978: 214). His words suggest that most often we are in a position to choose how we subject ourselves to authority. But as was seen in the previous chapter, many self-controlling mechanisms are so ingrained in our bodies that we often fail to notice the forms of authority rising out of our own daily behaviour. Tambornino contrasts desire and need but also notes how the two overlap as "desire refers not only to that which we want but also to that which we want so strongly as to seem to need" (Tambornino 2002: 6). Our mixed desires and needs are often socio-culturally conditioned. The causes for bodies to practise capoeira angola are usually mixed, involving desire and need in both voluntary and involuntary ways.

Honestly speaking, I'm sometimes amazed at my own decision-making mechanism. That is, maybe, because I'm a woman it doesn't give in to logic. That is, sometimes I sit down, have a conversation with myself – not an internal dialogue but precisely an external dialogue. "Well, why did I do that?" "I don't mean that I did something wrong, just that I did it." "Why did I go there?" "I don't know." (F)

While we cannot necessarily find out why some Russian bodies interact with the practice of capoeira angola, we can describe how this interaction occurs and to what extent it is marked by a sense of freedom.

When W was a school boy, he practised judo but he did not like the practice. After lots of complaining he finally discontinued it, to his father's disappointment. Thereafter, W only occasionally played volleyball when there was a good team in his school; otherwise he would mainly spend his free time playing computer games or watching TV at home. When eventually W found capoeira and started practising it at the age of fifteen, his father was not optimistic about the prospects of the hobby after the judo experience:

My parents, especially my father, said to me that, well, that I won't be able to do it. Because when I used to practise judo, well I was whining, I didn't want to go (practise) and he apparently got this impression that I'm like that with all types of sports. So that well, he didn't think that I would go practise. (W)

W's father did not want to give W the much-needed car lifts to capoeira angola classes because he thought his efforts would be in vain.

For teen-aged W freedom of movement and of voluntary decision-making seems to be especially important as he keeps returning to these themes throughout his interview:

You come voluntarily, that is, again for yourself. You control yourself, you force yourself. That is, it already depends on your capabilities. Without boundaries… It’s a huge difference, that is, whether you go voluntarily or whether you’re forced (to go). … Here you intentionally come, that is, you came precisely to train. No one kicked you over here. That is, you come yourself, it’s your personal choice. If you come, you train. Well, I think so. (W)
As a young man living with his parents and being highly dependent on their income, their car, W’s words communicate a strong yearning to be an independent body. He has decided to become a dentist, not because he comes from a medical family, but precisely because there are no doctors in his immediate family and he wanted to pick his future profession independently.

*I know that it is really difficult to study there but I go there myself, voluntarily. That is, no one is forcing me. It’s personally my own initiative. That is, you decide yourself and you carry it out. You evaluate your own strengths. If you can do it, why not go? (W)*

Many other angoleiros in Russia also emphasise the importance of choosing to practise capoeira angola freely, voluntarily. This can be seen as a stark generational difference in the Russian context where the earlier Soviet youth did not have the opportunity to make its own voluntary initiatives to the same extent as the Russian youth can and does today (Yurchak 2005). Y sees the weekly capoeira practice as primarily depending on one’s own motivation and drive for improvement:

*So that here everything depends on you, on your will, on your attempts to reach the goals. And other than you, here, like no one will give you help. So that is, everything depends on you. (Y)*

As Game notes in her work on human-horse relations, if a horse lacks motivation, "no amount of force could get a horse to go forward, jump or pull a cart" (Game 2001: 3). The opposite measure, that of letting go, can be much more conducive to this end.

During the classes angoleiros usually have plenty of freedom to decide what they will be doing next and how. As an example, participants usually choose their own instruments during a class. The songs that are sung are often selected by the participant and in games played in pairs, movements can flow according to a body’s unique skills. Following phenomenologist Susan Kozel, Rouhiainen writes that: "dancers both mentally direct and manage their bodily actions as well as follow out the motion that spontaneously flows from the body" (Rouhiainen 2003: 149). Her words suggest that even when movements spontaneously flow from a body, they are not necessarily flowing entirely freely as the movements are simultaneously mentally directed and managed. From that perspective, the choices made by an angoleiro in a game of capoeira are not free in an absolute sense. Our bodily freedom of movement is always restricted to some extent.

Participation in capoeira angola classes and events is on the one hand, voluntary. "So I started going to capoeira in the year 2012, right. Well it was my conscious decision. That is, I decided myself, like that.", says W. S’s account of their capoeira group’s formation also suggests voluntarism in coming together:

*People gathered who began to, well, who were really interested in capoeira and not in just… some kind of fitness. And we decided since January 2008, we decided to organise our own group and since January 2008 we became an independent group and mestre agreed that we would be under his leadership. (S)*

It was the common interest in capoeira that brought several young bodies together.
However, regular participation in the group's activities can also become an obligation in the eyes of some participants. In Russia women seem particularly likely to experience a strong sense of duty to a capoeira angola group:

*Personally when I practice capoeira, I like it, I like practising it but I don’t see it as the goal of my life. Maybe back when I just started, when it was something unusual for me and I thought that “Yes! We’re going to promote capoeira in Russia!” But now I feel more an obligation or that kind of promise that I will support the instructor. (Q)*

Q's husband, who has also trained capoeira for several years, experiences no such sense of binding obligation towards the group. Another angoleiro talks about how the responsibilities in a group are shared among the most experienced practitioners: "Well it’s not only the instructor but generally people who practice in a group who, like, organise". One of the organisers, N, who does not have children, uses a maternal metaphor to describe her caring relationship towards the group:

*Anyway it’s like this big part of my life that will anyway always be important for me. And how the group is doing is also for me… because I also have put quite a lot of effort into it and it’s that kind of child of mine that, of course, concerns me also in the future. (N)*

Men in Russia also experience daily obligations and gender role expectations. H contemplates about the significance of one's parents' forceful expectations:

*Well, for example, a person wants all his life to I don’t know… play on an accordion. Let’s say he heard somewhere in his childhood accordion playing and he felt that damn, “Mum, I really want to!”, there “Dad, I really (need) an accordion, please!” “No, you’re going to be a real man, go into boxing and that’s it, I don’t care!” And there immediately “Boom!” and that’s it, that breaks the person at the root. Well, it’s just that he stops feeling himself and he already doesn’t self-realise because he’s forced with a stick, so to speak, to practise something in order to meet someone else’s expectations. (H)*

Both W and H suggest in their interviews that fathers in Russia frequently expect their sons to practise so called masculine forms of fighting like boxing or judo rather than the less clearly masculine capoeira angola or accordion playing.

In their daily lives, many angoleiros live with their parents, are stuck in jobs that they find draining, embodying many daily routines that are not voluntarily chosen by their bodies. Perhaps because of such circumstances, in their discourses, capoeiristas highlight the significance of acting freely, in the company of people whom they find inspiring.

*I don’t see any sense in practising capoeira, or anything else in general, with people who don’t inspire you, just because it’s formal. Like having to go to school, yeah, or having to go to work. No. I think that’s wrong. (G)*

Interviewed bodies in Russia yearn to relate to capoeira through voluntary initiative.
Gradual Changes

Downey highlights from a neuroanthropological perspective that the bodily learning of capoeira is a very slow, gradual process (e.g. Downey 2012). "Changing one’s mind may be far simpler than shaping one’s body", Downey notes (Downey 2005: 131).

Well, I think that one year in Angola, that’s nothing. That is, I now realise that it’s just a tiny second. I can’t express myself in a roda how I’d like to. (F)

Capoeiristas note that capoeira classes offer them time and space to learn gradually, without too much hurry: "Yeah after maybe four months, no, three months, that I started going to capoeira, G, started taking out the instruments" says W, who was not pressured by his instructor to learn to play musical instruments immediately. Relations between capoeira angola and Russian bodies tend to develop at a slow pace.

Y is one of the most energetic angoleiros I met in Russia. His body moves in diverse, unpredictable ways during capoeira games and he usually plays with humour and laughter. He also teaches children’s capoeira classes: "With kids I just have fun. I just play with them. It’s a game, it’s not training.", he says. In his own practice he describes a similarly gradual learning process to W:

Also what attracts me the most is that here it’s impossible to (learn) everything, all at once, to learn all the moves. That is like… roughly speaking, you know basic moves and you polish them, polish, polish. (Y)

As Y reflects on his learning of capoeira, he says that: "In fact, what I hadn't noticed (before), I now see clearly and I understand how in fact after all, all these moments, they transformed me. They transformed me, (my) life as a whole." It took Y a while to notice how the practice of capoeira has changed him. Noticing bodily transformation as it is happening can be challenging; statements about change usually come as an afterthought subsequent to a physical process that has itself been imperceptibly gradual (Tavi 2004: 45).

B also describes how capoeira classes have influenced her:

I wasn’t, for example, taught at home, how to say it, to dodge. Well, meaning that capoeira teaches to be more flexible and to find ways out of some difficult situations. Nobody taught me that and I usually always went forward without anything stopping me. …In a debate with someone, we’d have opposite opinions and I would just stubbornly try to prove my point: "Oh no, I think this way, like that." But after all, you can always look (at something) from a different perspective. (B)

Even though capoeira is often depicted as a fight and martial art, practising it has taught B to avoid conflict, including in conversations. Like the running water mentioned by Dumoulié, B has realised how to dodge certain debates and conflicts by simply not getting involved. It is a counter-movement that opts for a letting go rather than resisting someone’s point of view. With the practice of capoeira B’s body-mind has become more flexible in its daily attitudes.

Not every practitioner has the time or patience for slow bodily transformation within the angola style. U describes how the capoeira classes of their group eventually
came to a halt, or at least a lengthy pause, due to the unavailability of time for the practice among the key organisers:

Well, it’s just an initiative of the people who practice: to go to Brazil, to achieve something, to practise there. It’s just that capoeira really takes up a lot of time and not everyone is ready to devote their own, personal time to it. (U)

Another practitioner, expresses his curiosity about capoeira that extends beyond the limits of the angola style:

Seven and a half years we’ve practised this. The time came to learn further because from all directions there are signs that the world of capoeira is so much bigger than all of angola put together. Much bigger! And it’s really damn interesting and as if it’s calling like “Hey, we’re also here! We also exist.” And like this interest, this thirst for new knowledge, precisely of learning capoeira. Not focusing on the word ‘angola’ but as a whole ‘capoeira’. It calls (us) and we just like, with guys, felt that way… (G)

Many capoeiristas in Russia commit to an initiative for as long as it feels desirable and they move on, when they “feel that way”. The slowness and gradualness of capoeira angola perhaps fits clumsily into the fast-paced global context.

N points out, however, that the pausing of a group’s capoeira classes does not necessarily mean that the initiative as a whole has come to an end: “We’ve already had these moments when we’d stop. It doesn’t mean that everything is going badly and that everything is over. … I think it’s some kind of breathing. That is, we inhale, we exhale.” Inhaling and creating an initiative, engaging in capoeira angola classes; exhaling and letting go of the initiative, ending capoeira classes – for the time being. A wave like, breathing movement, alternating between beginnings, ends and renewed beginnings. Relations between bodies and practice are not one-directional processes as they oscillate between nearness and distance.

5.2 SAD SPACES OF FREEDOM

This was that first hall. It was some shabby, miserable, art centre. Where generally, well, there were in addition to us, there was also a pack of these pathetic, little groups kind of like us. (O)

O gives a tongue-in-cheek description of some of the first places where capoeira angola classes were held in his city. He similarly describes their first online groups of capoeira angola:

There was this very weak, this, sad, little group on Vkontakte where there were minus five people. Like that (laughs). That is, there were zero and then after that it was Dead Souls. Yeah, like that (laughs). And through that group I found out (about capoeira). I was won over by the fact that it’s free (of charge). (O)

For O, the “sad”, “pathetic” character of the places where some groups practice capoeira, is not confined to the physical sphere, as it extends even to virtual spaces. It
was not the freedom of movement that attracted O to these sad locations at first but rather the fact that the early capoeira classes were free of cost.

The places used for capoeira angola classes in Russia tangibly define how much freedom of movement capoeiristas have. They also physically unite the capoeiristas for an hour or two in the same location. Ahmed writes that "bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other, an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space" (Ahmed 2010: 245). It is by sharing space that capoeira angola bodies take shape in Russia. Many of the interviewees point out that the places in which they tried capoeira angola for the first times were significant in forming their overall impression of the practice and the group. Spaces with plenty of light passing through large windows are noted to be especially pleasant: "I like this hall because it's very bright there", says C. "I really like both of them. Well, because it's bright there, windows.", P also notes.

New materialist thinking about bodily experiences is interested in the material configuration of concrete places, like an IKEA shop and its "machinic assemblages of vibrations, molecules and things" (Roberts 2012: 2512). In The Human Condition Arendt depicts the ancient Greek polis as an ideal space of political action where eudaimonia (felicity or happiness) could be found in the sharing of words and deeds among free men (Arendt 1958: 30–31, 196–197). While Arendt’s portrayal of freedom in Ancient Greece might be intentionally idealised I would not argue against the physical impressiveness of the Athenian polis as a physical place. Even the remains of the Acropolis felt full of vitality and optimism when I once visited it in September 2008. It is a place characterised by openness, light, white marble structures and vast sky above. At the top of the Acropolis as the view onto the mountains and the sea surrounding the city of Athens opens, one can sense spatial expanse, some kind of vibrancy, springing from the human agency that imagined and created these structures. (Of course, the physical construction work was carried out by slaves, as many of Arendt’s critics would note.)

In Game’s and Metcalfe’s article, a female interviewee in Sydney describes how it feels to run on a beach: "I feel open and free and expansive. I don’t like being closed up. … I become more open, more creative, more intuitive. I think my intuition becomes stronger when I’m near the ocean.” (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 303). The openness of Bondi beach provides a contrast to the otherwise urban life of Sydney (Metcalfe and Game 2014). The aforementioned African-Brazilian concept of axé (see chapter two), which refers to life energy and vitality, has many different cultural forms and interpretations. In Chinese bodily practices, Klemola notes the view that bodily movements should be practised in places where there is plenty of life energy (qi in Chinese). Qi is believed to be especially plentiful near large trees, mountains, beaches and cliffs. (Klemola 2004: 217.) This could partly be due to the fresh air found in such places, as the air quality is especially important for breathing in practices like tai chi. Outdoor, open spaces are in many ways ideal for the practice of bodily exercise, be it in the form of running, tai chi or capoeira.

There was a very, very cool seminar. It was cool because it was outdoors in nature. That is, it was a full immersion into, into the forest, the river. That is, you practice, first you train, and then you jump into the water. That is, it’s totally surreal! It was something unreal. Like that, it was in the summer. (U)
U describes a capoeira seminar that she recently attended with a friend in Croatia.

In terms of size, Russia is the largest country on earth, yet in my bodily experiences, many humanly inhabited parts of the country feel cramped and stuffy. The windows of private and public places are usually covered with heavy curtains through which one can hardly see outdoors. In the cold months of winter, as the heaters are turned on indoors, the temperature in apartments and cafés is often high to the point of being suffocating. The pavements are cluttered with snow and slush in the winter and early spring. Soviet architecture is often grave and grey, with dark brown frequently being the main colour of interior design. This creates indoor spaces of long, narrow, dark corridors that seem to reflect the bewildering Soviet bureaucracy. Even in the countryside while the fields, hills and the open sky are expansive, the village houses in Bashkortostan and the Samara region stand right next to each other, behind high, (frequently) metal, fences on tiny plots of land.

Unsurprisingly then, the places used for capoeira angola classes in Ufa, Samara St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod are often very different to the light and open Acropolis or Bondi beach, in their look and feel. Angoleiros in Russia have different views on what constitutes an ideal place for practising capoeira. While Z prefers more closed, confined spaces with less audience, V likes to be out in the open.

The place has an impact. That is, I, for example, personally, well, like some completely open place, open space, I – well, it’s unlikely that I’d go there. That is, I’d have less desire (to go there). But somewhere like a park yeah, … (I’d go) really gladly. That is, where there are less of these dudes who basically don’t understand yeah there, that… Although on the other hand, if you’re focused on the process, you don’t really care about these dudes… That is, for me it’s more, in this sense better, I feel more comfortable maybe in a closed space. That’s one thing. Or then, there where there are less people. (Z)

I probably like it more outdoors … Maybe it’s just me personally because I like to look out into the distance, I like that there is open space. Because in a hall, wherever you look, everywhere you bump into a wall, a socket, a barrier. Like that. Of course, that distracts from training, from the process itself. Well, I could say that in the summer I would rather choose training outdoors than training indoors. (V)

… From the viewpoint of the training process of course a hall is better adapted, in a hall there is the floor cover and so on. Here it’s asphalt, sand and grass, and the surface isn’t even and well, there can be physical obstacles. (Z)

V once visited me in Joensuu in August. We mainly spent time outdoors, going to forests and national parks in the area. Occasionally V would make use of the fact that there were no humans around us, as she would shout the iê sound that opens the roda out into the open of a lake or from high cliffs into the forest. "Outdoors, take in some more air into your lungs and then shout: lééél", she says during her interview. Relations between capoeira angola and Russian bodies allow the latter to openly express themselves not only in capoeira classes but also beyond them, for example, in a foreign forest.

It is difficult to identify clear categories for the indoor places where capoeira angola classes are held in Russia. When I asked capoeiristas to describe the places, they were often at loss in specifying their exact function: "It was us in a fitness club, not even a fitness – there it was more of a gym. Where people lift weights", U says. Capoeira
Angola is frequently practised in mixed vicinities of fitness clubs, gyms, dance and/or yoga studios, schools, malls, abandoned factory buildings, indefinite basements or attics. The rooms range from tiny spaces for boxing to very large school and martial arts halls. Often the room will have a mirror on one wall, some mats lying around, suggesting that some physical activity takes place there outside of the capoeira hours (fieldnotes 10.11.2013).

The places of practice changed throughout my fieldwork over the period of five years. One of the more permanent places where I carried out participant observation is now called a ‘Lifestyle Centre’. It is a large Soviet building that one capoeirista surmised had most likely housed shops during the late Soviet era. Today, the building has been extensively refurbished both inside and outside. On the ground floor there is an indoor market with a very good selection of vegetables, fruit, meat, fish and all sorts of fresh delicacies. There are several newly established cafés and restaurants with open kitchens serving local, Central Asian, Russian and fast food. Higher up, the centre looks like a mall with different boutiques and shops, ice cream and coffee stands. On the upper floor of this multi-functional building there is a creative centre where particularly children and young people come to practise theatre, breakdancing and other dancing, as well as capoeira. By 2016, the capoeira group there got their own medium sized room that was painted in bright yellow, blue and green colours, with large words Capoeira, Bananeira, Batucada neatly painted on the walls in addition to drawings of palm trees, instruments and other elements associated with capoeira and Brazil (photos 2016).

The other studied groups do not have their own studios but rather rent various, changing places on an hourly rate. At times the high costs are unsustainable:

Well, there was no permanent place of residence, we kept moving, sometimes there wouldn’t even be classes. (L)

To find a good space at a good time, you need a lot of money. To have lots of money, you need to take payment for the classes, yeah? Consequently, immediately about forty percent of let’s say those who are interested falls away, yeah? (Y)

The instructors are caught between raising class prices and losing a number of participants or having more participants who attend the classes for relatively low prices. In an attempt to save money, some of the groups have to bear the inconveniences of renting a very cheap place.

One group would rent a place in a yoga studio located in a basement of an apartment building on the Revolutionary Street of the city. The walls of one room are painted light blue and the floor has a typical dark brown wooden-looking vinyl flooring. A tiny corridor with a low ceiling connects the two rooms and a light smell of incense is present throughout the place. Occasionally the group would change rooms in the middle of a capoeira class as the larger room would free up after a yoga class. Sharing space with yogis usually means that capoeira classes have to be very quiet, without loud instrument playing or singing. (Fieldnotes 28.11.13.)

A small yoga studio used for capoeira classes could be described as a “shared, often vexed public space” to borrow Haraway’s expression (Haraway 2015a: 9). Unlike the Acropolis that mounts upwards with an expansive view on the surroundings, the yoga studio descends into a small basement amidst urban traffic and residential quarters. H is critical of such hectic urban surroundings: “the city, it really knocks people off their
natural, biological rhythm”, he says. A very small space like a tiny room used for boxing, where one of the instructors would have his personal classes, not only limits the scope of movement but creates a closed, stuffy atmosphere (fieldnotes 21.3.2014). The mood with which bodies relate to capoeira is dependent on the physical place of capoeira classes.

The style of capoeira angola is often intentionally played in confined spaces in order to habituate the angoleiros’ bodies to play in close proximity to each other without much room for escape. “This is improvisation within strict limits” as Parviainen puts it (Parviainen on contemporary dance 2003: 172). It is an angoleiro’s skill to play in a very tight roda, potentially symbolising both physical confinement during slavery and subsequent urban poverty, or as a reflection of Bahian, and more broadly Brazilian, daily life in which, according to Lewis, close physical contact with others is valued (Lewis 1992: 81). Angoleiros often use little space even outdoors as they stay within white court lines painted on the asphalt during a game in a city park (fieldnotes 1.7.2013). Thus even when practitioners move spontaneously, they nevertheless have to pay constant attention to their surroundings, to the physical limits that confine their game.

I: How about in the summer, do you have classes outdoors?
G: Outdoors, regularly. Well, we don’t have classes, we just meet to play. It’s this musical, musical practices and, and roda.
I: Where do you play?
G: In parks.

Partly because of the costs of renting a studio summer training sessions tend to take place entirely outdoors. The outdoor places for training vary from city parks, to boulevards, beaches, lawns and different types of squares. It is different to put one’s hands and head on a dance studio floor in comparison to a sandy beach or the concrete of a city park. Angoleiros often protect their heads and hair with some types of scarves. One July evening N and V were practising some acrobatic movements on the soft sand of the city beach. Next to us the capoeiristas’ movements were observed by three generations of women: a little girl, her young mother and grandmother. After 9 p.m. as N and V finished training, we chatted with the mother and grandmother. The young mother said that they “were in awe, looking at the acrobatic moves”, of the practitioners that made the young woman want to exercise. She mentioned that her mother used to be very acrobatic when she was younger. (Fieldnotes 3.7.2013.) In the environment of a warm, summer beach with a friendly family audience it is a pleasure to practise capoeira outdoors. But not all outdoor training sessions receive positive or understanding feedback:

So it’s difficult to know if public performances work to your advantage or if they work against you. (T)

I think that when people see us on the street they consider it as a performance. They don’t consider it as practice, as training. If we came out on the street, then it probably means that it’s a kind of a mini concert. Like that. But for us it could just be that we’re learning new music, new melody, new lyrics. (V)

Well when you come out and you have nothing to show, of course it is embarrassing. Then it is better not to come outside. This is the problem, that, people know little about you. (T)
Capoeira angola practitioners cannot always relax when they are surrounded by people who know little about their practice. At times the volleyball or basketball courts in the parks would be very busy in the summer evenings with volleyball and basketball players standing right next to the practising capoeiristas, waiting for them to leave and free up the space (fieldnotes 1.7.2013). Such audiences create more pressure than encouragement for the angoleiros’ bodies. Outdoor practice sites can occasionally also be very loud, with the music coming from large speakers of restaurants or cafés nearby muffling the rather quiet sound of capoeira music coming from a smartphone or instruments played live.

At one point when we were training bananeiras on our own, I was walking a bit to rest and the fresh wind, the dusk and the view of the city in the distance all gave a very invigorating feeling like the kind I had experienced in Salvador after a class. (Fieldnotes 19.6.2013.)

I described a summer training in one of Samara’s parks. After physical effort, the sweat dried off my exposed skin in the evening as it got cooler and darker in Samara, just as it did a couple of years before in December in Salvador. In capoeira angola, the imagined ideal location for practice is the state of Bahia on the coast of North-Eastern Brazil and within it specifically the capital city of Salvador. These could be characterised as a Mecca for angoleiros and other capoeiristas (Collins 2016: 268, 273; Downing 1996). Capoeira angola songs often mention Bahia and Salvador in reference to slavery. Almeida and co-authors note that there is:

A Bahia-centric discourse among many leaders. In this discourse, the codes, rituals, music and techniques of Bahian capoeira are considered by many practitioners throughout Brazil and internationally to be superior to capoeira practised elsewhere (Almeida et al. 2013: 1353).

The Bahia-centric discourses of capoeira angola aim to create strong associations between the practice and a particular place.

Eriksen who discusses transnational sports suggests that some localised sports like Gaelic football “represent something that cannot, and will not, be globalized because they symbolise a cultural identity that is by default associated with a particular place” (Eriksen 2007b: 164). Indeed, the Bahian identity creates certain challenges for spreading capoeira angola globally as places of capoeira practice such as Samara or Ufa could be seen as “hybrid contaminations” that challenge the alleged ‘purity’ of Brazil, Bahia, Salvador, as the places for capoeira angola practice (Braidotti on contamination 2006: 199). Squarcini notes that “every tradition, by definition, is an established space where constant negotiation takes place and in which avant-gardes and rearguards do battle for the last word” (Squarcini 2011: 30). The bodies practising capoeira angola outside of Bahia and Brazil can be seen as avant-gardes who are challenging the established places and practices of capoeira.

The places where bodies practice capoeira in Russia are not ideal, they can be small, not very clean, and dysfunctional in terms of heating or air-conditioning. The immediate, physical conditions do not always allow angoleiros’ bodies to let go into the music and movements of the practice. But even in small post-Soviet urban basements, the imagined world of capoeira seems to be a tropical, warm, bright place where one can leave the cold, dark and serious behind, for the hour or so of a capoeira class.
5.3 MICRO MIR

In a class of capoeira angola many practitioners seem to experience a being in the present moment, with discoveries made "in the here, now of a direct encounter" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 306). The direct encounter usually takes place between several bodies through their sweat and smiles as well as the sounds of capoeira. Metcalfe's and Game's interviewees in Sydney point out how the experience of going to the beach daily "involves a change in the experience of space and time" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 300). Like the beach practices described by Metcalfe and Game, such as running and swimming, capoeira angola is also a bodily practice that brings its practitioners "into the present" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 303).

As Q mentioned in the beginning of chapter two, classes of capoeira can bring relief to everyday life troubles by allowing one to forget them for an hour or two.

It's a whole, damn… micro, micro world (mir) of its own. That is with its own norms, rules, music – a whole world! So you come into this world and tune out. That is all the problems, all your like other duties, they are left behind the door. It's like when you come to a psychologist into a rehabilitation room, yeah? Relief yeah. You come (there), you lie down on the couch, pleasant music is turned on and you don't think about anything. You just enjoy. The same thing is here. (Y)

Y calls a class of capoeira a 'micro mir'. In Russian, 'mir' means world as well as peace. In the past, the word has also meant a community of peasants, or a 'little community' (Grant 1976: 636). Y's use of the term 'micro mir', seems to refer to a microcosm, a small community of capoeira practitioners whose classes and events hold something much larger in content. His description of the micro mir implies almost a parallel reality to the mundane life of capoeiristas, a place and time where one can leave everything else behind and just enjoy oneself – "a dream space" to borrow Malkki's words (Malkki 2015: 207). Anthropologist Margaret Lyon and sociologist Jack Barbalet note that "emotion is a concept which refers to the sense, including bodily sense, of evaluating experience" (Lyon & Barbalet 1994: 57). Y depicts his experiences of the micro mir in terms of emotions like relief, enjoyment and he compares them to the bodily experience of lying down.

Some authors on capoeira suggest that the creation of a small, closed world of capoeira outside of Brazil, into which one can "flit in and out" (Joseph 2008: 207), may easily turn into an imagined version of the so called Little Brazil. Joseph recounts her experiences of one evening at a capoeira academy in Canada:

It may have been snowing outside, but I heard the live samba band that had come in from Recife for the week, felt the hot temperature and my sweat-soaked clothing, saw the Brazilian flags strewn about the walls and the plastic palm trees that had been used for decoration. That night I had been playing capoeira, drinking caipirinhas, speaking and singing in Portuguese; dancing in Brazilian styles such as samba, pagode, and forró for hours. It was clear that an attempt had been made to transform the academia into a 'little Brazil' for the festa – and we were encouraged to imagine we had travelled south, if only for one night (Joseph 2008: 202).

Joseph critiques the attempts of Canadian capoeiristas to essentialise blackness and Brazilianness through their corporeal practice. Essentialist accounts of Brazilian culture
abound among angoleiros in Russia. J uses the term Little Brazil when describing his impressions of capoeira classes:

'It's nice when our own Little Brazil is created, roughly speaking. Yeah? It's nice when there is exactly what we want to have. We want to have some small piece of the sun, yeah, we want to have this freedom that is, freedom of self-expression. Because here – I would probably take dance more as a comparison. When you can do what you want. Knowing how to do something, you'll do what you want. And other people will also have fun and a good time because of that. So here it's just this, I don't know, just a party on the beach (laughs). (J)

Like the earlier-mentioned Y, J has never travelled outside Russia. He constructs a Little Brazil that is associated with sun, beach and party. This is where J feels that he can express himself freely, perhaps like the polis constructed by Arendt as an ideal place of freedom. Following J's words, as one steps into a capoeira class, it is as if the tropical sun starts shining there and the ground is suddenly covered in white Ipanema sand. The present moment is not necessarily present at all as it can also be, at least partly, imagined. J's words suggest a stereotypical portrayal of Brazil as a static image of "a utopian happiness attainable through partying, dancing, and sex, in the midst and in spite of the poverty, the quotidian violence, and the striking socio-economic contrasts between the rich and the poor" (Rosa 2015: 172). As Joseph and other writers on capoeira note, constructions of a Little Brazil can be rather inaccurate when compared to daily lives in Brazil.

Imagining distant worlds is certainly not a feature unique to transnational capoeiristas. Malkki in her study of humanitarian aid workers notes that at times people are motivated to do humanitarian work due to their "love of travel". She writes that there is "an imaginative/intellectual excitement in being involved in something different from and somehow larger (even "greater") than their usual working and personal lives". (Malkki 2015: 201.) Many capoeiristas in Russia too would love to travel, as we saw in chapter three, and the creation of a micro mir of a Little Brazil can be interpreted as a compensation for their physical lack of travel to Brazil due to economic or other reasons.

The capoeira classes in Russia are variously linked to Brazil in many of their artifacts. There would be yellow and green paint on a cabaça which is the resonator of a berimbau (photo 4.3.2014), symbolising the colours of the Brazilian flag. Many of the participants like to wear yellow t-shirts to classes because it is an exceptionally bright colour that most of them would usually not wear on daily basis. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they associate yellow with warmth and the sun. L even sees the colour in moral terms: "yellow colour – somehow is associated with goodness". Both groups in Samara and Ufa have large, fabric Brazilian flags, and one of the group's organisers would tape the flag onto the wall of a dance studio for most of the classes. In such material ways, the angoleiros in Russia tie their practice above all to the national construct of the Brazilian state rather than to Angola, Africa or transnationalism. The micro mir in which the angoleiros can "tune out", as Y puts it, is neatly associated with, at times essentialised, Brazil.

In a global environment of deep uncertainty we may cling to aspects that give us a sense of clear direction (Tambornino 2002: 139). We saw in chapter three that the practice of capoeira has rich and ambivalent cultural roots, carrying diverse symbolisms in its movements and lyrics. Nevertheless, capoeira classes in Russia are
simplified by some groups, perhaps in order to create a sense of certainty. Certainty of what it means to be of African-Brazilian origins, of what it means to embody a Bahian way of being, or of what it is like to live fully. O describes how one capoeira practitioner moved from Ukraine to Russia and in order to maintain the same direction in life, he decided to establish a capoeira angola group in the Russian city:

He lived in Kiev for some time and then he moved here and like any Georgian who comes to Russia opens up a Georgian restaurant here, so as to eat familiar food here and to bond with … Yeah the same thing here. If you move to a place where there is no capoeira, you think “How can I live now? I need to do something.” (O)

O communicates the need to maintain familiar habits, through the stereotypical example of Georgian diaspora opening up Georgian restaurants in Russia.

Attending capoeira angola classes in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod also opens up the participants’ worldviews as well as widens their social circles:

So the world for me, well, for me it expanded. New desires emerged, I never had the… it was the same for me to go abroad or not. Now I have the desire to go to well, to Brazil, somewhere else too. I have friends all over the world now, maybe. Well maybe not close friends but maybe like… acquaintances. (J)

Angoleiros would often talk about how capoeira classes offer them the chance of spending valuable time with close friends. In their interviews, several females mention how their capoeira group is a friendly community to which newcomers are warmly welcomed:

First of all, I was really amazed by the friendliness of the group. … When I came for the first time, it wasn’t an open class, it was a regular training session. Everyone came up to me, greeted me, as it usually happens. That was already a big plus. (M)

The most pleasant thing probably, from what I can remember; I liked the atmosphere. There when I came to the group, all the guys were really friendly. (A)

There everyone is positive. And you get charged with that energy. Girls were talking to me and in such a good-willed way. I was thinking “Oh, how sweet they all are here!” I think that this positivity this, this I really… In karate everything is so strict, my kid practices karate, I’ve been to the classes – it’s so strict! (C)

Well I never met collectives like that before where everyone hangs out like best friends. That astonished me. (L)

On Sunday morning you wake up, have breakfast and go (to class). And you get charged with such positivity for the entire day. (P)

Friendly relations, positivity and being surprised are the recurring themes of the five women’s quotes. Like C, other capoeiristas frequently compare capoeira classes to activities like karate, university or school classes, that they experience to be more restricting than the micro-world of capoeira.
X and Q discuss how Russian onlookers react to capoeira in an attempt to contrast attitudes of capoeiristas to those of ‘others’:

X: There everyone is happy somehow, cheerful. But people will come and think: “(They’re) some drug users, what’s that all about?”
Q: So you mean they’re colder?
X: Well somehow people are more severe here or something? Here… we are (laughs).

For a while Q and X talk about Russians in the form of ‘they’ until X notes that they are talking about themselves.

Q: Well probably in Russia it’s difficult for capoeira and Brazilian culture in general. It hasn’t adapted (here) for a long time, only just now has it started. And it’s interesting that here in our city Latin-American dances have also started to develop in parallel to capoeira, precisely during this same period. And this Brazilian culture has gradually, with capoeira, started to trickle to Russia.
X: If in capoeira, everyone is happy to see each other, even if they don’t really know each other. But here: (Q: “Why are you here?!”) “What do you want?”, “Why are you here?”
Q: Well, if you take these typical (street) guys.

Both Q and X portray capoeiristas as welcoming and friendly while non-capoeiristas in Russia, particularly ‘street guys’ as Q calls them, are supposedly often cold and bluntly unwelcoming. Such discourses are potentially one way of underlining the uniqueness of one’s community.

Atkinson in his article on a form of ascetism called Straightedge, discusses a common feature of ascetic or esoteric religious communities: their desire to “distance themselves from outsiders” (Atkinson 2006: 74). Although capoeira is not an ascetic nor an explicitly religious practice it shares the commonality with such communities in that among angoleiros there is a recurring desire to distinguish one’s group from the rest by emphasising the positive qualities of one’s own collective. O notes that angoleiros are “So underground, so, you know, all misunderstood, yeah? So there are few of us, we’re pathetic, but we’re so special!””, he says self-ironically. The micro mir of capoeira angola in Russia might give the impression of being a bounded, closed-off sphere. “Capoeiristas in general help each other. It’s this, well, probably like any other subculture, some like, a small model of a society.”, says E. Such discourses do not easily fit with new materialist emphasis on permeable membranes and fluctuating assemblages (Coole 2013).

They say that Russians are so very close to Brazilians in spirit. But we are anyway closed (inhibited) people. Closed, let’s say cautiously distrustful, so but… How to say it? We’re mainly used to setting up barriers in front of us. Yeah, we defend ourselves… But here you’re welcome to smile, to be open. (T)

T, like many other angoleiros, juxtaposes Brazilian cheerfulness to Russian somberness in a broad brush-stroke generalisation about national character. Like Q and X, T also suggests that Russians allegedly are cold towards strangers, unlike Brazilians. This implies that the micro mir of capoeira classes is like a cheerful tropical island amidst the Russian winter where one can come to experience joy and smiles felt to be absent from the immediate socio-cultural environment that surrounds
capoeiristas in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod. Q emphasises the sense of openness of their capoeira group:

Openness, well, and allowance of uniqueness or irregularity of one’s comrade (/friend). Well, for example, if he likes to have dreadlocks on his head and it’s comfortable for him to stand on his head like that, well, cool. (Q)

As H illustrated in chapter three, his dreadlocks were not welcomed by a professional community of heavily drinking welders, but for a capoeirista to have dreadlocks is acceptable, indeed somewhat of a transnational trend among angoleiros. It is a particular type of socio-cultural openness that can be found in the groups of capoeira angola that is restricted by certain bodily norms, like the wearing of dreadlocks.

Bodies that have travelled outside of their own ‘Little Brazil’ and have visited Brazil proper, are less confident in making generalisations about national characters. U who has spent time in Brazil and who has travelled a lot outside of Russia, describes one Brazilian capoeira teacher who once taught their group in Russia for approximately half a year:

Initially he is after all not a practitioner of angola and yet he is a very good capoeirista. …It completely doesn’t mean that he’s Brazilian and that’s why he’s like that cool. No. It’s not about nationality. (U)

Not everyone wants to linger in the present moment of an African-Brazilian micro mir in Russia. A friend of mine, not familiar with capoeira, once attended a class of capoeira angola in St. Petersburg while I was carrying out a pilot study with the group there. She found the atmosphere of the class to be oppressive as she felt that the music and movements had a trance-like effect on her that she thoroughly disliked. "The experience of the roda is often compared to (but is not) a trance", writes Willson (2001: 31). Willson suggests in brackets that in reality the experience of capoeira is not a trance, even if it is compared to one. Different perceptions of capoeira classes and events illustrate the difficulty, if not impossibility, of objectively approaching the topic. While I did not find the class of capoeira in St. Petersburg at all oppressive or trance-like, my friend certainly did. From this perspective, relations between each body and capoeira are unique.

Many long-term practitioners in Russia note that their experiences in capoeira classes and rodas vary: "It’s not always easy to create an atmosphere… that kind that fills the whole space with energy", says T. Another capoeirista agrees: "…roda, it can be different. Sometimes I might not like it at all, not at all. Sometimes I might like it a lot." N notes. It can be little details such as a "sparse circle, not standing right next to each other" (fieldnotes 25.3.2014) that cause the atmosphere to change, for the circle not to feel cosy and energetic. Capoeira angola is not a stable micro mir, a clearly bounded circle, in which a participant’s body can always let go and enjoy her- or himself. There is no uniform bodily experience of capoeira angola, rather experiences (in plural) vary with person, time and place of the practice.

Interaction between Russian bodies and capoeira angola occurs in space as well as time as if partly secluded from the rest of the world. However, as we already saw in chapters three and four, the wider environment, its values, norms and rules thoroughly permeate the practitioners and practice. They carry certain ideals about gender, race, ways of moving and bodily self-expression. Therefore, the idea of clearly
bounded spaces, groups, nationalities or cultures is more of a construction by the capoeira practitioners who imagine a sunny Brazilian place where they can come to play and be happy with other angoleiros, leaving all else behind. It is not the accuracy of the site as much as the potential pleasure that one can obtain from it that matters for many of the participating bodies (paraphrasing Veijola & Jokinen 1994: 133).

5.4 "FREE AS A WHIP"32 – CAPOEIRA AS A WEAPON OF RESISTANCE?

Arendt notes that the idea of passive resistance is an ironic one since:

*It is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men. (Arendt 1958: 201.)*

Passive resistance, or non-violent popular revolt, is not so passive, according to Arendt. On a twenty-eight-hour train journey from Nizhnii Novgorod to Ufa I once had an open conversation with a co-passenger, a young male soldier, about my research. He was asking me for hours about the capoeira groups and my findings to the extent that I felt I was being interrogated. The soldier was very suspicious of research carried out by someone from Finland about small groups with transnational connections found in different parts of Russia. For instance, he remarked that political revolutions usually start off with very small, seemingly politically innocent, initiatives and he was curious to know how well-organised capoeira groups are and what their wider aims might be. (Fieldnotes 17.–18.11.2013.) The Russian state and its representatives have been exhibiting an increasing paranoia over the security not only of Russia but also of the surrounding CIS states from a variety of real and imagined threats in the past decades (Allison 2013: 124–125; Shevtsova 2010: 148–152; Shevtsova & Wood 2011: 104–105).

Contrary to the soldier’s fears of a revolutionary capoeira movement, there seems to be a lack of practical organisation within the transnational circles of capoeira angola. One of the most repeated complaints during my fieldwork in Russia from the participants about their groups was that they are not sufficiently well-organised, in terms of "systematic organisation", as capoeiristas often expressed it. When thinking about what might be lacking in transnational capoeira angola, U says: "systematisation – so that it would be easier for people to absorb (capoeira), not only native speakers (of Portuguese), but from other cultures." Russian angoleiros often express the need to have clearer instructions, in the form of, for instance, class templates from their mestres on how to teach capoeira systematically.

Many researchers portray capoeira as a liberating, resistance movement (e.g. Almeida et al. 2013: 1347; Rosa 2015: 120–121). Rosa writes that the capoeira angola aesthetic, for example, in the form of *ginga*, plays a role "in subverting, or at least questioning, Western/colonial values and regulations of how one should move, behave, stand, or look" (Rosa 2015: 121). Dumoulié suggests that "capoeira is an art of contra-power" and that "black slaves, unable to tackle white power head-on, invented a whole

32 Bachmann in Dumoulié 2010: 11.
system of evasion and deflection; pretending to work, running about and laughing, mocking the choleric master" (Dumoulié 2010: 10). This description of capoeira is reminiscent of Scott’s famous ethnographic study of Malaysian peasants’ everyday forms of resistance that involve indirect measures of avoiding one’s responsibilities towards wealthier authorities (Scott 1985). A capoeirista fights against various barriers of an existing social structure, according to Dumoulié (2010: 2). He argues that in the past capoeira “expressed a ‘worldview’ and experience of life, an ethics and philosophy antagonistic to white culture” as the practice was created by blacks in response to white oppression (Dumoulié 2010: 1).

With the onset of industrialisation ‘white culture’, if we can speak of such a phenomenon, has certainly physically enslaved not only others, but also itself (Arendt 1958: 118–126; Russell 1932). “There was formerly a capacity for light-heartedness and play which has been to some extent inhibited by the cult of efficiency”, writes philosopher Bertrand Russell about the Western way of life prior to and after industrialisation (Russell 1932: 6). Capoeira angola to some extent challenges the cult of efficiency, at least in its dominant discourses (Assunção 2005: 196):

Well, capoeira is a movement for freedom. Well, at least at first that’s how it was. Well, for us, white people, everything is a little different (laughs) of course. We are officially, we’re not slaves, but in fact many people, well they force themselves (into a dead end). Like mestre said, well, “(It’s) digital slavery”. He said that we’re always in front of those phones! In front of laptops and so on. I think he’s right. And capoeira, it liberates you from that. If, if there’s a roda and well, you won’t be in front of your laptop (there) (laughs). (B)

African slaves would play capoeira and other games amidst their confinement in the Portuguese plantations. Even though the playful practices did not free them from slavery, their games did offer an alternative way of being in the world to the one proposed by the Portuguese slave owners who monitored, controlled and violently whipped them (Assunção 2005: 80; Dumoulié 2010). The practice of capoeira may have distracted Africans from physical colonial slavery while today it may distract bodies from “digital slavery”.

“Resistant bodily practices tend to be produced by structural relationships of exploitation/inequality”, writes Atkinson, “and are designed to confront dominant social structures, relationships and ideologies in dramatic and highly disruptive manners” (Atkinson 2006: 73). Some capoeira angola mestres and practitioners today engage in somewhat disruptive initiatives at resisting dominant social structures, for example, in the form of newly established kilombos (quilombos in Portuguese). Kilombos were originally communities established by runaway slaves that are portrayed in rather heroic terms of resistance to slavery by many contemporary capoeira practitioners (Assunção 2005: 6; Desch-Obi 2008: 154). N and I discussed how one of the best known mestres of capoeira angola today, and an initiator of a contemporary kilombo community in Bahia, sees the institutionalisation of the practice. N, who knows the master quite well, having spent time with him in Brazil, Russia and online, says:

*He described what his understanding of anarchy is like. So it’s when the process, that is in an ideal situation, the process goes on by itself without the need for anyone to direct it. So as an example of this anarchy he gave this, that he said he felt there in kilombo… For several days four or five people who understood each other really well and had a really*
good attitude lived there. And each one was doing his own thing so that in the end like, that is, they didn’t coordinate anything, yeah? One went this way, the other that way, and in the end everything kind of worked out by itself. Like that. But so that it would work this way, so this was, he was describing a unique situation, that he felt “This is it, this is like happiness. This is how it would be good to exist.” When people like without coordinating, each one takes his own place, does his own thing and everything ends up collective and great. But he also said that unfortunately it doesn’t always work out like that naturally by itself, that’s why there also needs to be organisation and some sort of rulership and some sort of... process. If it doesn’t work out like that, then someone has to rule. (N)

The mestre’s message seems to be that without spontaneous self-organisation, someone has to coordinate collective action. From this perspective hierarchies, and the institutionalisation of capoeira angola, do not appear to be intrinsically desirable, so much as instrumental for getting things done on a collective level. However, as Malkki notes, the neutral framing of a certain organisation in formal discourse in terms of its necessity does not mean that the organisation is not "intensely political" in its daily life and relations (Malkki 2015: 200).

Capoeira’s past and present aspirations have been romanticised by practitioners in terms of capoeira’s glorious struggles against various oppressive forces (Assunção 2005: 5–9; Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 154). Assunção questions neat and cohesive portrayals of capoeira’s historical background as he discusses the past of the practice in terms of various dominant myths, for most of which we have little visual or written evidence (Assunção 2005: 5–31). Chaudenson describes how Haitian voodoo practice of non-European origins exemplifies a system resistant to colonial cultural oppression (Chaudenson 2001: 195). A similar story is constructed by capoeiristas of their practice as a system of resistance – a story that appears to be growing in certainty and magnitude as time passes (Downey 2002: 12; Lewis 1992: 177).

Poetry, like capoeira’s origins, tends to be associated with a romanticised, glorious past, in a constant yearning for something lost (Abu-Lughod 1986: 251). Abu-Lughod writes that in a Bedouin community "poetry is ... the discourse of opposition to the system and of defiance of those who represent it: it is antistructure just as it is antimorality" (Abu-Lughod 1986: 251). "Poetry as a discourse of defiance of the system symbolizes freedom", she continues (Abu-Lughod 1986: 252). Just as poetry represents the noble past of the Bedouins (Abu-Lughod 1986: 255), capoeira represents African-Brazilians’ past and is a symbol of freedom that variously attempts to defy elites and their hegemonic discourses.

Do Russian practitioners of capoeira angola relate to the construction of a noble African-Brazilian past and its affective connotations? One instructor is optimistic about the potential relationality of Russian practitioners and capoeira:

Many here in Russia yeah, take capoeira angola as something, only meant for some. But I think that it can be made for everyone because... well, I generally believe that capoeira is universal. Everyone can truly practice it. There is just no need to close off, to turn away from people. (G)

The previous chapter described the ways in which G aims to make capoeira accessible to all in his (Russian) city. The African-Brazilian practice is often essentialised and
deprived of cultural nuances in order to be consumed by as many Russian locals as possible.

In the conclusion to her examination of civic activity in Tver’, Salmenniemi proposes that civic organisations simultaneously offer “potentially empowering arenas” for the participants and also function “as an excluding force” that reproduce social inequalities and disadvantages (Salmenniemi 2008: 224). One may ponder whether transnational capoeira angola groups are not at times embodying what they profess to resist – hierarchical systems that in some ways essentialise African-Brazilian cultural heritage. In her ethnography, Malkki points out how some forms of humanitarianism in fact dehumanise their objects “by reducing actors in a complex and meaningful historical process into nakedly human objects of compassion” (Malkki 2015: 199). In the previous chapter we saw how hierarchies within transnational capoeira angola at times reduce the practising bodies to their gender, race and nationality, instead of approaching the bodies in a more holistic way. Both the African-Brazilian practice and the Russian bodies at times simplify and essentialise one another.

Following other thinkers, Atkinson agrees that “resistance in the postmodern era may take on a more mundane, everyday, and less spectacular forms of expression” (Atkinson 2006: 73). Could the regular capoeira angola classes in Russia be seen as a form of social resistance, even in the absence of a transnationally well-organised capoeira resistance movement?

By simply sitting on the floor in a circle, capoeiristas are possibly challenging some of today’s hegemonies with their whole being. In a sitting position on the floor, bodies are concretely grounded. The pattern of sitting in a circle at least creates the feeling that everyone is equal in worth as no one individual is put on a pedestal in front of others. By embodying groundedness and equality, bodies challenge linear ideals behind Western progress; the endless reaching somewhere higher, being in front and above others. Social resistance need not be loudly declared in words as it can also be lived, quietly, through the body. As we saw in chapter three, non-verbal actions are at the centre of capoeira angola and in this respect too they challenge our nearly global norms of highly verbalised, extroverted behaviour.

“Bodily dissent has been interpreted until recently as marginal, pathological, or so much exotica, or else has been passed over, unnoticed and unrecorded”, writes Lock as she argues that bodies have individual agency (Lock 1993: 141; also Parviainen on bodies as a political tool in activism 2010). Human agency is not only expressed in thoughts, ideas that are verbalised but also in the form of bodily dissent. Blackman discusses how “bodies might protest, speak back or simply refuse to participate in the workings of disciplinary power” by attending a political rally, changing jobs or immigrating from a country (Blackman 2008: 28). In the case of capoeira, Dumoulié describes how the bodies of practitioners are “free as a whip” as they move dangerously, with a constant hidden potential for a sudden attack (Dumoulié 2010: 11). Turning the tables around, it is now the African-Brazilians whose ancestors endured whipping during slavery, who embody the whip with their cunning bodies.

Ev’rytime I hear the crack of a whip,
My blood runs cold.
I remember on the slave ship,
How they brutalize the very souls.
Today they say that we are free,
Only to be chained in poverty.
Good God, I think it’s illiteracy;
It’s only a machine that makes money.
Slave driver, the table is turn.
(Bob Marley 1973)

In the previous chapter, we saw how disciplinary power emerges not only exogenously from our bodies but perhaps more importantly it becomes part of our very being to the extent that our bodies are constantly policing themselves (Blackman 2008: 25). Are our bodies capable of resisting such intrinsic mechanisms of self-control? Can we protest against our own bodily habits, such as the constant tensing of the muscles? Or does such resistance in fact work counter-productively? As an example, if we actively try to resist tensing some of our muscles, the very pressure of this aim, the need to achieve something, is likely to produce more tension in our bodies, and thus, further aggravate muscular aches. The capacity to let go is not usually considered to be active agency in Western theorising that rather views resistance, negotiation and refusal as features of agency that can challenge disciplinary power (Blackman 2008: 28). However, I am proposing that there are also other forms of powerful agency that do not involve overt opposition or critique.

Malkki writes that "one must recognise that a certain kind of power resides in objects and practices repeatedly and habitually dismissed as "the mere"" (Malkki 2015: 205). Like feminist thinkers Haraway and Braidotti, Malkki also suggests that we should expand our notion of the political (Malkki 2015: 205). While the act of bodily letting go may be dismissed as 'the mere' relaxing or resting of the body, I propose that through bodily letting go, a shift of values occurs in our whole being whereby we learn to let go, for instance, of the desire to control. This type of shift in value can have wide social implications for the dominant ways of being in a patriarchal jobholders’ society.

While resistance movements tend to direct their efforts against something or someone (Downey 2002: 26–27), Heidegger suggests that a letting be (Gelassenheit) and waiting (Warten) involves an openness that is not directed anywhere or at anything in specific (Heidegger 2010). As Arendt notes, resistance implies "efficient ways of action", whereas, Gelassenheit does not aim at efficiency or action as such and thus it results in pure calm (Arendt 1958: 201; Klemola 1990: 37). Bennett sees resistant force to be a "negative power or recalcitrance of things" and she wants to highlight also alternative forms of "positive, productive power" of humans and non-humans alike (Bennett 2010a: 1). According to Coole and Frost, the exponents of new materialism "generally decline to locate themselves explicitly through critiques" as they prefer to engage in a ‘creative affirmation of a new ontology’ (Coole and Frost 2010: 8). A bodily letting go is an affirmative act of calm rather than of negation.

When I ask U about the role that mestres play in capoeira angola, she replies:

They try to popularise it in the whole world. And they tried to do the same thing in Russia. But like in Russia it didn’t really work out. But generally, they’re very actively popularising it in the whole world. (U)

By 2016, as I was conducting the last period of fieldwork in Ufa and Samara, as well as interviews in St. Petersburg, the three groups had either withered away or changed style from angola to contemporânea. As I contacted an angoleiro from Vladivostok via Facebook, he replied that he has also distanced himself from the practice. One of the groups still had occasional capoeira angola trainings but with a very small amount
of participants ranging from two to five people. Later on, another group of angola, however, restarted its classes. Some angoleiros in Moscow apparently also continue to practise on a small-scale. "It (capoeira) rests on faith/trust. That is, if there is faith, the group lives, if it's not there, everything ends!" O argues. Angoleiros must believe in capoeira in order to keep practising it, according to this view.

The transnational practice of capoeira angola has not caught on very well within the Russian context. The small groups practising the angola style tend to pop-up and wither away rather than exist on a stable, permanent basis. The relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola are in many ways a temporary phenomenon that alternates in its intensity. The number of capoeira angola practitioners in Russia has remained very small throughout the 2000’s and 2010’s. Therefore, the groups certainly do not form a mass social movement. These are fragile initiatives. We can hardly speak of capoeira angola as an organised, resistance movement, in the Russian context. The few bodies interested in capoeira angola in Samara, St. Petersburg, Ufa and Nizhnii Novgorod do undergo, however, significant individual transformation:

Probably everything has drastically changed. All my views on life have changed. It gave a big push in life. How it was before – well, it was that I like would laze around or what, I sat in front of the computer and so… (W)

The initiatives made by capoeiristas in Russia often do not have a wide social impact, even when the practice of capoeira certainly leaves traces on the bodies of angoleiros.

He was doing it purely as an initiative. Initiative. That is, only an inner desire to do capoeira angola, nothing else. Here it’s just this, just a desire to do something. And that’s all. And that caught me, I felt resonance. So and that’s why I stayed there and started supporting him. (O)

Angoleiro O was attracted to capoeira angola because it was initiated by a person who was passionate about the practice, rather than about commercialising or spreading it. O’s words suggest that the organiser of the group had no ulterior motives other than simply to practise capoeira angola. Arendt believes in the worth of action carried out for its own sake, rather than as ‘useful’ means to ends that are often not thoroughly understood (Arendt 1958). O’s description of their organiser implies a kind of surrender to something about which it is likely that the organiser knew very little. Perhaps he had that faith in the practice that O mentions in his earlier quote. Once the faith started to crumble, the group disappeared, at least for a moment, to reappear later.

In many respects Russian bodies are embedded in a different historical-cultural-social-political environment to the colonised initiators of capoeira. Yet their motivation and hopes are perhaps in some ways very similar:

In any case, I had decided for myself that even if I won’t be an angoleiro, I won’t be super cool, won’t become at least well, a treinel – I’ll just be (someone) who gets pleasure out of it. I just enjoy it all by myself and don’t need anything (else). I don’t need some title, some honors. The most important thing for me is that I can do something … and that I would like it myself. (Y)
In his surrender from chasing titles and prestige in capoeira, Y seems to create space for something more important. Because he is not aiming at anything, not using the practice as a means, he is able to enjoy it as an end. Practising capoeira brings Y happiness that appears to be a rather intimate experience, not devoid of personal challenges and failures (Parviainen on intimacy of movement 2006: 229). Authors on capoeira note that the slaves played games of capoeira in order to divert and enjoy themselves (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008: 4, 14; Assunção 2005: 41). In his laughter, joking and joy, Y directly challenges oppressive hegemonies that exist in today's world by simply not participating in them. His playful disposition creates alternative ways of being in which force and rigid control have no role.

5.5 LAUGHTER

"There aren't many combat sports that have joy as an end and humour as a means", Dumoulié writes about capoeira (Dumoulié 2010: 20). Humour plays an important part in the bodily practice (Downey 2005: 79–80) and in the many capoeira classes that I have observed in Russia. Amidst the vast social scientific work being carried out on suffering, violence and other negative aspects of our embodied social lives, more positive aspects like laughter, which could also be explored critically, are frequently left undiscussed and unnoticed. Braidotti recommends that we pursue a new type of "ethics of joy and affirmation that functions through the transformation of negative into positive passions" (Braidotti 2013: 194).

Laughter is a thoroughly bodily activity. "A full laugh", notes Elias "runs through the whole person" (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 284). Our whole face alters when we laugh as the mouth broadens, the lower eyelids are raised, the teeth are shown (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 284–285). Our intestines shake and laughter may "involve movements of the arms and the trunk" (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 284). The act of laughter momentarily transforms how our body is in the world. In an Essay on Laughter, Elias notes that laughter has many dimensions and connotations as it can be a sign of love just as much as a sign of hatred (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 282). "We may laugh affectionately with someone and cruelly at someone", he writes (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 282). Laughter presents itself multi-sidedly within capoeira as bodies at times genuinely laugh together but at other times use humour to create a distraction from a sudden attack. "We are not ready for physical combat as long as we laugh", Elias suggests as he points out that our eyes tend to be half-closed when we are genuinely laughing, thus impairing our vision (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 285). A sincerely laughing body, according to Elias, is a non-violent body (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 288).

When we allow our bodies to be overcome with the physical reaction of laughter, Elias suggests, following the thoughts of Kant and Freud, we allow what is ordinarily repressed to break out momentarily and unintentionally to lift "the curtain of our controls" (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 295). In this way, laughter can be a revelation of what is usually hidden in us: "the rogue in us stands revealed" (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 295). Laughter can be seen as an act of revolt against self-control and self-restraint as it frees us from both external social constraints and the internal "voice of a master" (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 298). Such an interpretation suggests that laughter can be a spontaneous act of letting go, a body surrendering wholly into the present moment. Elias writes that "laughter certainly is not a rational act" and it is precisely
because of this that laughter can have such a refreshing effect on our whole being that is frequently "weakened and fatigued by the meditations of the intellect" (Elias & Parvulescu 2017: 289, 296). Laughter as a bodily movement has its own intelligence that reinvigorates our whole being.

"It's probably the saddest possible reaction. They took capoeira very seriously", says J as he describes the first reception of a capoeira angola mestre in his city in Russia. Taking capoeira angola too seriously is seen by J to be an antithesis to the logic of the practice that is filled with irony. Based on my observations, some classes of capoeira angola in Russia offer the freedom to play, joke and enjoy life. In my notes I wrote that one instructor "gives room for free play and enjoyment" to the participants (fieldnotes 4.3.2014). Following Irigaray's work, Rouhiainen uses the concept of 'compassionate teaching' to refer to bodily communication that transmits an experience through "open-ended encountering and play" (Rouhiainen 2015: 17). Compassionate teaching is one way in which some Russian capoeira instructors relate to the African-Brazilian practice and to their Russian students.

At another occasion during a class I noted how one female participant's laughter and jokes would light up the atmosphere as her dark brown eyes were alight when she smiled (fieldnotes 31.5.2016).

You got light in your eyes...
Eyes that light up, eyes look through you
(Talking Heads 1983)

The capoeira game is played "against the spirit of gravity and seriousness", notes Dumoulié (Dumoulié 2010: 14). It is this atmosphere that seems to be fertile for spontaneous initiatives and to keep them alive, at least for some time. "Well, our strengths are for sure that there is the game, lively game! Lots of little jokes (laughs), it's really interesting to play.", says B.

Jokes are frequently made during capoeira classes about the sweatiness, redness and the general exhaustion of the participants' bodies. "The most living being is he who came here last", a female participant said in reference to the physical tiredness of all the practitioners present, as everyone breathed heavily. Her comment made heavy breathing turn into laughter. (Fieldnotes 27.3.2014.) At times there would be uncontained laughter at the end of classes and rodas seemingly due to exhaustion. There is a custom in capoeira of commemorating someone's birthday by allowing the birthday hero to play with everyone present in the roda. Usually a body plays two or three games in a row, at most, in a roda but in the special case of birthdays one has the unlucky chance of playing many games in a row. The birthday hero usually gets very tired and almost unable to play by the end but because these are celebratory games, everyone plays with good humour and there tends to be a special air of kindness in birthday rodas. (Fieldnotes 20.3.2014.)

"Whoops, and we'll respond to your move with this kind of foot sweep". And everything is more, more interesting this way, more alive. (E)

The physical vibrancy and play of capoeira angola appears to render the bodies of its practitioners more alive. As P and I were looking through some photos of their capoeira group, P described the mood of one picture as: "Here it's something serious, no joking yet at this stage." It takes the voices and bodies to gradually warm up, the
energy to flow so to say, for the joking and laughter to gradually emerge in a capoeira class or roda.

*Capoeira brought some joy into my life. Well I wouldn’t say that before it everything was very sombre, it’s just that… Outlook on life becomes different. You become even more joyful and react differently to everything. Even when you break your arm it’s not that scary because you know that there are people who will support you.* (B)

B broke her arm during a capoeira class as she was practising a sequence with a male angoleiro and fell into an awkward position. Some of the capoeiristas drove her to the nearest hospital and after the class was over, I also joined them there. B did not have to wait for long to get a cast on her arm and by the time I got there she was all ready to go home. The only thing B wanted to do before leaving, was to change clothes so that she could say to her mother that she slipped on ice and fell on the street rather than injured herself during a capoeira training. B was worried that her mother would not allow her to go to capoeira classes anymore if she were to find out that it can cause such injuries. So B, Q and I went into the women’s toilet and helped her change out of the capoeira uniform. With the cast on her arm it was challenging to put on some tight winter layers onto B’s body. We kept laughing there in the hospital toilet at the physical awkwardness of the situation. Even though B had just broken her arm, she was cheerful.

Before coming to capoeira, A used to practise aikido. She describes how the atmosphere of her aikido classes differed from that of capoeira angola:

> Without any of those kinds of emotions, enthusiastic upheavals, talks, games. There (in aikido) once the sensei33 let’s say shows an exercise and everyone meanwhile sits on their knees, listens carefully, watching. And then starts the polishing of movements where in general there’s no talking, just this exchange of technique. Of course, there again sitting down, listening to sensei further, looking at his – how he shows the next exercises. And there’s no such socialising as there’s in capoeira. (A)

Compared also to other styles of capoeira, capoeira angola arguably includes more trickery and joking in the physical game, at least according to one instructor in Russia. This is where G interprets the difference to lie between angola and other capoeira styles:

> More emotions. Namely the game goes, how to say, not only with the body yeah but (it’s) also a psychological game. In other styles there’s a bit less of it. I wouldn’t say that there isn’t any, there is also this humour and jokes, these: mandinga, malicia… like these qualities. But for us they exist practically 50/50. Meaning the movements of the body and psychology. Sometimes there is even very little bodily movement but (a lot) of this game. (G)

In capoeira angola unlike in some other bodily practices, such as yoga or zazen, one is rarely free from role playing. Letting go of all disguises, is not desirable within a capoeira angola game (Heidegger on transparency in front of others 1962: 162, 167).

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33 'A teacher' in Japanese.
In fact, the practice of capoeira is constituted by the constant masquerading of one's body, its emotions, thoughts and intentions (Lewis 1992: 94–95). In this way, the practice of capoeira does not allow bodies to reveal themselves as they are but rather encourages the player to put on the disguise of a cunning angoleiro whose body is relaxed yet unexpectedly violent, when needed. Klemola discusses how on the contrary, the Japanese practice of zen trains the body-mind to drop all role playing, to let go of all excess (Klemola 2004: 225).

Out of the different classes of capoeira I observed in Russia, it is particularly Y’s children’s classes that are filled with all sorts of play. During one class that Y and another male angoleiro held together on a Sunday, I described the children being engaged in: “Lots of acrobatics, lying around, playing and joking with friends”, making and inventing “theatrical moves, sounds, gestures… focusing for a minute, then being distracted again” (fieldnotes 24.11.2013). While in children’s classes emotional expression would not infrequently range from laughter to tears, adult capoeiristas only allowed themselves to display the range from laughter to serious. Adult capoeiristas embody more thoroughly a jobholder’s bodily and emotional self-management that was discussed in the previous chapter.

Y himself has a theatrical way of playing capoeira. In one of the classes he was standing in front of the mirror exaggeratingly moving his arms with seemingly unending energy (fieldnotes 25.3.2014). At the beginning of a children’s class at 6 p.m. on a hot evening, Y tried for a long time to turn on the air-conditioning in the room and when he finally succeeded, he joyfully exclaimed “Ooooh, I did it! How cool am I!”, with a hue of self-irony (fieldnotes 26.5.2016). Laughing and being joyful in capoeira is not synonymous with being naïve. The importance of not being gullible is frequently stressed in capoeira trainings (Downey 2002: 123). The bodies in a game of capoeira do not let go completely as a game of capoeira angola combines light playfulness with calculating malícia.

Angola – I like mandinga and the interaction of the game, this charm yeah? Difficult transitions, sequences, all these chess-like positions, lies, cunningness… In that there are many sides to angola. (Y)

In reference to nomadic subjects, Braidotti writes that they engage in “joyful acts of disobedience and gentle but resolute betrayal” (Braidotti 2006: 203). This is a very apt description also of how capoeiristas’ bodies act during a game and potentially, beyond it in their daily lives. During a November class, when teaching a sequence, the instructor said “after all, there is no aggression here, only cunningness” (fieldnotes 23.11.2013).

When he was younger, J would play street football and basketball in his city: “In street basketball if you’re playing soft or well, gently, you’re going to get an elbow in your face, that’s it. If you don’t close your body, it’s the same thing.” J makes a parallel between closing the body in capoeira as a protection from a hit to describing his basketball experiences with the same term of a ‘closed body’.

Well, I played mainly in the streets and that’s why… it was always very quite rough. And it reminded me that when you’re playing with some person you need to show him your strength without getting too personal. And he also shows his strength but you’re not fighting. Because really, one careless move and a fight might break out just then and there. Well, it’s all somewhere on the edge there. (J)
While there is plenty of humour in many capoeira angola games and songs, it is not always gentle and kind, or as J describes it: "it is Brazilian cruel humour". Relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola are interchangeably characterised by benevolent and by cruel laughter.

Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak portrays in his ethnography how some strands of the late Soviet youth were closely familiar with "cruel humour" of their own, as they celebrated the everyday absurdities of Soviet life in late 1970's and 1980's Leningrad. The Soviet youth and their peculiar humour described by Yurchak embraced spontaneity and risk as much as unhealthy eating and drinking habits, and the staging of absurd and often violent provocations. (Yurchak 2005: 238–281.) Y who is experientially familiar with the drunk male company from his earlier youth, points out how a group of angoleiros differs from his earlier circles of friends:

> When I came to capoeira, obviously I saw many positive people, yeah? That is when we can smile also without beer yeah, and (without) cigarettes. Not during nights in front of some apartment building staircase but playing and developing one’s body and spirit, yeah? When guys get a kick in their face and smile, hugging afterwards, that’s very pleasant. It gives you strength. (Y)

The humour and laughter of young men hanging out on the streets is often dependent on the inebriation of their bodies, according to Y. In contrast, bodies in capoeira classes are sober and are able to respond to aggression with smiles and even hugs after a game of capoeira.

Like some other capoeiristas, U also notes how the consumption of alcohol in order to have a good time became less compelling with the practice of capoeira. As I ask U what is the purpose of a capoeira game if it is not competition, she replies:

> A good way of spending time (laughs). Well, that is, it’s true, I mean… it’s you know, when, well, it happens when people come to a club yeah, get drunk yeah, have fun, well – how to put it? – enjoy themselves. But at that point when you start practising capoeira, you realise that you don’t want to go to a club and have fun drinking but you want to go and participate in a roda. Because it’s cool how there are these same emotions, joy, I don’t know… (U)

A class or a *roda* of capoeira can provide similar emotional experiences to dancing, drinking alcohol in a club, yet while remaining sober.

A game of capoeira "turns the world inside out, ass to the air, exalting the low and demeaning the high" (Dumoulié 2010: 16). The movements of capoeira angola at least turn the Western aesthetics and ways of being in the body upside down. "The humor of capoeira consists of inverting the codes and techniques of white combat: legs versus arms, feet versus hands, high versus low." (Dumoulié 2010: 16). The bodily practice of capoeira might have a peculiar logic of its own but the affect that it produces can be reminiscent of spending a night out dancing with friends or joking on the street corners while sipping beer, as Y’s and U’s accounts illustrate.

> Well, a game is just necessary in capoeira because capoeira is movement, it is a movement for freedom. And if you are free you, well, you look at the world more optimistically, you don’t inhibit yourself. (B)
Like the consumption of alcohol that can momentarily remove inhibitions set by social values and norms, the body moving and singing in capoeira occasionally enables one to free up from inhibitions. Klemola writes that play can provide an experience of freedom in that it enables one momentarily to let go of daily routines (Klemola 1990: 71).

During one outdoor training-session two instructors, N and R, were playing together, talking and joking at the same time (fieldnotes 1.7.2013). K and Y would make each other laugh in a game in another city, time and place (fieldnotes 13.3.2014). Such classes would feel fuller, with laughter and the participants' sheer presence in comparison to classes where participants would be mostly tired. During the more serious capoeira classes, there would be a feeling of emptiness as if everyone was in their own mental worlds, not quite bodily present. In this sense, humour is a collective attribute that brings us in contact with others. If the class is 'good' – that is: full of energy – then the laughter usually continues also after the class in various forms of teasing and story-telling. As V was changing her clothes after training in a park R would tease her "Well, show me some more!" as V was momentarily revealing skin while changing (fieldnotes 14.6.2013). "No one seemed to want to get up and out at the end of the class", I wrote about the participants of another group as they remained sitting in a circle in a large dance studio after their training (fieldnotes 22.11.2013).

O describes one of his favorite songs in capoeira by comparing it to Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy'. The song is called 'Parana É' and it is one of the best-known and most often repeated songs among capoeira practitioners worldwide. O suggests that the song is the anthem of capoeira, just as the Ode is the official anthem of the European Union:

_Here, the melody itself, and the choir, it’s – joy. It’s easy to sing, it’s beautiful and simple. And that’s why it became the anthem. And that’s why everyone knows and loves it. (O)_

If joy appeals to O and makes him want to practise capoeira, egocentricity within the practice puts him off: "I don’t like that capoeira angola tends to, it tends to develop ego", O says. Metcalfe and Game propose that we imagine ecological instead of egoistic beings (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 305). "Genuine ecological responsibility arises not from a subject but from this relational form of being." (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 306). Laughter is one way of letting go of the ego in an act of not taking oneself, one's ego, too seriously. Laughter can resist "praise, flattery, hypocrisy" and in this way it can defeat "human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions", according to philosopher and critic Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin on medieval laughter 1984: 90–93).

Spontaneous initiatives seem to require a certain letting go, a receptivity towards the new, such as "the most unusual idea – capoeira angola here in Russia, here in Ufa, during the winter", as T puts it. A response to something unexpected cannot be planned in advance. It is a spontaneous, "an open state of being" (Metcalfe and Game 2014: 301). The recognition that it is not only our egos that are active and transformative in this world is a humbling realisation for subject-centric thinking. Orlie notes that with the birth of a self-fixated ego there is the danger of losing a "fuller range of experience", and Tavi writes: "when our life is filled with our own ego, there is no room for anything else" (Orlie 2010: 124; Tavi 2014: 82).
Plenty is written in body studies today on the significance of sheer movement and the process of becoming (e.g. Blackman 2008: 135). In this way, restlessness and unending directedness is being glorified. Scharff writes that the neoliberal "entrepreneurial self is in a constant mode of becoming". Her article suggests that no matter how active a neoliberal subject is, she or he is never quite finished with managing her- or himself. (Scharff 2016: 112.) Such neoliberal becoming deprives its subjects from ever feeling satisfied. Instead of purposes, materiality is set in motion by "emptiness, contingency, and chance" (Coole & Frost 2010: 35). Materiality is in a constant state of letting go, empty, waiting without goals, being open and receptive, whereas the Western imagination is used to accumulating, holding on, achieving, acting purposefully without necessarily having the time or capacity to pause, genuinely listen and to be receptive to what already is.

Y, who as a teenager had difficulties simply speaking to strangers, now says: "We live how we play, right? That is, we can change our lives with the game. That is, through interaction with other people we transform our relationships, we consequently transform ourselves." Through relationality, bodies and practices are mutually transformed. Laughter is one of the connections that moves between the practice of capoeira angola and its practitioners. Russian bodies like Y come up with new ways of joking through capoeira, with Russian language puns, expressions and bodily gestures. Capoeira brings new ways of enjoying one's free time in Russia, that do not necessarily involve alcohol, loud music and staying up all night. Laughter in capoeira angola is usually not naïve but rather ironic, like Y's sarcasm that I have often observed and laughed at in capoeira classes.

No chains around my feet,
But I'm not free!
I know I am bound here in captivity
...
Still, I'll be always laughing like a clown
Won't someone help me?
(Bob Marley 1978)

"No reason to get excited,"
The thief – he kindly spoke,
"There are many here among us
Who feel that life is but a joke
But you and I we've been through that
And this is not our fate
So let us not talk falsely now
The hour's getting late."
(Bob Dylan 1967)
5.6 WHO KNOWS? NOT ME.

"We never lost control. You’re face to face. With the Man Who Sold the World." (David Bowie 1970.) We are now very concretely face to face with a struggling world that has been ‘sold’ primarily by the Western man in his dualist, mind-versus-matter, frenzy for ‘evolutionary Progress’, so-called development and capitalist growth. It has been "the savagery of European conquest", as Tsing expresses it, that has brought us to the current unsustainable state of the world (Tsing 2005: 6). The man who sold the world wanted never to lose control of his rational, calculative thinking, yet instead, he has lost so much more. Human activities have induced thousands of plant and animal species to become extinct at an accelerated rate during the past 2000 years (Ceballos et al. 2015). It is our sisters and brothers, as Hemingway would put it, whose lives have been lost. In the pursuit of more diverse experiences that Latour advocates (Latour 2004), we have in fact ended up with less organic diversity in our world.

You might win some but you just lost one
...
Gain the whole world for the price of your soul
Tryin to grab hold of what you can’t control
...
Wisdom is better than silver and gold
...
Every man wanna act like he’s exempt
Need to get down on his knees and repent
Can’t slick talk on the day of judgment
Your movement’s similar to a serpent
 Tried to play straight, how your whole style bent?
Consequence is no coincidence
(Lauryn Hill 1998b)

Virtually all of our relations, as those between bodies and practices, are defined by the troubled context of late capitalism. It is long overdue to stop selling the world.

New materialist minded thinkers like Coole and Frost note that “recent developments” in our late modernity “call upon us to reorient ourselves profoundly in relation to the world, to one another, and to ourselves” (Coole & Frost 2010: 6). Our relations must be radically transformed in order to move beyond the hierarchical master-slave model. It is the idea that man is the master of nature, women and all ‘others’ that has largely led us to the current environmental crisis. (Irigaray 2017.) Our sense of human control and mastery of materiality is an illusion, a fantasy, according to Bennett (Bennett 2010a). It is crucial not only for bodies and practices to relate intersubjectively but also for bodies and the environment to re-establish horizontal relations.

The practice of research can transform our relations to the environment and ‘others’. Cyclical ethnographic research constantly returns the ethnographer to the field, to reading social theories, to writing, in a process that is nevertheless more like a spiral than a full circle. An ethnographer never returns quite to the same field, with the same emotions, impressions and expectations as before. Each social scientific text is read in an accumulated manner as everything previously read impacts what is to come and how it is received. With each return, the ethnographer is on the one hand
back in the same place yet on the other hand nothing is the same there any longer, just like a spiraling movement brings us back with a twist. The ethnographic return is not a return to the starting point but a return to something new.

The historical and transnational movement of capoeira has also spiralled. The practice travelled from Western Africa to Brazil; it spread internationally to places like Samara, and from there a young woman has recently taken capoeira to a small Angolan village, where she has told the locals about a practice they had never heard of before. The practice returns to Africa through the most surprising avenues like that of a white, female Russian body. Despite our many controlling mechanisms that aim to appropriate certain practices to certain types of bodies or vice versa, the unexpected, uncontrollable, constantly occurs and surprises us. It is not solely an African-Brazilian male mestre who returns capoeira angola to its alleged roots in Angola, it is also a young Russian female. "Our most important instructor N (laughs) who has contributed to the development of capoeira angola not only here in Samara, but also in Russia and now she has even already travelled to Angola to open up a group! (laughs)“, A jokingly says this as N has in fact travelled to Angola primarily to work as a Portuguese-Russian translator. "The contribution of women is very strong", A nevertheless continues.

This dissertation contributes to feminist and postcolonialist thought by bringing forth the agency of young Russian women. It is from an initiative of two women in Moscow that capoeira angola emerged in Russia. Women play a key role in enabling the interaction of Russian bodies and capoeira angola in Samara, Ufa, St. Petersburg and Nizhni Novgorod, even though women are not expected to take up leadership positions in the neotraditional Russian context. The ethnography illustrates how practitioners of bodily practices, such as capoeira angola, share goals with postcolonial and feminist thinkers. Angoleiros disobey and at times betray Western patriarchal norms with their moving bodies and voices.

This monograph that variously critiques a mass, jobholding, late capitalist society contributes to feminist body research by focusing primarily on relations rather than on entities (paraphrasing Marder 2014: 228). While Western patriarchal epistemology has focused on subjects and objects, feminist thinkers like Irigaray propose a turn towards relations. This dissertation furthers such feminist calls by exploring relations through a specific empirical case. A small sample of participants places a focus on the quality of relations rather than on their scope and social impact.

Transformation of bodies in capoeira angola occurs through relationality with others. Interaction, not isolation, causes the bodies-minds to change. It is through the bodies of distant others that Russian practitioners begin to sense the muscles of their own backs and to perceive the world upside down for the first time in their lives. Combining phenomenology of body with an ethnography of a bodily practice enables us to notice the transnational, intercultural currents that influence and alter our perception. An ethnographic case allows us to see the workings of phenomenological claims in concrete bodies. My study highlights the uniqueness of each body in its relationality to practice. Capoeira angola movements and music are experienced differently in each practitioner’s body depending on her or his family background, upbringing, location and multiple other factors that have been discussed throughout the ethnography.

In cultural terms, as a Russian migrant, I produce knowledge about the body and capoeira from the periphery of the West. A marginal position enables a researcher to critically explore Western ideals such as, order. It is important for body studies to explore non-Western empirical cases – those carried out by non-Western researchers
and those focusing on non-Western phenomena – in order to expand and enrich interdisciplinary understanding of body. One way in which the methodology of ethnography is exceptionally valuable is in enabling us to notice, study and discuss alternative bodies and practices in the nuances of daily life that would otherwise go unnoticed. Ethnography allows us to ponder about the humbler aspects of our social reality that go beyond sensationalist, much repeated discourses, by bringing our attention to places, beings and practices that are usually framed as peripheral or unimportant.

This ethnography adds a new case study to anthropology of body and dance by describing and analysing how a particular holistic practice of Western and Central African and Brazilian origins is interpreted in the Russian context. By describing the historical and socio-economic backgrounds of Russian bodies, this ethnography shows that white capoeiristas do not form a transnationally homogenous group.

This dissertation adds new perspectives on anthropology and particularly on feminist ethnography by proposing a certain position for a female ethnographer. One way of being Simmel’s ‘stranger’ in a late capitalist patriarchal society is by adopting the position of ‘an idler’. A female ethnographer can be simultaneously productive and free in this position. In a labour intensive context in which bodies are constantly tense and nervous, it is emancipating and fruitful to let go into the nearness of one’s own body. I propose that feminist ethnographers embrace the aspects of freedom and creativity that fieldwork offers to them. Following Ahmed, I highlight that an ethnographer is engaged in a bodily practice, also when she or he carries out theoretical work. The work of body researchers would benefit if we were to pay more attention to our own bodies in daily lives. As an example, we could further consider: how does the unique body of each feminist ethnographer influences her work?

Feminist ethnography can be written in a spiral-like form so as to reflect particular feminist thought (e.g. Braidotti, Haraway, Irigaray) as well as the inductive methods of ethnography. The vegetal world, from which thinkers like Irigaray and practices like capoeira angola receive their inspiration, moves in cyclical ways much like a body of a woman that follows a monthly cycle. Ethnographic research similarly, as I already noted, advances in a spiral-like movement. It is for these reasons that I wrote the dissertation in a non-linear fashion. For instance, the spaces where capoeira angola is practised in Russia are intentionally described in this last chapter so as to avoid a linear narrative. Intersubjective relations – unlike slave-master relations – do not occur one-directionally but rather move freely back and forth like breath.

This ethnography offers situated knowledge rather than alleged ‘universal knowledge’ that has been offered by patriarchal thought. Rather than describing, for example, the Russian setting in universalising terms, I focus on descriptions of specific moments and scenes. This study also furthers feminist and phenomenological thought that critiques Western patriarchal vision and speech centric narratives (e.g. Irigaray 2002a; Sheets-Johnstone 1999: xvi). I have described specific living, proprioceptive bodies without reducing them to looks, language, speech and the sense of sight. Instead it is bodily movement, internal senses, stillness, silence and slowness of capoeira angola that are at the forefront of this study. Such a focus provides new data and analysis on both capoeira and bodily experiences of young Russians.

This work contributes to phenomenology of body by providing an unusual empirical example of how an African-Brazilian practice holistically transforms some Russian bodies-minds. My empirical data supports phenomenological observations that repeated movement of body transforms one’s whole being, including one’s
perception. Despite some arguments among capoeira practitioners in Brazil that white Westerners cannot genuinely embody *ginga* or the cunningness required in capoeira, I have tried to illustrate here with empirical examples that the bodily, affective, aspects of the capoeira practice do gradually become a part of also Russian, white, both female and male, bodies. Our beings and preconceptions are malleable as a young female in Ufa who might not know anything about African-Brazilian culture, begins to move in ways reminiscent of African zebras and Brazilian banana trees.

Transnational material impacts body-practice relations. On the one hand, some Russian bodies say that the practice of capoeira liberates them from ‘digital slavery’. On the other hand, the bodies rely on the Internet for finding capoeira groups, staying in touch with other practitioners and learning from online videos. Screens are as essential for the transnational practice of capoeira angola as are the *berimbau* and *atabaque*. The places of practice play an important material role in the relationality of capoeira angola and Russian bodies. How bodies interact is mediated by a concrete gym, park, beach or yoga studio and all of its attributes. The impact of specific places is an important ethnographic and new materialist addition to phenomenological thought on body which frequently considers experiences of body as if they occur in a vacuum.

This ethnography provides empirical examples of how Russian bodies experience themselves to be more alive and energetic through the non-Western practice of capoeira angola. I discuss body’s energy through an intercultural perspective in a way that challenges new materialist thought. While Western new materialists suggest that the conceptualisation of matter in terms of vibrancy and interconnection is new, I have included African and Eastern thought to indicate that this is not the case. This work sets various outlooks on body in relation with each other. For example, I explore phenomenologist and new materialist works from a postcolonialist perspective and I point out similarities between the methodologies of ethnography and phenomenology. Theoretical perspectives on matter and relations differ but this does not mean that they need to oppose one another (paraphrasing Irigaray 1996a: 20).

In this final chapter, I have brought the reader’s attention to the fruitfulness of a bodily letting go, be it in a capoeira class or elsewhere. Letting go into the nearness of our bodies can be an alternative mode to the more dominant one today of orienting ourselves forcefully in all directions in order allegedly to control the world. Y compares evasion in capoeira to finding one’s way in everyday life: “You just go and evade and you realise that in fact when you evade, go in that direction in which you want to, that it’s all much more productive”. Rather than further clash with and criticise the patriarchal capitalist mindset here, I would rather evade, as Y puts it, the very logic of forcefulness with the alternative of a letting go.

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Approaching the end of this dissertation we may perhaps now be in a position to return to something new in the light of the previous chapters. How do the African-Brazilian practice of capoeira angola and the bodies that practise it in Russia relate to one another? The practice and the bodies relate to each other much like two players interacting in an improvised game of capoeira angola. In both cases, two subjects act spontaneously, not according to a script. Capoeira angola initiatives in Russia usually emerge unplanned. Even the act of entering a first capoeira angola class often seems to be a spontaneous initiative that the mind fails to explain. For W, a new window
popped up on his computer screen that advertised capoeira classes and he saw this as a sign that he should attend the classes:

*It totally randomly popped up on my desktop. And here, for some reason, I started thinking: well, I thought, since it popped up it means something should be done. I found G’s contact information and called him. (W)*

*I came over, I came spontaneously. I was late for the beginning of training by ten minutes because… well, the journey from work there takes quite a bit of time. I looked, everyone was training, everyone is practising. G came up to me, said hello, we introduced ourselves. He said to join the warm-up. (P)*

*I immediately really liked the movements. Just, immediately. This, I realised, this is something for me. (O)*

*My body said: “Hey dude! You came to where you need to be.” I, I’m in my element. (E)*

"Where it will go at any moment, what will happen next, no one knows", Sheets-Johnstone writes about dance improvisation (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 485). The same can be said about the relations between Russian bodies and capoeira angola. While doing fieldwork in Russia I gradually learned that I cannot know what the capoeiristas will do next, what kinds of twists and turns their practice will take.

Just as the surrounding instruments, songs and audience influence the game of two capoeiristas, the relations between capoeira angola and Russian bodies are influenced by their socio-cultural surroundings. Bodies and practice find themselves in a late capitalist society that is patriarchal and increasingly transnationally connected via technology. Like the *roda* that brings capoeiristas physically together, the Internet transnationally connects Russian bodies and capoeira angola online. Even though the Russian bodies relate to capoeira in an inter-cultural way that crosses national boundaries, this does not usually mean that the bodies are transnationally mobile.

Intersubjective relations are suppressed in a patriarchal society (Irigaray 1996a). The relations between capoeira angola and Russian bodies reflect this state. At times, the Russian bodies appropriate the African-Brazilian practice and its culture for their own pleasure or profit. The aim of the bodies is not always to understand and to practise capoeira angola as accurately as possible. In turn, the practice does not treat all bodies equally. For example, white, non-Brazilian women are not viewed as equal subjects to Brazilian men within the capoeira angola community. The relations discussed in this ethnography are not the ideal Irigarayan relations between two non-hierarchically different subjects. The discussed practice and bodies relate intersubjectively only when they let go of the desire to control and dominate the other. When Russian bodies surrender to the movements and sounds of capoeira they allow the practice to be a subject that guides them. When the practice of capoeira angola accepts new types of bodies to sit next to old *mestres* and play the berimbau in a *roda*, it allows foreign bodies to become subjects who develop the practice in unique ways. Intersubjectivity requires that breathing space is granted to each subject – an opportunity to act according to one’s own, unique identity.

A researcher can create breathing space for oneself and others with one’s work within a rather suffocating context of late capitalism. The researcher can open new positions for oneself, such as the position of an idle feminist ethnographer. A female
ethnographer can choose topics and locations that are marginal in a patriarchal setting so as to create space for new types of subjects in academic thought. A researcher can also focus on subtle aspects of a living body that bring attention to our inner and quiet experiences. Moreover, a thinker creates new types of intersubjective relations by bringing theorists from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds together in a non-hierarchical way. "A living communication with the other" defies the past – its symbols, concepts and norms (Irigaray 2002b: 84). In these many ways a researcher can support the emergence of intersubjective relations with one's own daily conduct.

A different other can define us in new ways. Russian angoleiros re-interpret and redefine capoeira angola with their white, northern bodies and their socio-cultural histories. Capoeira angola transforms and redefines Russian bodies with its tropical, African-Brazilian socio-cultural heritage. Capoeira angola and Russian bodies "are engaged in a relationship from which they emerge altered" (Irigaray 1996a: 127). Changes in relations, beings and practices often occur when and where they are least expected. The most unusual combinations of places, people and practices can reveal new ways of relating in the world.
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Songs

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. DESCRIPTIVE NOTES’ CATEGORIES 1.

Space
Actors
Activity
Objects
Acts
Events
Time
Goal
Feeling

What are all the kinds of action34?

What are all the kinds of speech?

---

34The various ways in which capoeiristas ‘insert themselves into the world’ (Arendt 1958: 176).
APPENDIX B. DESCRIPTIVE NOTES’ CATEGORIES 2.

Time
Space
Feelings (also temperature)
Smells
Sounds
Words
Voice
Touch
Colours
Gestures
Facial expressions
Other Movements
Shapes
Objects
Actors
Moods
Textures
APPENDIX C. LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Информированное согласие

Контактные данные исследователя:
Татьяна Липияйнен
Отдел Социальных Наук, XXX, XXX Joensuu, Финляндия
Тел. +358 XXX, Email: XXX

Тема исследования:
«Этнография Капоэйры Анголы в России». Докторское исследование об Африкансо-Бразильском искусстве и его интерпретациях в нескольких Российских городах. Целью проекта является исследование (этнографическими способами) спонтанных инициатив в контексте современной России, в форме групп капоэйры анголы. Данная тема также рассматривает более широкие теории глобализации и культурного космополитизма.

Способы и период сбора данных:
Эмпирические данные будут собраны исследователем используя наблюдения, участие на тренировках капоэйры и интервью с капоэйристами. Письменные заметки будут сделаны вовремя и после наблюдений. Интервью будут записаны на диктофон, а затем транслитерированы. Фото и видео съемки будут также использованы. Все данные будут собраны в течение четырех лет. Максимальная длительность сбора данных не превысит одного месяца за раз.

Использование и хранение собранных данных:
Эмпирические данные будут изучаться одновременно теоретическими основами. Данные, собранные в России будут проанализированы и сравнены между собой, а также в сравнении с разными теориями социальных наук. Анонимные цитаты участников будут использованы в окончательной диссертации. Все данные будут надежно храниться в личном офисе исследователя в Университете Восточной Финляндии, в Йоенсуу.

Участие в исследовании является полностью добровольным. Анонимность участников будет сохранена используя псевдонимы. Участники могут решать, какие данные могут быть использованы для научного исследования и публикаций, таким способом гарантируя конфиденциальность.

На основании этого описания исследования, я согласна/согласен принять участие в данном исследовании.

Имя:
Дата и место:
Подпись:
Informed Consent

Researcher's contact information:
Tatjana Lipiäinen
The Department of Social Sciences, XXX, XXX Joensuu, Finland
Phone: +358 XXX, Email: XXX

Research theme:
"Ethnography of Capoeira Angola in Russia". Doctoral research on an African-Brazilian art-form and its interpretations in several Russian cities. The aim of the project is to research (using ethnographic means) spontaneous initiatives of capoeira angola groups in the context of contemporary Russia. The given theme also explores wider theories of globalisation and cultural cosmopolitanism.

Data collection:
Empirical data will be collected by the researcher using observation, participation in classes of capoeira and interviews with capoeiristas. Written notes will be taken during and after observations. Interviews will be voice recorded and transliterated. Photos and video recordings will also be collected. All data will be collected in the period of four years. The maximum duration of data collection will not exceed one month per visit.

The use and storage of collected data:
The empirical data will be examined simultaneously with theoretical readings. The data collected in Russia will be analysed and compared in the light of various social scientific theories. In the final dissertation, anonymous citations of the participants will be used. All data will be safely stored in the personal office of the researcher, at the University of Eastern Finland, in Joensuu.

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. The anonymity of participants will be preserved with the use of pseudonyms. Participants can decide which data may be used for research purposes and in publications, in this way, guaranteeing the confidentiality of data.

Based on the description of research, I agree to participate in this research.

Name:

Date and place:

Signature:

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35 Translation of the original document in Russian.
APPENDIX D. EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (2016).

Full name  
Age  
Place of birth  
Education  
Profession  
Hobbies  

For how long have you practised capoeira? And capoeira angola?  
When and where did you first hear about/ see capoeira?  
Do you know how capoeira came to Russia and St. Petersburg?  
Who was the first angoleiro here?  

How do you describe capoeira angola to your friends or family members who do not practise it?  
Are you familiar with the history/ origins of capoeira?  
What role do mestres/ your mestre has in capoeira angola?  
What role do women have in capoeira angola?  

Could you describe your first class/classes of capoeira angola?  
What were your first impressions of and experiences in the art-form?  
Who was the instructor and what was her/his teaching style like?  

What is your favourite movement in capoeira?  
What is your favourite instrument?  
What is your favourite song?  
What do you dislike about capoeira?  

What does the word 'tradition' mean to you?  
Why do you practice capoeira angola?
This dissertation focuses on relations between African-Brazilian capoeira angola and Russian bodies. The study is an outcome of ethnographic research. Participant observation and interviews were carried out in Russia between 2012 and 2016. Feminist theories, anthropology of body and dance, phenomenology and new materialism are the main theoretical perspectives. Russian bodies and capoeira angola relate to each other in ways that both follow and defy the logic of late capitalist patriarchy.