UC Davis
UC Davis Previously Published Works

Title
Between repetition and variation: a musical performance of malícia in capoeira

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3r56x546

Journal
Ethnomusicology Forum, 26(1)
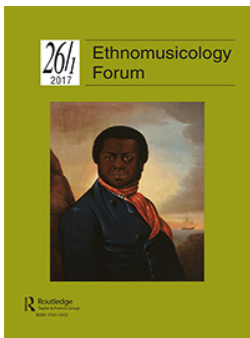
ISSN
1741-1912

Author
Diaz, Juan Diego

Publication Date
2017-01-02

DOI
10.1080/17411912.2017.1309297

Peer reviewed

Between repetition and variation: a musical performance of malícia in capoeira

Juan Diego Diaz

Published online: 24 Apr 2017.

Submit your article to this journal ⃗

Article views: 38

View related articles ⃗

View Crossmark data ⃗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Between repetition and variation: a musical performance of *malícia* in capoeira

Juan Diego Diaz

University of Essex, Colchester, UK

ABSTRACT

The physical expression of Brazilian capoeira features an intriguing combination of playfulness and aggression that practitioners navigate with *malícia*—the ability to be deceptive. Expressions of *malícia* in capoeira include attitudes, utterances or actions devised to confuse, distract or mislead the opponent and onlookers, resulting in an improvement of one's position during the physical game. This article explores musical structures connected to *malícia* and argues that in promoting competition between those engaged in the physical game, musicians bring *malícia* to the foreground of the musical domain. Because capoeira's music is groove based and patterned at all levels of structure, this study uses periodicity and variation as the main categories of analysis, focusing on how musicians, singers and those playing the physical game manipulate or relate to patterns, variations and tempo at different levels of structure in order to display *malícia*.

It was a hot afternoon in Bomfim village, in the Recôncavo Bahiano, northeastern Brazil. The most exciting capoeira games were over. Everyone was tired and hungry, the choir was singing with less energy, and the performance was losing momentum. Mestre Cobrinha took a *berimbau* (musical bow) and started to sing 'Lalai laila', to which everyone responded loudly, 'Lalai la'. The music rapidly became faster. Cobrinha switched to one of the most popular songs, 'Paranaûe', while improvising on his *berimbau*. Not only was the response of the choir louder, but the movements of the players in the middle of the circle became more intense, their eyes shone, and their faces smiled. Mestre Cabello, one of the players, locked his steps to the beat. His opponent mirrored Mestre Cabello and both looked more relaxed and confident. Suddenly Mestre Cabello disrupted his pattern and executed a sweep with his leg over the other player, putting him on the floor. Mestre Cobrinha celebrated by singing 'Baraúna caiu, quanto mais eu' (If a big tree fell down, I would too). By then dozens of onlookers were congregated around the circle singing, yelling, and laughing. The master sang two more songs and closed the performance. (Capoeira performance at Bomfim, Bahia, August 2009)

The physical expression of Brazilian capoeira may appear to the lay observer as a playful dance that suddenly transforms into dangerous combat, or vice versa. But this is only the surface: most *capoeiristas* [capoeira practitioners] characterise the art as both dance and

combat, or as neither, and they develop specific techniques to navigate a blurred line between playfulness and aggression—or better, to inhabit a space where the two co-exist. The ability to be deceptive and unpredictable while playing capoeira is one of these techniques and is a central feature of the art. Practitioners use the terms *mandinga*, *malandragem* and especially *malícia* (which I will use hereafter), each with different con-notations. Expressions of *malícia* in capoeira include any attitude, utterance or action devised to confuse, distract, mislead or deceive the expectations of the opponent and onlookers, resulting in the improvement of one's position during the *jogo* [game], as prac-titioners refer to the physical expression of the art.

In an iconic study of deception in capoeira, anthropologist Lowell Lewis wrote that 'the domain of physical interaction foregrounds combat and malícia, in most cases, while aspects of harmony and cooperation, no less necessary to the ethic of deception, usually remain in the background' (1992: 103). He contrasts this with the musical domain where 'this configuration of patent/latent tends to be reversed … solidarity is necessary for the normal interaction of instrumentalists and singers, and malícia recedes into the background' (ibid.). While agreeing with Lewis' premise that cooperation is generally more overt in capoeira's musical interactions, here I argue that in promoting competition between *jogadores* [those participating in the physical game], musicians engage in a great deal of deceptive behaviour, bringing *malícia* to the foreground of the musical domain. This is evident in the strategic use of song text (e.g., 'quero ver cair' [I want to see someone fall down]), or codified *berimbau* rhythms that *capoeiristas* associate with combative ways of playing. However, I focus on a less studied form of musical *malícia* that manifests itself at structural level: manipulations and reinterpretations of periodic patterns in the instrumental music and songs.

Why periodicity? Capoeira music and dance are patterned at all levels of structure. For instance, the capoeira groove is formed by patterns that repeat in a cyclic manner. Most songs are responsorial and the ones that are not have strophic form with rhythmic–melodic formulas of more or less fixed length. The dance has a periodic step called *ginga*, a synchronised movement of arms and legs that makes the body sway from side to side over a period of four or six beats. Like in all groove-based music, some patterns in capoeira remain virtually unchanged while others may vary. This coexisting repetition and variation allows musicians to control the flow and is fundamental for the performance of *malícia*. As Lewis notes: '*malícia* cannot function without at least some cooperation in establishing a pattern in the first place. If no pattern is set up, if no conventions are at place, there is nothing to interrupt and there cannot be expectations to foil' (1992: 103). Like collaboration and competition, repetition and variation are complementary in capoeira and ideally balanced.

This discussion explores how practitioners manipulate instrumental, song and dance cyclic patterns and their variations in the context of a capoeira performance. My central questions are: first, how *capoeiristas* relate to periodic patterns in instrumental music, songs and dance; second, how these patterns allow musicians to shape the perform-ance and promote collaboration and competition among players; and third, whether the manipulation of patterns at various structural levels can be framed as expressions of *malícia*. I am thus concerned with how meaning and values are embodied in the practice of capoeira.

Musical analysis has been relatively neglected in capoeira literature, in favour of more culturally and historically oriented studies. The analysis of musical patterns and their relationship with techniques to control the flow of the performance and with various types of ambiguous behaviour in capoeira have been relatively unexplored up to now. My approach is only preceded by Larrain (2005), who studied patterning in the relationship between music and the physical game at an emblematic capoeira group in Salvador—Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP). I expand upon Larrain's work by exploring pattern variation, particularly focusing on *malícia*. My study supplements a rich body of literature on deception in capoeira that addresses its historical development (Dias Albert 2006), the way students internalise deception (Downey 2005), its social implications and symbolism (Lewis 1992), its contribution to empowerment (Varela 2013) and its indigenous philosophy (Capoeira 1992). My study is primarily located in the field of world music analysis, a growing field at the intersection of ethnomusicology and music theory—but it may also be placed in the field of choreomusicology, which studies the relationship between sound and movement within performance genres. More specifically, my work adds to literature exploring 'blurred genres' where music, dance, martial arts, theatre and acrobatics coexist: for instance, *silat* fight-dancing in Indonesia (Mason 2009), Chinese kung fu (McGuire 2015), Muay Thai (Williams 2015), Egyptian *tahib* (Boulad 2014) and various dance-combat practices in the black Atlantic (Desch Obi 2008).

The following discussion is based on my ethnographic, participatory fieldwork in the Bahian cities of Salvador and Valença in 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2016 with the group International Capoeira Angola Foundation (FICA-BA), led by Mestres Cobrinha (Cinezio Feliciano Peçanha) and Valmir (Valmir Damasceno). These data are supplemented by commercial recordings by GCAP, an emblematic capoeira group in Salvador. Following an introduction to capoeira and a discussion of periodicity and deception in the contexts of capoeira and other African diasporic arts, I analyse periodicity and variation in capoeira's instrumental music, songs and the physical game.

Capoeira

Capoeira is a synthesis of West and West-Central African combat dances that originated in Brazilian slave culture. In its current form—which includes several styles and regional variations—capoeira combines music, song, dance, martial arts, acrobatics and theatre. With a history of repression and marginalisation, it has been integral to the history and identity of Afro-Brazilians since at least the eighteenth century (Calvalcanti 1999). Now globalised, capoeira is seen both as representative of Brazilian culture and as proof of the strong historical ties between Brazil and Africa.[1] Although many of the findings of this study may apply to various styles, here I focus on Capoeira Angola, a style traditionally associated with the descendants of Africans in the northeastern state of Bahia in Brazil.

The performance of capoeira is known as *roda* [circle], which refers both to the spatial configuration formed by practitioners while they perform and to the material and symbolic aspects of the art that are to be put into practice. Every aspect of the *roda* is controlled

---

[1]In 2008 the Brazilian government gave the capoeira circle and masters the status of Immaterial Cultural Heritage. This recognition was followed in 2014 by UNESCO, who inscribed capoeira in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

by a certain protocol. A typical *roda* starts with a short instrumental interlude followed by an introductory solo song called *ladainha*. This is always followed by a responsorial song called *chula* or *saudação*. After the *chula*, the physical action begins, accompanied by *corridos*, another type of responsorial song. Several *corridos* selected from a large repertoire are sung in succession until the end, when the *mestre* [capoeira master] closes by yelling *iê*!

Songs and games are accompanied by a percussion ensemble called *bateria de capoeira*, typically composed of three *berimbaus*, two *pandeiros* [tambourines], one *agogô* [two-mouthed bell], one *reco-reco* [scraper] and one *atabaque* [low-pitched barrel drum]. *Capoeiristas* take turns to play the instruments and to dance because everyone is expected to participate in both. Games are always between two players and begin and finish at the foot of the lead *berimbau*, typically played by the most senior *capoeirista*. The duration of each game is variable, rarely exceeding ten minutes. I have been in short *rodas* of half an hour and in others lasting five hours. Everyone is expected to contribute to the *roda* by singing loudly in response to the soloist, being attentive to the games, keeping the space of the *roda* close and paying attention to the cues of the *mestre*. The *roda* is the ultimate event of capoeira, where practitioners perform what they have learned including physical prowess, musical skill, song repertoire and, of course, the ability to be deceitful.

Periodicity

Periodicity is pervasive in music and can manifest itself in any form of restatement—literal or transformed—including timeline, riff, ostinato, formal structure, call and response, drum pattern, chord progression and so on. The ways in which repetition and variation are produced, perceived and conceptualised are complementary and always in dialogue with one another. As Michael Tenzer points out, patterns can 'create a sense of stability through return or constancy, and such stability will always be in constant dialog with change' (2006: 22). Here, I seek to discover how patterns are organised and modified and how both patterns and variations can create a sense of stability—or not. This includes a horizontal study of each pattern and the variation that stretches it (e.g., the study of a *berimbau* pattern and its variations), and a vertical study of their layering (e.g., the study of various song periods in relation to the patterns composing the groove). In doing so, I resist cross-cultural attempts to associate repetition with stasis and variation with movement (Kramer 1988) or repetition with lack of musical interest (Schuller 1989), loss of individuality (Adorno 1990) and slavery (Rahn 1993).

Scholars of African and African diasporic music argue for a logic shared by groove-based musics: 'repeating parts of varying periodicities are layered together to generate an interlocking texture' from which musicians extract a pulse and the defining features of a time cycle, and which then 'serves as a stage over which various kinds of interplay (call and response) and improvisation inspiration take place' (Monson 1999: 36 and 44). This logic of ostinato with variations, what Tenzer (2006: 26) calls 'sectional periodicity', helps to understand the ways in which *capoeiristas* relate to the pulse, to cycles and to the mechanisms used to alter them.

At a more abstract level, some have argued that the treatment of repetition sets African and African diasporic culture apart from their colonial nemesis—Western European culture—challenging the aesthetics and teleological thinking of western rationalism (Gates 1988; Snead 1984). Phrases like 'the changing same' (Jones 1972) or 'repeating

with a difference' (Gates 1988) refer to this difference and to rhetorical skills highly esteemed in African and diasporic communities.[2]

More specifically in the realm of capoeira, Lewis argues that the art can be viewed as 'a theatre of domination and liberation' (1992: 94) and that 'improvisation [a form of pattern variation] is related to the ethic of freedom or liberation central to the game' (ibid.: 88–9; my addition). Lewis' association of improvisation with freedom is a common theme in other musical practices such as jazz (Fischlin and Heble 2004; G. Lewis 1996). But the drama that Lewis refers to makes capoeira unique because it is reminiscent of the times of slavery in Brazil, when many believe the art was developed.[3] One popular narrative, for instance, asserts that runaway slaves invented capoeira and heroically fought their enslavers using capoeira techniques as far back as the seventeenth century (Assunção 2005: 6). This narrative has a contemporary counterpart: many *mestres* use capoeira as a tool to raise awareness of current struggles against racism and inequality in Brazilian society.[4] Many practitioners thus see capoeira as an art of liberation, both historically and now.

For Lewis, improvisation is key in allowing practitioners to metaphorically break the chains of slavery—but the right to improvise and deviate from patterns or norms in the *roda* must be earned through experience and intimacy with those patterns. As in many other African-derived traditions, in capoeira senior practitioners have more freedom to improvise because they are believed to know how to do so without losing the character of the art, a great preoccupation of *capoeiristas*.

Aside from the fact that patterns are internalised by participants and are used instinctively in the *roda* (most competent *capoeiristas* know the periodicity of dozens of songs and can predict when to respond to the soloist),[5] many *capoeiristas* pay conscious attention to the relationship between musical patterns and the physical game and shape their moves accordingly. For instance, codified *berimbau* patterns incite *capoeiristas* to play using specific bodily positions (e.g., upright or closer to the ground) or with a specific character (e.g., playfully or aggressively). As the following analysis will show, in the *roda* some patterns may simultaneously promote competition and a sense of community.

Deception, trickery and *malícia*

In *The Signifying Monkey* Henry Gates Jr claims that the Yoruba figure of the trickster was transferred to the Americas under the names of Exú, Echu-Elegua and its variants (Gates 1988: 20–4). For Gates this figure, who serves in Yoruba mythology to mediate between the divine and human realms by means of tricks, became a type of folk hero in African American communities for his ability to signify—to deceive using double-talk, the language of trickery (ibid.: 74). Gates argues that this deceiving language, which mixes the literal and the figurative, is achieved through repetition and revision of what is said in the same manoeuvre: in his words, to signify upon something is 'to repeat with a

---

[2]See Danielsen (2006: 57) for a fuller discussion of theories of the treatment of repetition in African diasporic culture.
[3]See Assunção (2005: 5–22) for a critical appraisal of oral narratives and scholarly discourses placing the origin of capoeira in Brazil's time of slavery.
[4]Many *capoeiristas* like Mestre Morares and his students have been engaged in the Black Consciousness Movement in Brazil since the 1980s and have used capoeira as a tool to promote social change and fight racial discrimination.
[5]*Capoeiristas* may also rely on different cues to properly time their response in *corridos*—they may take cues from vocal gestures of the choir, rhyme schemes in the lyrics, the soloist's intonation, *berimbau* variations and more.

difference' (ibid.: xxii–xxiii). This association of repetition and variation with trickery will be elaborated upon.

With a different diasporic history but possible connections to the African-American practice of signifying, deception is also a feature of Afro-Brazilian culture. DaMatta (1991) showed that trickery is one of many societal features enacted through urban rituals in Brazil such as carnival, street gambling and soccer. Somewhat augmenting DaMatta's work, Lewis (1992) and Downey (2005) proposed that capoeira is another urban practice where deception and the popular *jeitinho brasileiro*[6] are enacted. For them, deception circulates in and out of the *roda*: it comes from outside the *roda*, reflecting aspects of Brazilian colonial past, and returns to society via lessons learned. These authors, together with Assunção (2005), propose that such deception largely emerged when former enslaved people, particularly from Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, learned that direct confrontation against slaveholders was not as effective as veiled strategies of resistance, such as being intentionally inefficient or feigning incomprehension when taking orders. Yet not all aspects of capoeira are subject to deceptive behaviour: some clear rules, ethics and protocols are always observed, such as respect for the call of the *berimbau* to stop the game, or the alternation between soloist and choir in *corridos*. By the same token, it is clear that the potential to act deceptively does not represent the universe of behaviours in Brazilian society.

As deception gained the status of philosophy in capoeira, the use of trickery to attack and escape became a sign of mastery.[7] *Jogadores* may hit each other with various types of kicks or headbutts and they may also trip each other up with a sweeping leg. However, when this is done without deception it is seen as undesirable because it often leads to open fights, threatening the balance between collaboration and competition. In addition, direct violence is avoided because it undermines the image of capoeira as a healthy cultural practice and compromises the beauty of the game. In the initial story, Mestre Cabello gave a sweep with his leg to his opponent after deceiving him and this was celebrated by everyone. On the other hand, in all my visits to Salvador I have seen *mestres* stopping *rodas* and scolding *jogadores* who blatantly kicked each other.

In capoeira parlance, the terms *malícia*, *malandragem* and *mandinga* are related to a broader discourse of deception. Although these terms may be used interchangeably, practitioners and authors make important distinctions. *Mandinga* was probably appropriated by *capoeiristas* from the Mandinkas, a West African ethnic group brought to Brazil during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and known for their knowledge of magic and sorcery (Assunção 2005: 114). According to Capoeira Angola practitioner Isabel Green (aka Bel), many *capoeiristas* believe that this esoteric knowledge protects them inside and outside the *roda* (interview, Valença, 17 July 2016). For Mestre Cobrinha, *mandinga* is 'always associated with spiritual questions, with supernatural forces beyond human capacity. In capoeira language, a *mandingueiro* [a person who masters *mandinga*] is a person who can be a magician and a wizard' using 'spiritual and ancestral knowledge' (interview, Valença, 21 September 2016). Other *capoeiristas* connect *mandinga* more

---

[6]*Jeitinho brasileiro* is a Brazilian strategy of social navigation where an individual can use emotional resources, blackmail, family ties, promises, rewards or money to obtain favours or to get an advantage, usually in situations where rules or social conventions need to be bent or circumvented.

[7]See Dias Albert (2006) for an account on the development of deception in capoeira in Bahia at the turn of the twentieth century.

directly with deception: Jose Nilton Jesus dos Santos (aka Do) explained that '*mandinga* makes the other person believe what does not exist' (interview, Valença, 17 July 2016). Assunção explains that this view of *mandinga*, 'closer to cunning (*malícia*)' than to magic, is more recent and secular (2005: 115).

The meaning of *malandragem* in Brazilian society is closer to the *jeitinho brasileiro*, a strategy of survival developed in day-to-day interactions. According to Lewis, *malandragem* may mean 'any type of shady activity' and conjure 'the making of one's living in a less than honourable fashion—but not necessarily illegally: one can be a gambler, a beggar, a gigolo or simply a person with no visible means of support' (1992: 47). The association of capoeira with *malandragem* may have had derogatory connotations for practitioners in the past, but with time the term has acquired a positive value. Mestre Cobrinha, for instance, sees *malandragem* as the capacity to:

> take advantage in a specific situation in an unexpected way. It is a [kind of] knowledge acquired through life experience … it is the crossroads where all paths and possibilities are open and the person maximizes their advantage by taking a particular path. (Interview, Valença, 21 September 2016; my addition)

Likewise, Bel defined *malandragem* as the capacity to deal with any situation in life in the most practical and economic way. But in doing so, the person may 'take shortcuts' by reinterpreting, bending or even circumventing rules of social interaction (interview, Valença, 17 July 2016).

Finally, *malícia* is more directly associated with trickery. Do, for instance, declared that *malícia* may be demonstrated in the *roda* by 'pretending to be clumsy, brute, or slow in order to lure the other' (interview, Valença, 17 July 2016). Mestre Cobrinha sees *malícia* as 'the faculty to anticipate the movement of the other person … and to prepare a response with a feint' (interview, Valença, 21 September 2016). This aligns with scholarly views of *malícia*. Lewis has written that the 'idea of setting a pattern and then breaking it, of creating expectations and not meeting them, is perhaps the essential capoeira strategy and a prime example of malícia' (1992: 101). For Downey *malícia* is a synonym of cunning or savvy, manifested as 'humor, technical virtuosity, deceptiveness, the ability to anticipate another's actions' (2002: 491). Likewise, Assunção writes that 'malice or deception—also a key concept in modern capoeira—meant to lull the other player into a false sense of security, only to surprise him with a move he was not expecting' (2005: 108).

From this short survey, specific associations emerge—*mandinga* with magic or spiritual power, *malandragem* with resourcefulness and *malícia* with deception. However, it is also clear that there is a great deal of overlap among the three terms. For the sake of simplicity, the ensuing analysis uses the word *malícia* to refer to deception, trickery, deceptive musical behaviour, playing with listeners' expectations or ambiguity.

Periodic patterns in the instrumental music

The capoeira groove is set up by the repetition of cyclic patterns in all of the instruments of the *bateria* and is typically enriched by variations performed by the *berimbaus*. According to their normative role, the *bateria* can be divided into two groups: the supporting instruments (*atabaque*, *agogô*, *reco-reco* and *pandeiros*) and the *berimbaus*. I will consider the patterns of each group separately:
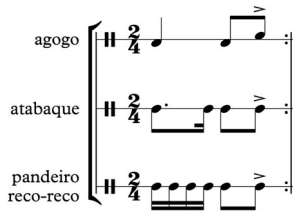
Figure 1. Capoeira's basic rhythm by supporting instruments as taught in the capoeira group FICA-BA.

Supporting instruments

The supporting instruments are all percussive and contribute to the composite texture by playing binary rhythms spanning two beats. All instruments play a pattern that emphasises each pulse and the second upbeat (see Figure 1). Contrary to many African-derived grooves where the aggregate ostinato is formed by layers interlocking contrasting rhythms, capoeira's supporting instruments generally play almost homorhythmically.

In conjunction, these short patterns offer a clean and unequivocal reference structure for *berimbau* players, singers and *jogadores* that is expected to remain unvaried throughout the *roda*.[8] Playing a supporting instrument facilitates beginners' musical participation; moreover, arriving at an active *roda* and taking a supporting instrument before playing *berimbau*, leading songs or dancing is a sign of respect and humility (both highly valued in capoeira circles) because one is seen as someone willing to give before taking.

In some groups and contexts, however, supporting instruments may introduce some variation, particularly *pandeiro* players. In Figure 1, the basic pattern of the *pandeiro* matches the *atabaque* pattern but its notes are more diffused because of the buzz produced by the jingles when the *pandeiro* is hit or shaken. These diffused sounds are less effective for timekeeping purposes and thus relatively dispensable. In other words, variation in supporting instruments tends to be more accepted when it is less noticeable. This may be why most *pandeiro* variations—when there are any—are relatively short, well spaced and not very loud.

But these considerations may be suspended when *mestres* and other senior *capoeiristas* play *pandeiros* because they have more licence to deviate from patterns. For instance, at a *roda* in FICA-BA, Salvador in 2009, Mestre Cobrinha played a variation in the *pandeiro* consisting of a steady row of sixteenth-note bass tones spanning ten pulsations that began loudly and eventually diminished the volume. The *mestre* closed this row of bass notes with a loud slap and a hand gesture as one *jogador* headbutted the other on the belly, throwing him out of balance. Immediately after, the *pandeiro* returned to the pattern shown in Figure 1.

In this example the *mestre* used a *pandeiro* variation to cue one of his students but he was careful to conceal the message from the other *jogador*. In doing so, the *mestre* manipulated rhythm, dynamics and timbre to strike a balance between clarity and subtlety. The insistence of the consecutive sixteenth notes against the basic rhythm and the initial

---

[8]In some Capoeira Angola groups like FICA-BA, some variation is allowed by supporting instruments, except the *atabaque* and *agogô*, which are considered more definitive time keepers in the *bateria*.

Figure 2. *Pandeiro* variation used by Mestre Cobrinha to cue a *jogador*. Source: *roda* at FICA-BA, July 2009.

loudness of the variation made it stick out over the texture and be noticed by his student. Once the communication between the two was established, the volume decreased to disguise the variation from the other *jogador*. For the cue, Mestre Cobrinha chose a distinct loud slap (Figure 2).

This example illustrates how *pandeiro* players and *jogadores* may collaborate in deceiving another *jogador* through pattern variation. However, this is an extension of Lewis' definition of *malícia* because pattern interruption here is not meant to deceive the expectations of the attacked *jogador*, but to alert and cue the attacker. Said differently, variation is not used to deceive but quite the opposite, to inform. Deception occurs when the *pandeiro* player hides the variation from the attacked *jogador* by burying it in the texture. This shows that although players of supporting instruments primarily use patterns to be collaborative, some may use variation deceptively to promote competition in the physical domain.

Berimbau *ostinati:* toques

The *berimbau* is a musical bow of West and West-Central African origin that is emblematic of capoeira. *Berimbau* players produce three main sounds by hitting the string with a wooden stick while moving a coin or stone towards or away from the string: a low-pitched tone, a high-pitched tone and a buzz sound. The *berimbau* section is composed of three *berimbau*s tuned at different pitch levels. *Gunga*, the lowest-sounding *berimbau*, is the leader of the *bateria* and has the responsibility to dictate the *toque* (*berimbau* groove). *Medio* and *viola* are the middle and highest-pitched *berimbaus* respectively; the latter is in charge of embellishing the groove with variations (interview, Mestre Cobrinha, San José, Costa Rica, 2 August 2005) (Figure 3).

The combined texture formed by the three *berimbau* patterns is called *toque*; *toque de angola* is by far the most common in Capoeira Angola *rodas* (see Figure 4). In addition to *toque de angola*, other *toques* of different periods and rhythmic content may appear in the *roda* (see Figure 5) and *capoeiristas* often have specific associations with each. For instance, in FICA-BA and other groups in Salvador, practitioners associate *toque de angola* with a slow-paced game where players demonstrate balance and corporal

Figure 3. Mestre Cobrinha playing *berimbau* at a *roda* in Salvador, April 2006. Photograph by Amanda Procter.

Figure 4. Capoeira song 'Aide' and *toque de angola*: three *berimbaus* and supporting instruments.[9]

[9]Numbers 1–2–3 in Figure 4 represent how most *mestres* count the beat and are therefore the 'insider' count. However, most songs consistently stress number 3, as in the case of 'Aidê'. In order to reflect this, a 2/4 time signature with the downbeat on 3 instead of 1 is used.

Figure 5. Common *berimbau toques* used in capoeira *rodas* in Salvador.[10]

expression; *toque jogo de dentro* with a game where *jogadores* play very close to each other and near the ground; *toque são bento grande* with faster games more focused on combat; and *toque iúna* with the high-level performance of *mestres*.

But the spirit of the game is also affected by changes in tempo. Mestre Cobrinha declared that changes in the character of the *jogo* today are actually more associated with changes in tempo than with type of *toque* (interview, Valença, 4 August 2009). This is also confirmed by Larrain (2005: 101–2), and by my own observations. In my experience, *jogadores* recognise specific *toques* and may adjust their way of playing, but they mostly react to changes in tempo, generally becoming more competitive and aggressive with faster tempi. This correlation between faster musical pace and more intense fight is not unique to capoeira. Duncan Williams (2015: 4) wrote that *sarama*, the musical style accompanying Muay Thai, is performed at a slow tempo when the fighters perform a ritual boxing dance previous to the fight proper. Once the fight begins, 'the tempo of the music is increased' and continues growing in the later and more intense stages of the fight (ibid.: 4 and 6).

Although some *toques* are emically associated with slower tempi (e.g., *toque de angola*) or faster tempi (e.g., *toques jogo de dentro* and *são bento grande*), the *bateria* has an overall tendency to accelerate. From the point of view of the *berimbau* those accelerations may occur for different reasons and at different paces. In the case of *toque de angola*, which syncopates the downbeat, those accelerations tend to be more subtle and may occur because of an involuntary tendency to shorten the duration of the syncopation. In the case of the other two mentioned *toques*, accelerations are typically more pronounced and this may be because they are associated with more lively games, which often happen at faster tempi. It is incumbent to the *gunga* player (usually a *mestre*) to keep tempo in check. Articulating both beats of the time cycle, *toques jogo de dentro* and *são bento grande* are useful for this purpose because they allow *berimbau* players to ride the *bateria* by articulating every pulse. *Mestres* can compensate for undesired accelerations by leading a gradual ritardando. Or they can use the same technique to increase the tempo. In the track 'Devedor' (GCAP 1999), for instance, Mestre Moraes opened with *toque de angola* and used a two-beat non-syncopated *toque* —similar to *jogo de dentro*—to increase the tempo (between markers 2:14 and 2:48). After the tempo increased from 70 to 74 beats per minute, he returned to *toque de angola* and the tempo remained stable for the rest of the track.

---

[10]See Shaffer (1977) for transcriptions of 12 *berimbau toques* of different periodicities as played by the most well-known *mestres* of Bahia in the 1970s.

Pattern variation in *berimbau*s

The strong cyclic motion created by the *bateria* at the two-beat level is enriched by *berimbau* variations, particularly by *viola* and *gunga* players. These variations consist of superimposed rhythmic phrases of various lengths (typically two, four, six or eight beats) that create polyrhythm by means of cross-rhythms, changes in the subdivision of the beat and offbeat accentuation (see Figure 6). As we will see, these techniques of creating polyrhythms are used selectively by *berimbau* players to stick out of the texture in more obvious ways.

In general, *jogadores* are keenly attentive to *gunga* patterns and variations because these are, along with songs, the principal means used by *mestres* to communicate with *jogadores*. *Capoeirista* Bel declared:

> I believe that the *mestre* controls the game with the *berimbau*. At any point of the game, the *mestre* uses the *berimbau* to call *jogadores* or to tell them something … Therefore, when we are playing, the attention to the rhythms played by the *mestre* needs to be very strong. In no moment should we get distracted. (Interview, Valença, 17 July 2016)

Gunga players use variations to control the flow and to cue *jogadores* and musicians. For instance, they may summon *jogadores* to the *pé-do-berimbau* [foot of the *berimbau*] with a row of triplets or sixteenth notes as shown in Figure 7. *Jogadores* are called to the foot of the *berimbau* at the beginning and ending of each game and sometimes in the middle, when the game is getting too aggressive or too mellow. After the pause, *jogadores* usually collaborate more with each other in balancing playfulness and combat. But *gunga* players may also use this type of variation (a row of open tones) to mark sectional boundaries such as a change of *toque* or song, to ride the *bateria* when they want to change the tempo or for embellishment. In fact, a series of triplets may be interpreted differently by *jogadores*, with one *jogador* taking advantage of the one who hears it as a false call. Larrain also documents cases of false calls in GCAP and wrote that *jogadores* ideally should be able to 'discern between the beginning of a *berimbau* variation and the beginning of a call [to the foot of the *berimbau*]' (2005: 126). At many *rodas* in Salvador I have seen *jogadores* using hand gestures to invite the other to the foot of the *berimbau* or pretending to move in that direction when hearing a series of triplets in *gunga* that were not necessarily

Figure 6. Typical *berimbau* variation techniques at Capoeira Angola *rodas*. Source: Track 'Devedor' (GCAP 1999).
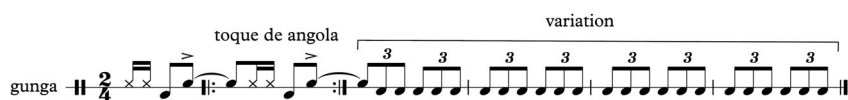
Figure 7. Typical *gunga* variation used to summon *jogadores* to the *pé-do-berimbau*.

meant to call *jogadores*. When the other *jogador* takes their eyes away from their opponent to check whether the *gunga* player is actually calling, he/she becomes vulnerable.

In these situations a *berimbau* variation may be used by one of the *jogadores* to deceive the other; but unlike the example of the *pandeiro* variation, here collaboration between the musician and the *jogador* is not required—although it could happen. The preconditions for this example of musical *malícia* are shared attentiveness to the patterns and variations of *gunga*; more specifically, a shared association of a series of low tones of *gunga* with a call to halt the game.

Like in the previous case of the *pandeiro* player, *berimbau* players may also use variations to communicate possibilities of attack to *jogadores*. According to Mestre Cobrinha, the *berimbau* player may grab the attention of a *jogador* (usually one of his/her students whom she/he wants to favour in the game) by playing a long variation to which the *jogador* is supposed to answer *quebrando o jogo*—playing exaggerated variations of the *ginga*—in order to distract the other player. The musician will cue the *jogador* to attack by closing the rhythmic phrase with a high tone on the *berimbau*, which Mestre Cobrinha always places in the second upbeat of a measure (see Figure 8). Based on Mestre Moraes, Larrain writes that, independently of their length, *berimbau* variations 'should conclude with the basic rhythmic figure of the second measure [of the *toque*]' (2005: 104; my addition). That means that if *toque de angola* is the main groove from which variations are deviating (as often happens in Capoeira Angola *rodas*), the cadential point for those variations is a high tone in the second upbeat (see 4, 5, 7, and 8); precisely where Mestre Cobrinha places his cues. He probably learned to play in this form from Moraes, his *mestre*.

When Mestre Cobrinha taught us this technique during a class at FICA-BA in 2006, he asked the *jogador* in question to stop looking at his opponent and to move in an erratic fashion, staring at him only while he was playing the variation. This is a provocation for the other *jogador*, because looking at your opponent at all times is a basic rule in the physical game. To provoke another *jogador* is to entice them to open their body posture in advance of making an aggressive move. This open position also makes them vulnerable: Downey has written that 'in capoeira vulnerability is described as "being open"' (2005: 138). As the other *jogador* took advantage of the 'opportunity' to attack, Mestre Cobrinha cued the player to counterattack, profiting from this vulnerability.
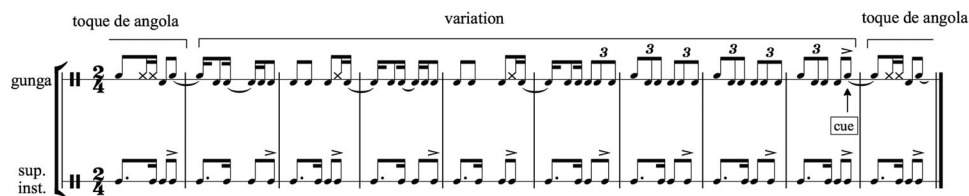
Figure 8. *Gunga* attack cue as taught by Mestre Cobrinha (Salvador, March 2006).

The efficiency of this technique depends on the ability of the *mestre* to read the situation, judge the best moment to counterattack and give a clear—but not too obvious—cue to the *jogador*. But it mostly relies on the ability of the *jogador* to listen to *gunga* patterns, variations and final cues, to react fast and to choose an appropriate counterattack. Greg Downey documents a similar lesson with Mestre Cobrinha where 'players were asked to dance while facing the orchestra; they were to listen, not watch, for the other player's vulnerabilities. They searched for a musical inspiration that would help them to slip through the defenses of their adversary' (2002: 501). Some of Mestre Cobrinha's students, such as Do, confirmed that they benefit when they listen to his *berimbau*: 'if you listen carefully to your *mestre*'s *berimbau*, he will help you' (interview, Valença, 17 July 2016). This collaboration stems from a belief that sound 'reveals opportunities in the constantly shifting intercorporeal relation between bodies at play' (Downey 2002: 501) and the expectation that *mestres* should support their students when they play with *jogadores* from other groups. I do not suggest that all *mestres* use this device, but it might be one of the reasons why it is so difficult to play in the *roda* with *jogadores* whose *mestres* are at the *berimbau*. One is virtually playing against two people.

A closer look at Mestre Cobrinha's variation in Figure 8 reveals a common technique used by *berimbau* players: repeating a motif before changing it or expanding it. In Figure 8 a motif is introduced in bars 2–3, repeated immediately after (bars 4–5) and then modified (bars 6–9). The repetition of the motif creates a sense of stability that is disrupted when the motif is changed. This effect is similar to what Robin Attas (2015) calls 'projection shift': 'a moment where listeners are likely to shift their focus from one projective duration to another because of changes in texture' or 'changes in instrumental parts' (ibid.: 282). According to Attas, projection shifts help listeners to maintain attention and help to build groove intensity. In the transcribed example, Mestre Cobrinha initially captures the attention of a *jogador* with a repeated motif and announces an imminent moment of attack with a projection shift. In my experience, at the moment of projection shift (here, the second beat of bar 6) the *jogador*'s focus sharpens, anticipating the cue, but the exact length of the last phrase is unpredictable. The *mestre* and the *jogador* are speaking the language of *malícia*.

Lewis proposed that the way in which *berimbau* players construct patterns by arranging three sounds (two tones and a buzz) is analogous to the physical interplay in the *roda*: the alternation of high and low tones is iconic with the attack and defence dialogue and the buzz sound mediates between the two tones similar to the way the *ginga* mediates between attack and defence (1992: 143–4). For him *malícia* in the physical game is 'echoed by "deceptive" bow playing' (ibid.: 144). He argues that this is done by tricking the listener into 'expecting a high tone and a low tone is produced instead (or the reversed)' (ibid.) or by 'artfully creating and breaking rhythmic patterns which involves the alternation of two opposing pitches' (ibid.: 145).

Lewis may be right in that *berimbau* players may play with listeners' expectations by alternating two tones, but he fails to substantiate ethnographically how this technique relates to *jogadores*' *malícia*. *Berimbau* variations exceed a simple alternation of two tones functioning as polar opposites. Players combine these two tones plus the buzz and various effects to form phrases of various lengths to cue and embellish. Manipulating periodicity to play with listeners' and *jogadores*' expectations allows subtle forms of *malícia* to emerge.

Contrasting variations involving a steady row of sixteenth-note or triplet low tones with variations that use different tones and rhythms is useful to understanding their role in the *roda*. The former are so commonly used when a message needs to be communicated rapidly to *jogadores*, singers or other musicians that they may be seen as codified. Because of their drone-like repetitiveness, they build tension rapidly and carry a sense of urgency to which most respond by looking immediately at the *berimbau* player. This effect is intensified with steady rows of triplets as they produce a sharp contrast against the quadruple subdivision of the main groove. The latter are rhythmically more elaborate and unpredictable, and thus are more ambiguous because they can be heard either as cues or mere groove embellishment. This ambiguity allows subtler forms of communication between *berimbau* players and *jogadores*, like the example above where Mestre Cobrinha cues a *jogador* to attack. Finally, variations combining the two types (containing some steady low tones and some rhythmic and timbral variety) also create ambiguous situations and fertile soil for the display of *malícia* in the game.

In sum, beyond enriching the groove and helping musicians to control the flow, *berimbau* variations allow musicians to express *malícia* by secretly helping one of the *jogadores* to launch a successful attack. *Jogadores* also pay close attention to the ways in which their opponent interprets (or not) variations and use this information to trick each other. The following section offers more examples of musical *malícia* where singers manipulate periodicity and tempo to influence players.

Periodicity in the songs

In a *roda* at least three types of songs—*ladainha*, *chulas* and *corridos*—are connected in an extended song cycle mirroring the pacing of the physical games, in which the intensity develops gradually (Downey 2005: 75 and 78). As mentioned, the *ladainha* and *chulas* are preparatory and *corridos*—call-and-response songs with variable text, melody, rhythm and duration—accompany the physical game.

At a given *roda*, *corridos* are not sung in any pre-established order.[11] The lead singer may sing one *corrido* every game (the verses of a single *corrido* can potentially be repeated over the course of some ten minutes) or they may change to a new one in the middle of a game, often in response to a situation such as a fall. *Corridos* are important vehicles to transmit the history and philosophy of the art. They may comment on the games, encourage *jogadores* to play more gently or more intensely, challenge someone or tell stories. Some songs make explicit or tacit references to the deceptive nature of capoeira: consider the three songs presented in Table 1.

Most commonly, the soloist and the choir alternate phrases of the same length. For instance, in the *corrido* 'Aide' shown in Figure 4, the choir's and soloist's part last four beats each. This *corrido* thus has an eight-beat period. There are *corridos* with periods spanning four, eight, 16 or 32 beats. Some *corridos* may begin alternating longer phrases and have a second part where soloist and chorus alternate two-beat phrases (e.g., 'Quem vem lá' [who comes there]). Ideally the choir should always respond to the soloist's call in unison, in time and as loud as possible. This type of exchange, supported by a tight groove, sustains the energy of the *roda*. When energy is fading (the choir sings

---

[11]Some exceptions are *corridos* 'Adeus adeus,' 'Eu já vou beleza' or 'Adeus corina dā dā,' used to announce the end of *rodas*.

Table 1. *Corridos* 'Miudinho Cuidado', 'Paranaue' and 'Nem tudo que reluz'.

Choir: *Miudinho cuidado*	Little [*capoeirista*], be careful
Esse jogo de angola e mandingado	That Capoeira Angola game is played with mandinga
Solosit: *No lugar que tem polícia, Paraná*	In the place where the police is, *Paraná*
Vagabundo não encosta, Paraná	The vagabond does not stay
Choir: *Paranaue, Paranaue, Paraná*	*Paranaue, Paranaue, Paraná*
Soloist: *E no lugar que tem malandro, Paraná*	And in the place where there are malandros, *Paraná**
Eu não vou fazer aposta, Paraná	I am not going to bet, *Paraná*
Soloist: *Nem tudo o que reluz e ouro*	Not everything that shines is gold
Nem tudo o que balança cai	Not everything that gets out of balance falls

Malandro is a person versed in *malandragem* [street savvy].
Source: *roda* at FICA-BA, 9 June 2012.

softly or is silent), some *mestres* may pause the *roda* and scold everyone. But more commonly, the soloist chooses *corridos* to engage the choir. The soloist may sing a *corrido* explicitly asking the choir to sing loudly (e.g., 'Essa roda é de mudo e eu não sabia' [that *roda* is full of deaf people and I did not know it]) or choose a *corrido* that comments on the physical action (e.g., 'Si não aguenta por que veio?' [If you cannot handle it why did you come?], in the context of a game where a *jogador* complains). *Corridos* encouraging combative ways of playing like 'Quero ver cair' [I want to see someone fall] also encourage loud responses, and popular *corridos* like 'Paranaûe' usually have an energising effect.

Once the choir is engaged, it tends to accelerate as those who anticipate their response more push the rest to sing faster, thus contributing to increase tempo. Having a more frequent response and requiring more attentiveness on the part of the choir, *corridos* of shorter periods are more engaging and contribute to accelerate at a faster rate. Consider the following exchange with *capooerista* Do:

JDD: How do you use *malícia* when you are in the *bateria*?
Do: Lately I was in a situation where I precisely did that. I was playing *gunga* and I wanted to bring the rhythm up [increase the tempo]. The rhythm was very slow and I wanted to help one of the *jogadores*. I knew that he likes to play faster and that the other person gets in trouble with faster rhythms. I used that *malandragem* to get the other person out of control … And I sang some *corridos* that gave [the rhythm] that momentum; that augmented the speed gradually.
JDD: What corridos?
Do: 'Ai ai ai ai São Bento me chama' and 'Onde vai caimão' have the tendency to accelerate. And with those *corridos* one can influence the game. (Interview with Do, Valença, 17 July 2016)

Do is aware that changes of tempo impact the game and that certain songs help him make those changes. The two *corridos* he mentioned have periods of four beats, the shortest available in the capoeira repertoire. Similarly, in the opening story, when *mestre* Cobrinha sang the four–beat *corrido* 'Lalai laila,' the tempo rapidly increased, energising the *roda* and making the game more intense. Once the *mestre* reached the desired tempo and energy, he switched to 'Paranaûe,' a popular *corrido* with a longer period (16 beats) that maintained the level of energy but moderated the rate of acceleration.

Soloists may also engage the choir and control tempo by manipulating the *corridos*' periodicity. One common technique is to break the pattern of alternation in four-beat *corridos* by prolonging the solo part with a longer call. Here, a projection shift and

intensification takes place—the choir is left in suspension and the anticipation for the following response makes the return stronger. Such was the case at the *roda* in Bonfim when mestre Cobrinha sang the *corrido* 'Lalai laila.' Like many other four-beat *corridos* 'Lalai laila' is usually introduced with a 16-beat call, allowing time for the choir to recognise the song and prepare for the appropriate response (see Figure 9). After eight call-and-response cycles, Mestre Cobrinha broke the pattern of exchange and prolonged his call by 14 beats with the same phrase used in the introduction (see Figure 9). The choir's response was louder and the game became more intense. This increase of intensity not only raised the overall energy of the *roda*, but also eventually set the stage for Mestre Cabello to trip the other player. This was predictable: when games become more intense and agitated, more experienced players generally have the upper hand. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that Mestre Cobrinha intentionally helped his friend Mestre Cabello by singing 'Lalai laila'; this is not the only time I have seen the two *mestres* collaborating in subtle ways in the *roda*.



Figure 9. *Corrido* 'Lalai laila' as sung by Mestre Cobrinha. Source: Roda do Bomfim, August 2009.

Patterns in the physical game

So far, we have studied how *jogadores* relate to musical patterns and variations in numerous deceptive situations. But how do players display *malícia* by establishing patterns themselves and disrupting them? This last section briefly explores this question by focusing on *ginga*, capoeira's more consistent periodic movement. *Ginga* is capoeira's basic step, a patterned move from which most attacks, defences and displacements depart and return. It consists of four, six or more somewhat uniformly timed steps: Figures 10 and 11 show common four-beat and six-beat *ginga* cycles. During *ginga*, *jogadores* typically mirror each other's steps in a dancing manner while they prepare and anticipate attacks and defences.

Depending on the situation and skill, each *ginga* position may offer better or poorer possibilities to attack or defend. For instance, positions 2 and 3 in Figure 11 have the same foot arrangement (each *jogador* has one foot in the front and one in the back), but in position 3 the majority of the weight is in the front foot while in position 2 it is in the back. Position 2 allows a quicker escape from various attacks (e.g., a sweep with the leg, a headbutt or a circular kick) but offers poorer possibilities to attack when compared with position 3. With the front foot well planted in position 3, the back foot can swiftly apply various types of kicks (frontal or circular), but at the same time one is more exposed to take a sweep in the leg or a headbutt. Therefore, the *ginga* cycle can be seen as a continuum where positions of relative vulnerability and opportunity recur periodically.

In his study of movement and rhythm in GCAP, Larrain (2005: 139–41) analyzes the relative effectiveness of applying a *meia-lua* (a circular kick with the arch of the foot) in each position of a six-beat *ginga*. He takes into account the distance between *jogadores* and the relative direction of their movements in each *ginga* position and argues that if both players synchronise their *ginga* steps to the musical beat, 'it is possible to explain, to a certain extent, the objectivity of the movements in relation to the rhythm' (ibid.: 142). He clarifies that combinations in a capoeira game are 'infinite' and leaves it to the reader to decide which of the six positions is objectively the most effective for this particular attack. Whether or not one agrees with the idea of objectively better *ginga* positions, the individual preferences of each player may prompt them to track *ginga* cycles of different sizes when they coordinate their *ginga* to the musical beat.
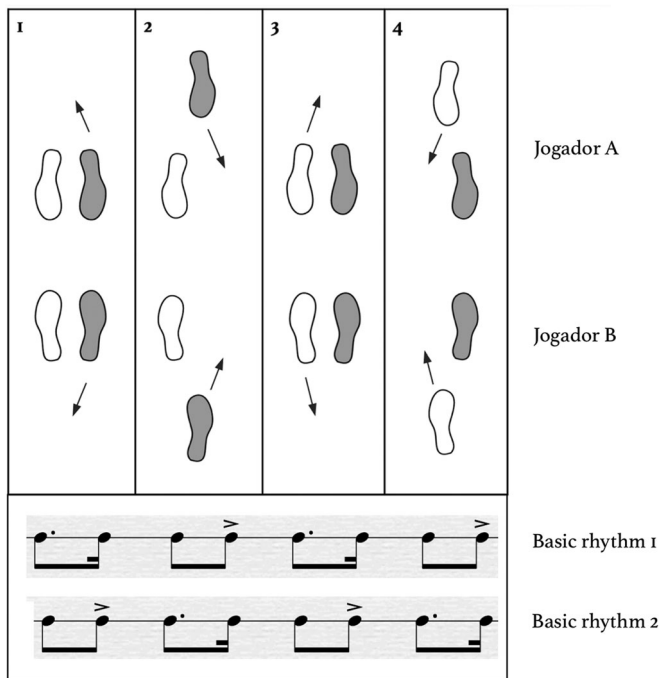
Figure 10. Four-beat *ginga* cycle. Arrows anticipate the following step. Basic rhythms 1 and 2 represent the basic pattern of the supporting instruments in two different relationships with the *ginga* cycle.
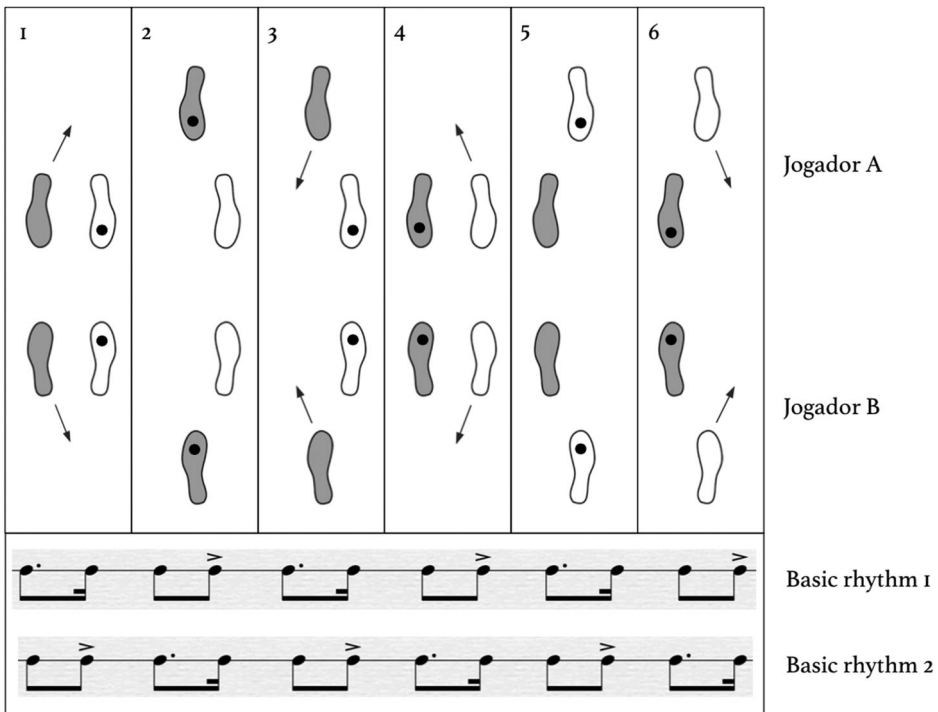
Figure 11. Six-beat *ginga* cycle after Larrain (2005: 138). Arrows anticipate the following step and black circles indicate the foot carrying more weight. Basic rhythms 1 and 2 represent the basic pattern of the supporting instruments in two different relationships with the *ginga* cycle.

However, although *jogadores* may learn and practice *ginga* to the beat, they rarely coordinate their steps strictly with the musical pulse. In my own experience, they rather find a common ground that might be faster or slower than the groove pulse. Generally speaking, at faster groove tempi, players' *ginga* steps tend to move slightly slower than the music; at slower groove tempi, the steps tend to move slightly faster than the music; and at moderate groove tempi, the steps and the music's pace are more likely to match. To be sure, an acceleration in the musical groove generally provokes an acceleration in the game, but not necessarily at the same pace.

For some, this coexistence of separate musical and dance rhythms and pulse streams is integral to the art. Mestre Cobrinha, for instance, taught us that *jogadores* should play with their own internal rhythm and that one should generally not lock one's *ginga* to the music pulse because one becomes predictable and thus vulnerable (field notes, Salvador, Bahia, April 2006). Seasoned *jogadores* may consciously phase between strict and free coordination of their *ginga* steps with the groove pulse in order to deceive the other *jogador*. Such was the case of Mestre Cabello in the opening story. When he locked his steps to the groove beat, his young adversary recognised a predictable pattern, mirrored it, became predictable and, soon after, fell down.

Other martial arts accompanied by music feature a similar coexistence of musical and internal rhythms. In kung fu, where some collective training sessions are accompanied by a small percussion ensemble, practitioners alternate between 'keep[ing] in time together'

and 'push[ing] away from group synchronization' (McGuire 2015: 7). McGuire calls this phenomenon 'push-and-pull' or a 'duality between the implicit rhythm of combat and explicit musical rhythms', and adds that this is highlighted in demonstrations (ibid.: 13). In many of the capoeira classes in which I have participated, students tend to synchronise their *ginga* steps to the musical beat. McGuire uses McNeill's (1995) concept of muscular bonding to explain that in kung fu training 'physical synchrony makes shared exertion more pleasurable by promoting social cohesion' (McGuire 2015: 7). This may be the case in capoeira classes too, but as in kung fu training advanced practitioners eventually train sequences at their own pace. In the context of actual performances, the importance of muscular bonding is superseded by the need to apply techniques efficiently, and this is partly accomplished by anticipating or delaying one's step in relation to the musical beat. This is why in the performance of both practices, the 'push-and-pull' is accentuated.

Referring to his own experience with kung fu, McGuire wrote:

> The feeling of performing a routine that I have worked out like this is that of fighting my own fight by imposing my rhythm and not being sucked into the beats of the unrelenting percussion. I am aware of the music, but only enough to be able to weave my movement through it, without being caught up in its patterns or tempo. (2015: 14)

Although synchronising one's *ginga* steps to the musical beat may be risky in some cases, this article has demonstrated that a deep engagement with musical patterns and tempo gives subtle advantages to the attentive *jogador*. As is plain by now, the information elicited from patterning, variation and tempo is key for the performance of *malícia*.

Concluding remarks

This article has documented traces of *malícia* in patterns and variations played by the supporting instruments and the *berimbaus*; call-and-response songs, and music and *ginga* beat. Because one of the most common techniques to accomplish *malícia* (and thus to outperform others) is to establish a pattern and then break it, some authors have suggested that improvisation and variation symbolise a path of freedom (Lewis 1992: 88–9 and 103). Lewis implicitly supports other authors who argue—in other musical contexts—for a broader relationship between variation and freedom and between repetition and slavery (Adorno 1941; Rahn 1993). I have demonstrated that subtler forms of *malícia* may be at play when *berimbau* players choose and remain in certain patterns or when a lead singer chooses a song with certain periodicity. The pattern or the song may communicate a message to *jogadores* that is reinforced through literal repetition, or may affect tempo—a key element influencing the spirit of games. Like in the case of *jogadores* who lock their *ginga* steps to the groove beat, in both cases periodicity creates a sense of stability in the surface, while producing subtle changes at a deeper level. This is the case of *corridos* with short periods like 'Lalai laila,' which tend to increase in tempo and make games more intense. It is thus not surprising that many *corridos* with lyrics encouraging *jogadores* to play more aggressively have relatively short periods: 'Quebra gereba' (four beats); 'É macaco' (four beats); 'Moleque é tu' (four beats); 'Quero ver cair' (eight beats). In sum, if capoeira is to be interpreted as a path of freedom through the performance of *malícia*, pattern repetition and pattern variation are both plausible techniques to walk that path.

Jogadores hear and react to various cycles running simultaneously at the *roda*. They may interpret a *berimbau* pattern as an invitation to play a friendly game; a *berimbau* variation as a cue to attack or as a false call; or a call-and-response song as an invitation to play more aggressively. At the same time, *jogadores* negotiate the pace of their *ginga* steps with respect to each other and to the groove beat. While they engage with these cycles and are attentive to their variations, the spirit of the physical game is subtly affected when musicians change tempo by manipulating *berimbau* and song cycles.

This study has relied on periodicity to explore how musicians shape the *roda* and how *malícia* is operationalised in the performance of capoeira. Although I focus here on periodicities of medium scale (pulse, motifs, phrases, periods, dance steps, song verses), similar arguments might be drawn from the study of repetition and variation on a smaller and larger scale. Like most groove-based music, capoeira has particular swing feels that affect how the music is played, heard and danced.[12] The *roda* itself can be treated as a larger unit subdivided into cycles of different duration: entire games, songs or sections of *toques*. A combined focus on patterning at micro, medium and meta levels will broaden our lenses when looking at how musicians shape the performance in *capoeira* and other groove-based musics, and also in understanding one of capoeira's most elusive and fascinating features—*malícia*.

Notes on contributor

Juan Diego Diaz is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Essex, UK. He completed his Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at the University of British Columbia (2014) with a dissertation on music and black identities in Bahia, Brazil. A long-term capoeira practitioner, he researches musics of the Black Atlantic with specific focus on Brazil and West Africa.

---

[12]Microtiming in capoeira has not been explored systematically. A possible point of departure to study this phenomenon in capoeira is Gerisher's (2006) article on *suingue bahiano*, a set of microrhythmic patterns that she found across various Afro-Brazilian percussion styles in Bahia.

References

Adorno, Theodor. 1941. 'On Popular Music'. *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 9: 17–48.
———. 1990 (1936). 'On Jazz'. *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 12 (1): 45–69.
Assunção, Matthias Röhrig. 2005. *Capoeira. The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*. London: Routledge.
Attas, Robin. 2015. 'Form as Process: The Buildup Introduction in Popular Music'. *Music Theory Spectrum* 37(2): 275–296.
Boulad, Adel Paul. 2014. *Modern Tahtib: Bâton de Combat Égyptien* [Modern Tahtib: Egyptian Baton Martial Art]. Noisy-sur-École, France: Budo.
Calvalcanti, Nireu. 1999. 'Crônicas do Rio Colonial. O Capoeira' [Chronicles of Colonial Rio. Capoeira]. *Journal do Brasil* Caderno B, 1st ed., pag. 22.
Capoeira, Néstor. 1992. *Capoeira: os Fundamentos da Malícia* [Capoeira, the Fundamentals of Malicia]. Rio de janeiro: Record.
DaMatta, Roberto. 1991. *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*. Translated by John Drury. Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press.
Danielsen, Anne. 2006. *Presence and Pleasure. The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
Desch Obi, T. J. 2008. *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Arts Traditions in the Atlantic World*. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.
Dias Albert, Adriana. 2006. *Mandinga, Manha & Malícia: Uma História Sobre os Capoeiras na Capital de Bahia (1910–1925)* [Mandinga, Manha and Malícia: A History of Capoeira Practitioners in the Capital of Bahia (1910–1925)]. Salvador, BA: Edufba.
Downey, Greg. 2002. 'Listening to Capoeira: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and the Materiality of Music'. *Ethnomusicology*, 46(3): 487–509.
———. 2005. *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Fischlin, Daniel and Ajay Heble, eds. 2004. *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*. Middletown, CO: Wesleyan University Press.
Gates, Henri Louis. 1988. *The Sygnifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Gerischer, Christiane. 2006. 'O Suingue Baiano: Rhythmic Feeling and Microrhythmic Phenomena in Brazilian Percussion'. *Ethnomusicology* 50(1): 99–119.
Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP). 1999. 'O GCAP Tem Dendê'. [Sound Recording].
Jones, LeRoi. 1972. 'The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)'. In *The Black Aesthetic*, edited by Addison Gayle Jr, 112–25. New York: Anchor Books.
Kramer, Jonathan. 1988. *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies*. New York: Schirmer.
Larrain, Nicolás Rafael Severin. 2005. 'Capoeira Angola: Música e Dança' [Capoeira Angola: Music and Dance]. Masters Thesis, Federal University of Bahia.
Lewis, George. 1996. 'Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives'. *Black Music Research Journal*, 16(1): 91–122.
Lewis, Lowell. 1992. *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Mason, Paul. 2009. 'Gestures of Power and Grace: Brutal Combat, Beautiful Choreography and the Bricolage of the Contemporary'. In *Boundaries and Beyond: Language, Culture, and Identity of Souteast Asia*, 33–5, edited by M. K. S. Manueli and H. Hussin. Kuala Lampur: University of Malaya.
McGuire, Colin. 2015. 'The Rhythm of Combat: Understanding the Role of Music in Performances of Traditional Chinese Martial Arts and Lion Dance'. *MUSICultures* 42(1): 1–23.
McNeill, William. 1995. *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Monson, Ingrid. 1999. 'Riffs, Repetition, and Theories of Globalization'. *Ethnomusicology*, 43(1): 31–65.

Rahn, John. 1993. 'Repetition'. *Contemporary Music Review* 7: 49–57.

Shaffer, Kay. 1977. *O Berimbau-de-Barriga e seus Toques* [The Belly Berimbau and its Rhythms]. Rio de Janeiro: Ministerio de Educação e Cultura, Secretaría de Asuntos Culturais, Fundação Nacional de Arte, Instituto Nacional de Folclore.

Schuller, Gunther. 1989. *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz 1930–1945*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Snead, James. 1984. 'Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture'. In *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, edited by Henri Louis Gates. London: Routledge, 59–80.

Tenzer, Michael, ed. 2006. *Analytical Studies of World Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Varela, Sergio. 2013. 'Mandinga: Power and Deception in Afro-Brazilian Capoeira'. *Social Analysis*, 57(2): 1–20.

Williams, Duncan. 2015. 'A Short Cross-Analysis of Brazilian Capoeira and Thai Sarama Music and Shared Ritual Practices'. *Analytical Approaches to World Music* 4(1): 1–15.