BRAZIL FIELD TRIP: CAPOEIRA, SAMBA, AND MORE IN PEDRA FURADA

After class, a group of about fifteen students, including myself, boarded a van and headed down to Pedra Furada, a "bairro popular" with an ocean view. We were guided along the twisted alleyways and given a mini-tour of the neighborhood. The streets were vibrant: colorful collections of trash lined the walkways, stray animals prowled for tidbits of food, home-run stores were pasted with orange flags advertising Skol. People peddled various sweets in hand-crafted carts while quietly humming to themselves. Children ran bare-foot through the streets playing tag while women nursed their babies on make-shift porches. In the humid air, the news of the day ran rampant: people were discussing what they were having for dinner, scraps of tele-novellas floated through the doorways, and a scratched copy of 'Single Ladies' by Beyonce started and stuttered to a stop through an open window. Our group witnessed improvised houses built so close to each other that one could smell their neighbor's breath. Homes built over the ocean were scantily supported by poles of wood driven through the water. I felt like some of the homes wouldn't even remain standing after the next downpour of rain.

As we began to walk towards the capoeira school, Chris, our guide, informed us that the government was trying to buy out the *favela*. With its prime location and ocean-front view, the government was promising to transfer the residents to a different place. This exchange would give the government the opportunity to tear down the houses in order to replace them with a big hotel aimed at attracting incoming tourists. So far, the residents had done well at resisting this offer but no one had any idea how long it would be until the government implemented their agenda. With this in mind, we were joined by several local children and walked along the uneven road to the capoeira school. The capoeira school, located on the third floor of a solid brick building, was an incredible experience. As soon as we walked in, the animated capoeira instructor directed us to remove our shoes. The room was humid and the walls were covered with beautiful graffiti that depicted Africans playing capoeira in lush green fields accompanied by music.

The environment was very positive—all of the children were locals and were given lessons for free because they couldn't afford to pay. The instructor put on dance music and started to teach us some very basic moves. We crouched low, side by side with the local children, and swayed back and forth to the music. Soon, we were split into two groups and pitted against each other. The children, of course, were the stars of the show. I couldn't compete with their early mastery of this ancient martial art but it was fun to try. I practiced dodging blows and doing high kicks above their heads in cadence to the music.

We then formed a large circle with the children in the center. Each child chose one of us as their dance partner. I attempted an awkward samba as one of the instructors effortlessly danced around me. One little boy in particular shined as he swayed his little hips and danced around one of the girls from our program. Afterwards, the children were given the floor and we watched as one by one, they completed multiple back flips and other feats of gravity. I have to say that I was very impressed as I watched them fight one another in such a graceful way. When we left the capoeira school, there was sweat on our brows and grins on our faces. At the end of the day, it was an extremely valuable and mind-blowing opportunity to spend the evening exploring the neighborhood and learning capoeira in Pedra Furada.

—Aleyna Jones
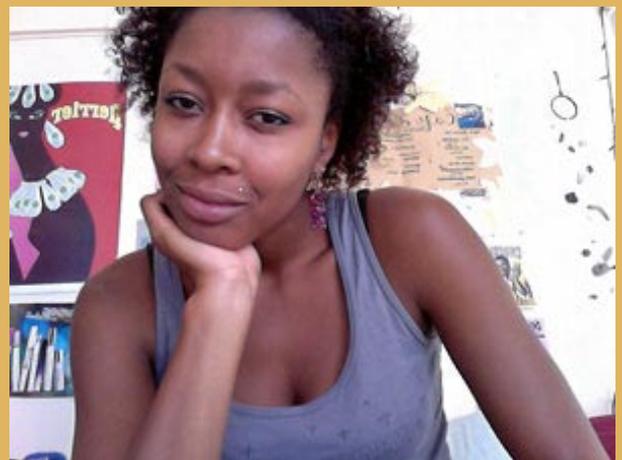
Aleyna is a UCEAP student from UCSC studying in UCEAP's Language and Culture Program in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. The program is anchored by the course "Brazil and the Black Atlantic," an interdisciplinary investigation of Afro-Brazilian identity and culture. Various interactions with the community, like the one described here, are part of the course.