

The Classroom as Ginga: on the experiences of “becoming a man,” “turning into a faggot,” and building knowledge in the circle

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Abstract: This essay proposes thinking of the classroom as a circle, a place of exchange, vulnerability, and the collective construction of knowledge. Starting from a childhood memory in which I, still a child, pretended to be a teacher, the narrative intertwines with pedagogical experiences lived in courses on gender and race studies from an intersectional perspective, taught at Brazilian universities in recent years. The metaphor of *ginga*—borrowed from *capoeira*—is central to understanding how teaching can be playful, political, affective, and ethical, opening space for the body, emotion, and attentive listening. Inspired by authors such as bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Wilson Barbosa, Gilles Deleuze, and Emmanuel Lévinas, the text argues that arranging the classroom in a circle functions as a practice that decentralizes power, legitimates lived experience as a way of knowing, and builds learning communities in the presence of the Other who calls us into relation. Through classroom accounts, especially discussions around masculinities and difference, I argue that knowledge can be built from attentive listening, eloquent silence, and the willingness to confront tensions. The circle thus becomes a sacred space of coexistence with the Other, where *ginga* is necessary to engage with conflicts, affects, and diverse forms of knowledge. With this essay, I propose thinking of *ginga* as an epistemic and pedagogical tool that leads us to understand that teaching and learning in a circle require the full presence of the body and a disposition to be affected, to inhabit vulnerability, and to build—collectively—a knowledge in constant movement.

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Opening the Circle

In my earliest childhood memories, I was a three-year-old boy. In those memories, the game I most enjoyed was hanging a small chalkboard on the wall of my mother’s

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backyard and, in front of it, arranging three or four small stools in a circle to simulate a classroom in which I was the teacher. I would stand before the chalkboard, gesturing and speaking to my imaginary students seated on the stools. There, I could spend hours playing at being a teacher. What was once a childhood game has become my adult vocation. This scene is among my most powerful memories and, today, after many years, it presents itself with a density and potency that continue to accumulate meaning over time, increasingly shaping the contours of my adult choices.

Playing at being a teacher as a child says much about the choices I have made throughout my life. Today, as a “real” teacher (and not merely pretending in my mother’s backyard), whenever I enter the classroom it feels as though my inner child stands once again before a small chalkboard hanging on the wall, with a few desks before it—this time occupied by students who are anything but imaginary. The difference is that this childhood game has become my profession, and for that reason I often say that I work by playing. Perhaps it was even coherent that, at three years old, I was already playing at working. What is certain is that there is something profoundly powerful about being a child—something we gradually lose over the course of life: the willingness to play at being whatever one wishes to become.

In revisiting this childhood memory, I sense that my child-self was already playing at becoming whatever he wished to be. Unconsciously, perhaps, my three-year-old self was already sketching the outlines of his own future. Perhaps that is why work has never been something burdensome or joyless for me, at least not the work of teaching and learning. On the contrary, I feel that my professional choice has deeply honored my inner child. This choice, of course, was not made on the basis of financial gain, for it is widely known that teaching is generally not considered economically successful. Yet this personal decision has never been about money. Choosing the classroom as a place of work, in my case, carries something playful that I have never allowed my inner child to lose.

This does not mean that my choice has never generated existential crises of the kind, “What am I doing here?” Such moments have certainly occurred. Yet I have never doubted how genuine this choice was, nor how profoundly it resonates with my deepest

self—with that three-year-old child who already felt like a teacher. In a certain sense, whenever I enter the classroom, I feel that a childlike spirit still inhabits me. Being in the classroom retains something playful and magical that remains intimately connected to the imaginative being of a child at play.

Childhood is often described as the phase of life marked by the greatest creative freedom, precisely because it is the phase in which one plays at being whatever one wishes to be. As children, we play at being astronauts, athletes, swimmers, football players, scientists, teachers, cooks, mechanics. Everything is possible, for we have not yet fully entered the realm of the limiting beliefs of adult life. When I realize that my professional choice is also the choice of my child-self, I recognize that there is no greater freedom than the freedom of choice exercised by a child.

Although my students are no longer imaginary, the chalkboard is no longer small, and I am no longer in my mother's backyard, the playful character of being in the classroom endures. The feeling that being in the classroom is a form of play has never left me. The magical universe of arranging the stools in a circle before the chalkboard, the exchanges between my imaginary students and myself, and the seriousness with which I treated it all accompany me to this day. And just as I did at three years old, my students today also sit in a circle.

Over the past five years of teaching, I have made a pedagogical choice that, in many ways, reconstructs the setting of this earliest childhood memory. Before beginning class, I ask the same question: "Shall we form a circle?" Anticipating the question, the students begin, together with me, to arrange the desks into a circular formation before the chalkboard. For me, organizing the classroom in a circle carries a political ethos and a praxis that I wish to examine in this essay.

In the first part, I share the universe of *ginga*, a central element in *capoeira*², and relate this concept to ways of inhabiting the classroom while constructing knowledge. I

² *Capoeira* is an Afro-Brazilian embodied practice that combines martial art, dance, music, and ritual performance, developed by enslaved Africans and their descendants in Brazil as a form of resistance, self-defense, and communal expression. Structured around a circular formation (*roda*) and guided by call-and-response songs and percussive rhythms, capoeira operates simultaneously as combat technique, aesthetic

propose thinking of *ginga* as an epistemic and pedagogical tool placed in the service of collective knowledge production from a position of vulnerability, affect, and attentive listening to the Other. To this end, I draw on Wilson Nascimento Barbosa's reflections on *ginga*, as well as on the ideas of bell hooks and Paulo Freire, in order to reflect on the educational process through the organization of the classroom as a circle—a form that allows us to understand knowledge construction as a practice of *ginga*.³

In the second part, I recount a pedagogical process conducted in a class on gender in which I discussed, in a circle with students, what it means to be a man. I share the tensions inherent in the formation of individuals socialized as belonging to the male gender, as well as the anguish, pain, and suffering embedded in the imperative to “become a man” and the socially imposed fear linked to the dangers of “turning into a faggot.” I reflect on the challenges of proposing a model of knowledge production that attempts to disrupt the authority of the professor, as advocated by bell hooks. In an autobiographical and autoethnographic movement (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2019; Gregorio, 2023), I share my own experiences of “becoming a man” and “turning into a faggot” in order to build, within the classroom, an epistemic community grounded in trust, affect, and shared vulnerability. In this circular classroom model, the professor is not the center of attention; rather, everyone occupies the center of the same circle. When the professor participates in sharing lived experiences, vulnerability becomes the foundation of a plural,

improvisation, and cultural memory, encoding histories of survival, displacement, and insurgent creativity within the Black Atlantic.

³ *Ginga* is the foundational swaying movement in *capoeira* that sustains readiness, relational awareness, and strategic improvisation. Here mobilized as an epistemic metaphor for embodied, responsive knowledge production. I also use the term *gingar* - which could be precariously translated as “to turn” - like a verb in order to think of this movement as an action and a state of being in the world. I deliberately choose not to translate *ginga* into English. While approximate renderings such as *sway*, *rhythmic sway*, *embodied improvisation*, *relational movement*, or even *corporeal attunement* may capture partial dimensions of the term, none fully conveys its semantic, historical, and political density. *Ginga* is not merely a bodily oscillation or an improvisational technique; it is an Afro-Brazilian embodied practice rooted in *capoeira* that carries epistemic, ethical, aesthetic, and relational meanings formed within the histories of resistance of the Black Atlantic. Translating the term would risk reducing it to a descriptive physical movement or assimilating it into preexisting Anglo-theoretical vocabularies that cannot fully hold its situated significance. Retaining *ginga* in Portuguese thus functions as a decolonial gesture: it affirms the legitimacy of locally grounded conceptual production and resists the expectation that theoretical categories must be rendered fully transparent within dominant linguistic regimes.

diverse, and strengthened community. It is when the figure of the omniscient and untouchable professor is dismantled that the circle of knowledge begins to turn (*gingar*).

I bring forth the tensions that exist within a diverse and plural environment marked by opposing and antagonistic worldviews, and, drawing on Gilles Deleuze, I reflect on teaching and learning as processes that awaken interest—where what matters most seems less about determining which vision is more true or correct, and more about recognizing that building a classroom community requires standing before the Other, before difference, or, in the terms of Emmanuel Lévinas, before the face of the Other who calls us into question.

Within this classroom model, *ginga* fulfills an important pedagogical function, for it is the condition of a way of being in the world with one's whole body—and a way of knowing through *ginga*. Teaching and learning in a circle require an ethical, aesthetic, and political disposition to be continually affected by the Other.

“Everything for us happens in circles”: *gingante* thought⁴

The deepest experiences—those that become most present in our formation and in our imaginary—are experiences in the circle. *Capoeira* happens in a circle, *samba* happens in a circle, the *gira*⁵ of the *terreiro*⁶ happens in a circle, *ciranda*⁷ happens in a

⁴ “*Gingante* thought” is a conceptual extension of *ginga* to describe a mode of thinking characterized by rhythmic displacement, relational responsiveness, and strategic improvisation.

⁵ I intentionally maintain the term *gira* in Portuguese. While expressions such as *ritual session*, *spirit-possession ceremony*, or *mediumistic gathering* may approximate specific elements of the practice, each translation isolates one dimension—liturgical, phenomenological, or performative—at the expense of its relational and cosmological totality. A *gira* (from the verb *girar* – to turn, in English) is simultaneously movement, encounter, embodiment, circulation of spiritual force, and collective attunement.

⁶ *Terreiro* is the ritual space dedicated to these Afro-Brazilian religious traditions such as *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*.

⁷ *Ciranda* is a traditional Brazilian children's circle dance and song form. I preserve the term *ciranda* rather than translating it simply as *circle dance*. Although the latter may describe its basic choreographic structure, it fails to communicate the affective, pedagogical, communal, and historically situated dimensions of *ciranda* within Brazilian cultural life.

circle⁸. As Nego Bispo states, “Everything for us happens in circles” (Bispo dos Santos, 2023, p. 12). When I became aware of this, I understood that although my child-self did not enjoy playing with many children, even when alone with imaginary friends and students, he always played in a circle. The circle was already, for that child, an element and a form that guaranteed playfulness in the process of being and existing in the world. It is no coincidence that the cultural manifestations, lived practices, and expressive forms mentioned above all share the same structure: the circle.

Arranging the classroom in a circular formation offers a far richer and more expansive experience of exchange, particularly in terms of individual formation and the awareness of being-in-collectivity. To be in a circle is to face the Other directly; it is to inhabit a position of constant vulnerability. Facing one another requires eye contact; it requires listening. If we remain seated in rows, turned away from one another, such listening becomes far less possible.

In my classroom experiences, I have observed that in a linear arrangement, when one student speaks, others do not necessarily turn to receive what is being said. In such a configuration, gazes rarely meet. One turns one’s back on the Other—and this gesture encapsulates much of the dominant classroom dynamic. Turning one’s back on the Other may become an obstacle to welcoming the Other and, consequently, to allowing oneself to see through the Other’s gaze. In a circle, by contrast, it is nearly impossible to avert one’s eyes. When the Other speaks, they summon the gaze. A student’s narrative and their interpretation of the text under discussion are mediated by a look that carries an entire life—and an inner child.

When we adopt this pedagogical practice, the moment we invite students to sit in a circle, we open doors and windows to everyday life beyond school, to the diversity of lived experiences and social visions that students bring, and to the profound challenges such exposure entails (Oliveira et al., 2010, p. 261, my translation).

⁸ The circular format of cultural manifestations originating in the African diaspora and in Indigenous matrices in Brazil constitutes a powerful symbolic and embodied representation. Regardless of its mythological origin, the circular configuration has neither beginning nor end and carries an important energetic function in practices such as *candomblé*, *capoeira*, *samba*, and even children’s circle games such as *ciranda*.

The circle thus becomes a pedagogical element that introduces into classroom interaction dimensions that exceed the course syllabus. Beyond the texts included in the bibliography, there emerges another kind of text—or perhaps more precisely, another kind of narrative weaving—whose inscription belongs to lived experience rather than to the written page. In the classroom circle, knowledge born of experience becomes present. I proceed from the premise that the classroom can assemble feminist pedagogical tools and strategies that horizontally center and privilege both theoretical knowledge and knowledge derived from lived experience. Inspired by bell hooks—to whom I owe many of my reflections and passions for education—I understand the classroom circle as a place where students’ lived experiences come through memory. In this sense, being in a circle enables a distinctive blending of experiential and analytical modes of knowing (hooks, 2017).

Over the past five years, I have taught a course on gender, race, and class from an intersectional perspective in both public and private universities in Brazil⁹. In the past few years, I adopted the circular arrangement strategy in face-to-face undergraduate courses at a federal public university. What struck me during this period was the ethnic, social, and economic diversity of the enrolled students. Previously, I had taught the same course at a prestigious private university, widely regarded as elite within Brazilian higher education. There, the context was markedly different: predominantly white, upper-middle- and upper-class students, often internationally traveled, well provided for, arriving on campus in their own cars.

In the more recent public university context, the reality shifted. The composition of students clearly reflected a different profile. A significant portion of students came from less privileged backgrounds and had possibly experienced racial, gendered, or class-based violence. In classrooms such as these, I begin from the premise that it is imperative to secure a political space within which these students may express themselves. I draw on the Freirean principle, shared by bell hooks, that community must be built—and that “one

⁹ In recent years, I have taught this course at the undergraduate level in International Relations programs.

way to build community in the classroom is to recognize the value of each individual voice” (hooks, 2017, p. 58, my translation).

My recent teaching experiences have shown me that being in a circle invites us to listen to the Other, to be with the Other, and to ensure that the Other does not become invisible in the classroom. One of the central challenges of establishing this dynamic—this political and geometric ethos constitutive of the circle—is to ensure that the most marginalized students, those who have had few opportunities to be recognized and heard beyond university walls, are acknowledged as voices with important contributions to make. Ensuring that all students feel part of a community in which what they have to offer matters requires recognizing that knowledge is also built from the memories they share and the experiences they have lived—not solely from textual readings.

It is common for students to feel deeply affected in courses that address sensitive, profound, and often painful themes. The dimension of being affected—and allowing oneself to be affected—leads us to recognize that the classroom circle also requires a willingness to build communities traversed by affective and emotional fields that frequently retrieve and reveal pain and suffering as part of the knowledge-production process.

There have been moments in my teaching trajectory when I witnessed students become emotional, cry, or express anger. Engaging this emotional field is part of a pedagogical process that seeks to break with the barriers of a “banking model” of education (Freire, 2021), structured through the alignment of students in rows—a system in which the professor deposits knowledge into students, who later withdraw it to prove they have learned. The rigidity characteristic of row-based classrooms constitutes a form of regulation and discipline that contains bodies and emotions, rendering differences less visible (Oliveira et al., 2010, p. 261).

The classroom circle, by contrast, decentralizes the educator and situates them alongside the learner as a perpetual apprentice. Knowledge production often activates lived pain that cannot be contained within textual limits. At times, such pain overflows the bodies that carry it and affects everyone involved—for a community is being built, and in it, mutual affectation is a shared condition. As bell hooks writes, “to hear one

another (the sound of different voices), to listen to one another is an exercise in recognition” (hooks, 2017, p. 58, my translation).

Of course, arranging students in a circle does not guarantee vulnerability or the professor’s renunciation of authority. Yet the circle is a challenging invitation for all. To be in a circle is to sit beside one another, to “see the other, recognize the other, hear the other, feel the other” (Oliveira et al., 2010, p. 261, my translation). Accepting this invitation ultimately means acknowledging that we are inevitably with both the similar and the different—and that respect, reason, and emotion form a necessary triad for coexistence and learning (Oliveira et al., 2010, p. 262). This is no easy task.

The classroom circle offers the opportunity to see, think, and act in circular ways. Discussions have no definitive end; they are composed of recommencements (Bispo dos Santos, 2023). Knowledge in the circle is constructed from multiple directions—as many directions as there are students present. Thought is not linear; it curves, rises, descends, detours, returns, lingers, trembles. It is like the *ginga* of capoeira. Over the past five years, I have sought to inhabit the classroom circle as if I were in a *capoeira* circle—to live the classroom through *ginga* and through what I call *gingante* thought.

In *capoeira*, *ginga* is the fundamental movement from which all offensive and defensive strikes emerge¹⁰, whether linear or circular (Barbosa, 1991b). The *capoeirista* (the person who plays *capoeira*) maintains a base while swaying, feinting, insinuating movement on one side while mobilizing the other, dissimulating with the hands, seeking to disorient the adversary, swaying, mocking, leaning from side to side, deliberately refusing to grant satisfaction. In an act of integration, the *capoeirista* may offer by negating—offering and denying the face to a slap; offering and denying the belly to the blade of a razor. For Wilson Nascimento Barbosa, the *capoeirista* reveals:

the dialectical nature of Black culture, constantly working with abrupt change, with mutation: the foot in place of the hand, the backside in place of the head

¹⁰ *Capoeira* was—and continues to be—an instrument of struggle and a resource for the emancipation of socially marginalized groups. It was practiced by enslaved Black populations in Colonial and Imperial Brazil, a society that, even after the proclamation of the Republic, preserved profound levels of inequality; to this day, *capoeira* remains a resource of social emancipation (Cordeiro & Araújo, 2018, p. 139). Until the first half of the twentieth century, *capoeira* was prohibited under the Brazilian Penal Code, and its practice was criminalized as *vagrancy*, revealing the racism and classism constitutive of Brazilian society.

(...) delivering blows with the buttocks—something a ‘martial’ fighter would deem undignified. It is, obviously, a matter of mockery, of reversing expectations, of manifesting the specific cunning of Black people (Barbosa, 1991b, p. 8, my translation).

What I propose is to think the classroom through *ginga*, understanding knowledge construction as an invitation to a dance that is simultaneously a struggle. Teaching, in this sense, is a playful invitation. It contains a ludic dimension, yet it is also serious. Teaching is a “mixture of struggle, dance, courage, and cunning” (Lopes apud Barbosa, 1991a, p. 10, my translation). To think knowledge production in the classroom requires a certain *ginga*.

In recent years, there have been many moments when I, too, was moved during exchanges of knowledge and perceptions of the world with students. There have also been moments of discomfort, when more conservative students expressed misogynistic, homophobic, or transphobic views. In such moments, I needed cunning; I needed *ginga*. I needed to understand that in the circle all could be present—and that this is both the strength and the challenge of engaging in a pedagogical process that seeks to disrupt hierarchies and multiple forms of domination and control often concentrated in the figure of the professor.

As in *capoeira*, the classroom sometimes requires play: leaning from side to side, teasing, inviting the Other into a dance that reveals itself as struggle, dodging, deliberately refusing satisfaction. Teaching in a circle is to be inspired by drum cultures¹¹ that express a rhythmic vision of the world, conceived as becoming, as perpetual change, as rhythmic movement (Barbosa, 1991a)¹². The classroom circle is a proposal for continuous, unfinished methodological movement—a permanent state of presence before the Other, even the Other whose speech threatens one’s own existence.

¹¹ “Drum cultures” is a reference to Afro-diasporic rhythmic epistemologies in which percussion structures communal temporality and relationality.

¹² Wilson do Nascimento Barbosa argues that although *ginga* has been preserved and has traversed Black cultural manifestations—such as *capoeira*, *samba*, and the *terreiros* of *candomblé* and *umbanda* in Brazil—it is not exclusive to Black cultures. He contends that European cultural formations intertwined with Arab, Turkish, and Romani influences also generated swaying, rhythmically dynamic forms such as flamenco, tango, and bolero; similarly, cultural crossings involving Arab and Berber influences gave rise to rhythms such as rumba, mambo, cumbia, and maracatu.

What I propose, ultimately, is to think the classroom circle as a rhythmic movement of successive displacements of the professor's authority—as a constant deviation from the will to power, from the desire to silence the Other who does not share one's worldview, and finally, as an ongoing vulnerability that places the inner child at the forefront in its most genuine desire to play with the Other and to be in the world.

A class is emotion and *ginga*: building community through lived experience

In recent years, I have included in my course on gender, race, and class from an intersectional perspective a class devoted specifically to masculinities. I realized that this topic was necessary in such a course; otherwise, I would be reaffirming and reproducing the idea that masculinity should not be an object of discussion or, at worst, that masculinity is a universal and given category that does not need undergo analytical and critical scrutiny. Following the same reasoning, I also included a class on whiteness, as I came to see that it was essential for students to understand that discussing gender and race also entails examining and analyzing the positions occupied by men in general and by white people in particular.

Students who identified as male, upon encountering the topic of masculinities in the syllabus, were visibly uncomfortable. This discomfort was also shared by some female students who initially expected that, in a gender studies course, “the woman question” would be the central focus of study. In the very first sessions, as I presented the syllabus and noticed the unease among some students, I explained my choice of topics and began with the following question to the class: which body is a body endowed with gender and race?

This provocative question was grounded in the assumption that everyone would be led to question their own race and gender, in the sense that every body inserted within the frameworks that render the human intelligible is a body endowed with gender and

race.¹³ The classroom would fall into silence—pedagogical silence, insofar as the question affected the movement of bodies shifting in their chairs and the crossing of glances. I would also ask whether being a man means having a gender, and whether being white means having a race. The course discussion thus began through these very tensions.

This movement proved important and led me to deeper reflections on education as a *ginga*-inflected practice and as a process of building affective communities, as I have sought to experience it. In one class on the concept of gender, I asked the students to help me arrange the desks in a circle and posed the question: “What is it to be a woman?” To begin, I brought in one of the most famous statements in gender studies by Simone de Beauvoir (2011), “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” from *The Second Sex*. As expected, this is a question that clearly allows—and I would say even requires—responses to draw upon a repertoire of lived experiences. Immediately, the female students began speaking not so much about what being a woman is, but above all about what it feels like to be a woman, especially within Brazilian society. They began to position themselves, reflecting on how they experience themselves as women.

Unanimously, the statements of the students who identified as women revealed a common thread: throughout their lives, they had been educated to behave “as a woman should behave.” This process involved parental and familial instructions about how to sit, how to speak, what was appropriate for them to do as girls, with what—and with whom—they should play. In short, their accounts converged around the idea that being a woman entails a series of rules and norms imposed upon them—rules meant to guide (or at least expected to guide) them toward what society anticipates of women.

¹³ Although this is not a central question of this essay but rather a background concern, there are important contemporary reflections that challenge the assumption that all bodies are intelligible as human. So-called abject bodies, for instance, pass through registers other than those of human intelligibility. The racial question fundamentally informs who is and who is not considered human—or, in other words, who is read as a human body. In this regard, I suggest reading Julia Kristeva (1989) on abjection and Berenice Bento (2022, 2024), who reflects on whether gender is a useful analytical category depending on the bodies under consideration, and on how racism is constructed through the notion of abjection.

Not sitting with their legs open, not speaking loudly, playing only, and preferably with other girls, playing with dolls or house games, not wearing short clothes, being careful when going out, not talking to strangers. These were some of the examples many of them offered to illustrate the normative frameworks within which they grew up and were socialized. Beyond what they, as women, were not supposed to do, some emphasized personality traits commonly attributed to women, traits that, not coincidentally, are cast as the exact opposite of those attributed to men: women as “fragile,” “sensitive,” “caring,” those who must be “protected,” among thousands of other attributes that would not fit within this space. Men, by contrast, are assigned the opposite: “strong,” “rational,” those who “must protect.” It is noteworthy that the paths the women traced in defining “woman” in class evoked precisely a notion of “man” in order to make explicit what women are said to lack and what men are presumed to possess (or are expected to possess): strength, courage, rationality, and so on. In other words, woman appears as defined by the absence of what man supposedly has.

At first, of course, not all the female students felt comfortable speaking, and my question echoed for a few seconds before the first student began. From the standpoint of an educator attentive to dynamics, interactions, and the multiple readings of bodies in space, it was perceptible that as each woman chose to share her perspective, others began to feel safe enough to express their own. It was a chain reaction: one voice encouraged another. What one shared resonated in the experiences of others, and it was at that moment that the classroom began to take on the contours of *ginga*. The students shared, and one after another asked permission to enter the circle and *gingar* with the others.

Naturally, only the women initially felt interpellated by the question, and the men in the room remained silent. But I also wanted to hear from them, and I continued the class by introducing the perspective that if Beauvoir, in asserting that one is not born but rather becomes a woman, could we not also ask whether one is not born but rather becomes a man? When I posed this reflection, the astonishment on the faces of the men in the room was unmistakable. One of them said, “Professor, but a man is a man!” I smiled and asked, “What do you mean, a man is a man?” He replied, “A man is born a man and that’s it—there’s no such thing as becoming a man!”

I then asked whether, just as women are socialized and grow up trying to respond to norms about what a woman is and how she should be, men do not also grow up trying to fit into conceptions of what a man is and how he should be. Silence. I continued by asking whether every person born with a penis—what we designate as male genitalia—is automatically born with their gender guaranteed. The silence persisted, though some of the male students nodded affirmatively. I pressed further: if this were indeed the case—if “a man is born a man and that’s it”—why would it be different for women? Why would women have to respond to gender norms throughout their lives while men would not?

These initial reflections were an invitation for students to share their worldviews beyond the assigned readings. If, as Paulo Freire (1985) teaches us, “the reading of the world precedes the reading of the word”, then before encountering any text, before learning any word, each person in the classroom is already immersed in their own lived experience of the world, of apprehending and understanding it through conditions that are singular yet also shaped by broader collective contexts that contour those experiences.

To understand the class as a space to which students are invited to bring their own perceptions of the world was precisely my aim. I wanted each person to think from their own lived experiences, informed by the social universe within which they were inserted and socialized. Thus, the student’s statement that “a man is born a man and that’s it” reveals itself as a reading of the world that runs counter to what the texts proposed in the syllabus suggest, namely, that gender is constructed rather than given a priori (Scott, 1990; Saffioti, 1999; Lauretis, 1994; Butler, 2019).

I begin from the premise that all of us bring into the classroom a form of knowledge that comes from experience, and that experience is itself a mode of knowing—one that can coexist with other modes of knowing and enrich our collective learning (hooks, 2017). In this sense, the statement that “a man is born a man and that’s it” is politically potent and pedagogically stimulating, for it makes visible the differences and diversity that compose a circle and invites us to inhabit this plural, diverse, and rich space.

This type of pedagogical conduct in which deeply and intimately rooted positions are shared in the circle, in which dissensus emerges and worldviews are placed under tension often leads to moments of profound silence. This is not merely an absence of

interest in responding to the Other, but rather an eloquent silence. From the perspective of someone facilitating the construction of thought and knowledge, the difference is clear between moments of silence that signal disinterest and those in which silence speaks for itself. This is a silence that stirs affective structures and reveals itself through body language: through glances, through the shifting of backs against chairs, through lips that move as if wanting to speak.

To pose questions of this kind requires from students a willingness to share lived experience, something of their most intimate and deeply rooted selves, of a self that has never before been interrogated. It also demands that the professor be willing to share their own experiences. As bell hooks (2017, p. 35, my translation) argues, “professors who expect students to share confessional narratives, but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive.” Moreover, “[w]hen professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators.” (bell hooks, 2017, p. 35, my translation). In this sense, students’ silences are moments in which I feel invited to enter the circle and, like a *capoeirista*, I ask their permission to share something of myself and to bring my lived experiences as a way of producing knowledge.

I continued the reflection by offering something of myself, of my speaking body, whose marks might enunciate the place from which I come and which informs my way of knowing. I began by sharing, in the circle, that I grew up in an interracial family in which, from an early age, I would hear my paternal grandmother say to my mother about me: “Be careful, or this boy will turn into a faggot!” I told the students that I grew up with this sentence echoing in my mind. It functioned both as a warning to my mother and as a preemptive attribution of blame that would fall upon her for her maternal “failure” to raise me as a man. In my childhood universe, “turning into a faggot” acquired the worst possible connotations, signifying the greatest aberration that could befall a child. “Turning into a faggot” became my greatest childhood nightmare—and my mother’s as well.

I went on to say, within the circle, that during my school vacations my father—who was a mechanic—would always make me go to work with him at the shop, insisting

that I needed to “learn a man’s trade” and that “getting my hands greasy” was “what real men do.”¹⁴ My father would say that I would “turn into a faggot” if I stayed at home “being a mama’s boy”. “This boy is going to turn into a faggot!” became a refrain throughout my childhood and adolescence, gradually acquiring material force in my body insofar as it induced it to behave in certain ways. I began to speak less and to restrain myself more, because my voice was, according to my father and the boys at school who bullied me, a “girl’s voice.” I felt ashamed of who I was. I kept to myself, lingering in corners, and had few friends. I did not want to play with the other boys at school. This discourse acquired materiality and materialized (Butler, 2015)¹⁵ in my body in ways that contained and silenced it, since anything my body did could become a mode of expression to be avoided, as it was deemed an improper form of self-expression.

I continued sharing that, despite all the norms directed at me in order to discipline and control my body (Foucault, 2021), I always felt that there was something within me that was uncontrollable and insubordinate. I knew there was something in me that refused repression. Even though my childhood was traversed by the nightmare of compulsory heteronormativity¹⁶ (Rich, 1994), there were fissures my child-self would find, spaces in which it could free itself through the body.

There were moments when I, in my grandmother’s living room—the same grandmother who would tell my mother that I would “turn into a faggot”—would dance

¹⁴ The quotation marks I use throughout the text refer to phrases and expressions spoken by my family members, but they also signal utterances that reveal a patriarchal culture whose norms are oriented by heteronormativity, within which each gender is assigned, in binary terms, a specific function.

¹⁵ For Judith Butler, materiality and materialization are central concepts in her critique of traditional ways of thinking about the body, sex, and gender. She argues that materiality is not a fixed, natural substance existing prior to discourse, and that the body does not possess a pure, biological, pre-discursive materiality upon which gender is later “constructed.” Rather, materiality is always shaped by norms, discursive practices, and technologies of power. Materiality, therefore, is not denied; it is understood as the result of normative processes—materialization—operating through repetition and regulation, through which something comes to be recognized as “material,” “real,” “body,” or “sex.”

¹⁶ Compulsory heterosexuality can be understood as the social, cultural, political, and economic system that presupposes, imposes, and naturalizes heterosexuality as the only legitimate form of sexuality and affect. It is not merely an individual sexual orientation, but a normative structure that organizes social relations, defines gender expectations, shapes institutions (family, school, state), and delegitimizes or renders other sexualities invisible.

in front of the television, imitating *Globeleza*.¹⁷ My grandmother and my aunt, gathered in the room, watching me to dance before the screen inspired by that hypersexualized Black female figure, could only feign an expression of surprise accompanied by an awkward smile. I believe that, in their minds, there was no longer merely a fear that I might “turn into a faggot”; there was already a certainty—what they did not know was when it would be enunciated. Yet seeing me dance like *Globeleza* was itself already a form of announcement.

The students laughed when I told this story. They could surely picture the scene: a boy dancing *samba* in the middle of the living room, while his aunts and grandmother looked on in shock. Storytelling summons imagination into the classroom, and this is a crucial pedagogical resource—especially when knowledge is grounded in lived experience. It is an element that creates bonds and connections, as it mobilizes the affective realm beyond the strictly intellectual. Being in a circle with students offers the conditions for understanding the classroom as a space where creativity, imagination, and, above all, emotion are not merely permitted but welcomed.

For Gilles Deleuze, a class “is a kind of musical matter in movement, in which each group learns what suits it. Not everything suits everyone. A class is emotion. If there is no emotion, there is no intelligence, no interest—there is nothing” (Dosse, 2010, p. 291, my translation). For Deleuze (Deleuze; Parnet, 1995), the boundary between a good class and a bad one lies precisely in the student’s interest. A class is good when the student is awake, engaged, present. If there is no interest, the student is not fully conscious—he is asleep. Yet, for Deleuze, nothing determines in advance what exactly causes a student to awaken. Mysteriously, at some moment, the student awakens: interest is summoned, and he enters the circle. In this sense, a class is not exclusively about the intellect; it is more than that. As it is for Deleuze, I have come to understand that “a class is emotion.” However, I believe it is more still. What my trajectory as a professor has revealed to me is that a class is *ginga*.

¹⁷ *Globeleza* is the name given to a character created by Rede Globo—one of Brazil’s main television networks—to represent Carnival in its televised vignettes beginning in the 1990s. She became a media icon that, in stereotyped form, synthesizes the sensuality, dance, and bodily aesthetics associated with Brazilian Carnival. For feminist and anti-racist critiques, see Santos and Silva (2003).

In a certain way, although I had not previously planned to narrate that specific childhood memory, something of the order of the unsayable—perhaps something that escapes rationalization—affectively activated that moment of my life and came to me with a force from which I could not turn away. Perhaps the force of that personal memory reveals itself precisely in its power to affect the students and to awaken them to that moment of collective knowledge production within the circle. Everyone’s gaze, fixed and motionless, seemed undistracted even by the irritating hum of the rusted fan; and as I narrated my experience of “becoming a man,” I felt that I was increasingly able to awaken each person’s presence in the circle, especially the men’s.

I continued by saying, within the circle, that such expectations reflected social norms regarding what a man ought to be, and that my father’s and grandmother’s concern was an expression of fear that I might deviate from the binary normative route of gender. The discourse that forbade doing “this” or mandated doing “that” functioned as a constant reiteration of gender norms, revealing that there is nothing more unstable than gender itself, because if it were not unstable, there would be no need to reinforce and reiterate it incessantly. I went on to argue that my entire childhood was traversed by discourses and norms that demonstrate that one is not born a man but becomes one. The assertion that “this boy will turn into a faggot” reveals precisely the fear that I might stray from the prescribed path of “becoming a man.” It confirms that no one is, in fact, born a man or a woman; rather, these are categories imposed through multiple processes of normalization. Being born male does not automatically make one a man; manhood is constructed.

I then returned the question to the circle: “What does it mean to be a man?”¹⁸ For a few seconds, I noticed bodies shifting in their chairs, gazes drifting toward the horizon visible through the window, gestures that signal presence and the ways in which learning is not confined to the intellect but is, above all, embodied. The question “What does it mean to be a man?” reveals its force precisely through the eloquent silence it produces. It is a question that unsettles the body, that sends a shiver through it.

¹⁸ For further reflections on what this question provokes, see Ambra (2021).

As in *capoeira*, in which the body learns and responds, the classroom in circle formation summons bodies to be present, not seated and immobile, but awake and in relation. In *capoeira*, one must know the timing of the Other's movement, must understand it. One must feel the rhythm of the Other. In the classroom circle, *ginga* performs a similar function: it entails sensing the timing of gestures, the temporality of the Other's body, and reveals that teaching is also a process of learning how to listen, even when what one listens to is a silence that speaks more than words. Knowledge is embodied.

The silence persisted until a Congolese exchange student stated: "This homosexuality thing does not exist in my country. There, we only have men and women, that's it." The room seemed to go into shock at his remark. Students looked at one another as if to say, "And now, what do we say?" They looked at me as though expecting me to respond in a way that would counter his view, which clearly reflected how gender is lived within the culture of his country of origin (something not altogether different from prevailing Brazilian norms).

I felt a strong urge to respond in a way that would demonstrate how "mistaken" that position was. At the same time, however, I questioned internally whether doing so would amount to silencing that student by positioning him as "wrong" in contrast to what would be presented as the "correct" worldview. I remained silent, looking at everyone while grappling with this internal crisis over what to do, what to say. Then, with the circle still in silence, the same student added: "Even in the Bible this is clear, professor. That not only do man and woman exist, but woman is created from Adam's rib."

In that moment, I felt devastated. It was a blow to me, and, I believe, to many students present. My desire to exercise my authority as a professor grew in proportion to my sense of powerlessness. What that student had said was something my grandmother could have uttered to me as a child. It was precisely the same discourse voiced by some members of my family when I came out as homosexual. Hearing it unsettled me, not only because it touched a personal wound, but above all because I wondered which other students in that room might also have been struck by that discourse.

I found myself at an impasse over how to respond to that “sweep”, that unexpected move from an opponent. As all the students looked at me, seemingly certain that I would say something to counter the “blow,” my awareness of how politically potent that classroom moment had become began to expand. After all, what I sought was precisely a plural and diverse environment, one in which we could all stand before difference in a circle, facing the Other face to face. And that was exactly what I had before me. I immediately realized that, until then, the classes to which I had taught this course had largely shared an ideological alignment with critical and reflexive perspectives on gender, such that I had never encountered a moment like this. This was the first time I stood before a group that was genuinely diverse and plural, beyond the intellectual bubbles within which I had grown accustomed to teaching.

My feeling was one of failure, not only because I recognized within myself a desire to activate my authority as professor, which would contradict my pedagogical effort to build an affective, inclusive, and plural community, but above all because that desire emerged from another place: the place of a man who had grown up suffering the psychic and physical effects of that same patriarchal discourse that silences and renders invisible other ways of being in the world and other possibilities for understanding gender. In a certain sense, the fear my family harbored that this boy would “turn into a faggot” was sustained by the very same discourse voiced by the Congolese student.

No circle is free of tensions, neither in *capoeira* nor in the classroom. In both, there is the risk of the blow that wounds, of the word that touches open sores, of confrontation, of the silence that speaks volumes, of inequalities laid bare. Yet it is also true that within the circle conflict becomes possibility. The circle is ritual and risk; it is where ways of engaging the Other, difference, error, and challenge are practiced. In this process, the professor does not occupy the position of dispensing truths; rather, the professor is also one who becomes vulnerable in and with the circle. In contrast to a banking model of education, in which the educator deposits ready-made content into passive students, what I seek through the classroom-in-circle is, inspired by Paulo Freire (2020; 2021), a liberatory education grounded in dialogue, problem-posing, and the student’s critical consciousness of their own reality. In this emancipatory

process, *ginga* assumes a fundamental role within the circle, for *ginga* is a dance-fight of constant bodily movement, a body that is affected, that affects, that swerves and creates.

In the classroom circle, *ginga* functions as an epistemic and pedagogical tool for engaging tensions, silences, and clashes of ideas and affects. In such a classroom, one must *gingar*. Here, *gingar* acquires a pedagogical character of survival. It is through *ginga* in the circle that one perceives how circular form disrupts traditional vertical hierarchies, how it decentralizes knowledge by shifting exclusive focus away from the master and inviting mutual listening. In the classroom circle, listening itself circulates power and enables knowledge to emerge from each person's lived experience, generating a form of collective intelligence. Here lies the liberatory character of teaching and learning, with all the risks and challenges this entails. In the circle, no one is the center and everyone is the center simultaneously; to be in a circle affirms the value of the collective, of orality, of listening, and of self-reinvention.

I responded to the student that his was a biblical interpretation with which I was quite familiar. I explained that when I came of age and came out as homosexual, many members of my family invoked the same idea. What I did in that moment was to enter the circle and appropriate the biblical discourse by situating it within my lived experience, as a way of engaging the Other while simultaneously creating the conditions for others to engage that same discourse from a situated perspective. This movement of feinting, of insinuating one move and making another, of swaying, of teasing, of undulating, is a *ginga*-inflected way of "offering while refusing," as Barbosa describes the *capoeirista*'s movements: offering and withholding one's face from the opponent's slap, offering and withdrawing the belly from the razor's blade. It is in repetition, in the iteration of discourse, that the possibility of subversion resides (Butler, 1997). In this sense, *ginga* is subversion.

Conscious of this *ginga*-like movement, I asked the students how they understood the issue. Clearly, this was not what they expected from me. They anticipated that I would mobilize the authority attached to the professor's position to "combat" that view, but that was not the position I chose to occupy. Teaching unfolds along this fine line between the need to be responsive, even when what one can offer is silence and a gaze that refuses to

turn away. In moments when what is at stake, or rather, what is in the circle, is not the rational alone, I perceive that teaching is also an affective process. Not affective in a romanticized sense of love or pleasant sentiments, but in the sense of being affected by the Other, of that which moves us, regardless of its nature. Teaching is also a continual process of allowing oneself to be affected.

Some of the female students began to speak about how that view reinforces the context of violence against women in Brazil, insofar as it places women in a secondary and subordinate position in relation to men, as in the biblical narrative, and how it also sustains homophobic and transphobic violence in the country. They brought forward data indicating that Brazil is the country that most kills women, homosexuals, and trans people in the world.¹⁹ I found this movement significant, for what they did was not to combat the Other's discourse, but rather to reflect on the implications and everyday effects of that discourse.

Still, I wondered whether that student might have much more to share with the circle about the place from which he came. I asked them what might explain the alleged absence of homosexual and transgender people in Congo, as the student had claimed, in comparison with Brazil. After looking at me intently, the Congolese student replied that he thought that "maybe there are [homosexual and transgender people], but if someone catches them... you already know, professor..." to which I responded, "what happens?" In the silence of the circle, another Brazilian student interjected that "probably the same thing that happens in Brazil... they are murdered." The Congolese student nodded in confirmation.

¹⁹ For additional data on femicide, see the *Relatório Anual Socioeconômico da Mulher (RASEAM) 2025*, released by the Ministério das Mulheres (2025). Between 2015 and 2024, 11,650 cases of femicide and 29,659 cases of intentional homicide and bodily injury followed by death of women were recorded, totaling 41,309 cases of violent deaths of women during the period. Brazil continues to lead globally in the number of violent deaths motivated by LGBTphobia. According to the *Observatório de Mortes e Violências LGBTI+ no Brasil* (2024), the country reported 230 deaths of LGBTI+ people in 2023, of which 184 were murders, 18 suicides, and 28 due to other causes. The majority of victims were transgender people, especially trans women and travestis. The report *Dossiê Assassinatos e Violências contra Travestis e Transexuais Brasileiras em 2024* (Benevides, 2025), prepared by the Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais (ANTRA) and released in January 2025, presents an alarming panorama of violence against trans people in Brazil. Despite a 16% reduction compared to the previous year, the country has remained, for the sixteenth consecutive year, the one that kills the most trans people in the world.

I added that this was precisely the fear with which my childhood had been marked: the fear of not being allowed to exist as one is, the fear of being killed. I continued by sharing that society's fear of coexisting with those who are different, who have different sexual orientations, different desires, manifests itself in the alarming rates of violence against these minorities. This fear is imposed on thousands of children, not only in Brazil or Congo, but in many other parts of the world.

Immediately, another (Brazilian) student raised his hand and, with a trembling and visibly emotional voice, said that it was the first time he realized he could not answer the question "what is it to be a man?" He explained that throughout his life he had received only hatred from his father for being "more effeminate" than other boys, for "speaking in a high-pitched voice," and for having only female friends. As he shared his experience, with his voice shaking, deeply moved, he recounted severe episodes of violence he had suffered at the hands of his father during childhood. I saw other students becoming emotional, and at a certain moment I felt my own eyes fill with tears.

Between words and sobs, the student apologized for sharing all of that, and all I could do was listen and receive him from a very deep place within myself. In many ways, his words brought me back into contact with my own affective universe. I saw myself in him and allowed myself to cry. When he finished speaking, I, visibly moved, thanked him for the opportunity to have his experience shared with all of us and affirmed that this was a safe space for lived experiences to be voiced, and that there was no reason for guilt. Some students stood up and embraced him in gratitude and solidarity. Soon after, other students, men and women, began sharing their own experiences of how heteronormative and patriarchal norms had shaped their lives and their bodies.

The class unfolded through comments on texts by Joan Scott (1990), Teresa de Lauretis (1994), Simone de Beauvoir (2021), alongside reflections on each student's lived experiences. When theory is brought into proximity with lived reality, the learning process acquires far greater complexity and becomes much more compelling. It is precisely in bridging these two domains that we better grasp both the positions from which we speak and the limits of theory itself. There are lived experiences that exceed the boundaries of written text. When space is opened for bodily contact, for a classmate's

embrace in solidarity with what has been lived and narrated, when space is made for the body to be affected by listening to the Other, teaching and learning become far more powerful. The classroom becomes a space-time in which community can be built.

In that class, I became certain that, as Gilles Deleuze suggested, a class is emotion. What mattered to me was not converting any student's discourse or worldview. I was not interested in correcting the Other, but in establishing the conditions necessary to inhabit a communal space in which vulnerability and openness to the Other are central to teaching and learning.

The classroom-in-circle enables this face-to-face encounter with the Other. To be in a circle is to stand before the Other who addresses and demands a response from us. It is to encounter the exposed and vulnerable face of the Other. My decision to share my own lived experience of masculinity was, undoubtedly, an ethical summons to the students to share theirs. Here lies my pedagogical desire: to make the classroom a permanent invitation to engagement. Beyond encouraging students to read texts and engage with theoretical arguments and concepts, I am guided by the desire to bring theory and practice into encounter so that theory gains body and flesh, and experience acquires analytic and interpretive depth through which new ways of seeing and inhabiting the world may emerge.

To be in a circle with students is to accept the call of the Other from whom we cannot escape. What occurred in that class, when my shared experience became a demand upon the students, is, pedagogically speaking, what Emmanuel Lévinas understands philosophically as ethical responsibility before the Other. For Lévinas, there is no pre-ontological subject existing outside relationality; the Other is that which propels us. We are susceptible to the Other in such a way that we become responsible not for what is done to us, but for the relation established at the level of our radical susceptibility (Lévinas, 1981).

For Lévinas (1981), our susceptibility to the Other is neither desired nor chosen; it is the very condition of our responsiveness. We become responsible for the Other not because of what the Other does to us, but because we are susceptible to them, and this susceptibility is not something we can opt out of. Responsibility arises from the fact that

the Other acts upon the self in a way that, from the outset, constitutes an ethical summons. In Lévinas's view, subject formation itself takes place through this encounter with the Other, who has a face to which we are compelled to respond. As he writes, "The face, for its part, is inviolable; those eyes, absolutely unprotected, the most naked part of the human body" (Lévinas, 1990, p. 8, my translation).

In contrast to a classroom model in which students sit in rows, each seeing only the back of the head in front of them, the circle makes it possible to stand before what synthesizes the essence of the Other: the face. To stand before the face of the Other imposes upon us an ethical demand. It is to face a mouth that shares "its truth," and eyes that reveal pains and sufferings that often cannot be put into words, but that manifest themselves in tears, in touch, in embrace. To stand before the face of the Other requires that we—students and professors in the circle alike—become wholly vulnerable to what the Other makes of us.

At the end of that semester, the Congolese student approached me and said he had never taken a course that had shaken him so deeply, something that had been, for him, so challenging. He thanked me, saying he had come to understand much about Brazil through that class, and that although he did not agree with many of the ideas shared, he would return to his country very different from when he had first arrived. I looked at him and expressed my deep gratitude for the opportunity he had given us to contribute so meaningfully to making the class genuinely diverse and plural. I told him that my objective had never been to convince anyone of any idea, nor to determine right or wrong worldviews, but rather to affirm that different visions of the world can inhabit the same space—the same circle—in respectful and humane ways. I ended by saying that whoever enters the circle enters in order not to remain the same; one enters to fall and rise, to teach and to learn with one's whole body. What remains for me is that teaching is an art that requires embodied presence, listening, fair play, and an open soul. Teaching is a *ginga*-inflected process in which knowledge is never fixed; it swerves, evades, and continually reinvents itself.

Concluding Remarks

Teaching and learning in a circle require an ethical, aesthetic, and political disposition—a constant openness to being affected by the Other. It is ethical because our relationships are affective and reciprocal. It is aesthetic because the classroom-in-circle is a sensorial experience, capable of producing sensations and moving the subject (Santos and Betlinski, 2012): this Other who interpellates us with their gaze and makes us understand that what binds us is our total susceptibility to one another. And it is political because the classroom-in-circle allows us to build safe spaces in which participation is fundamental to constructing knowledge in the service of the political communities we seek to create. In this sense, the classroom-in-circle, more than a safe space in which each person feels comfortable participating, is a space in which thought has eyes, a nose, a mouth, and ears. Thought is not the back of the person seated in front of you, from whom only an indistinct voice can be heard. Thought cries, embraces, is affected, and smiles.

In the classroom-in-circle, it becomes possible to embody what is said; it becomes possible to listen to the Other from the standpoint of one who has lived something in their own flesh; and it becomes possible to construct knowledge from the place of feeling—particularly from suffering. As bell hooks (2017, p. 124) writes, “there is a particular knowledge that comes from suffering. It is a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed in it by experience”. Just as in *capoeira* bodies sing between blows, in the classroom circle voices recount the blows of a wounded self. Just as in *capoeira* one learns by falling and rising again, in the classroom-in-circle one learns by speaking and listening.

The circle is a space for enunciation and for listening. Often, listening in the circle is an attentive silence before the speech of the Other; it is a gaze held before the face of the one who speaks. It is like in *capoeira*, where one enters into an attentive silence at the call of the *berimbau*²⁰. Between silences and the echoes of sound, the circle reveals itself

²⁰ The *Berimbau* is an Afro-Brazilian musical instrument consisting of a wooden bow (*verga*), a steel string, and a hollow gourd that serves as a resonator. It is played with a thin stick (*baqueta*), accompanied by a small shaker (*caxixi*), and a stone or coin used to vary the pitch. In *capoeira*, the *berimbau* is the principal

in its sacred form—whether drawn with chalk or shaped through *ginga*. Whether in reverence to the ground, in reverence to the word of the Other, or to shared knowledge, to be in a circle—in the classroom, in *capoeira*, in *samba*, or in the *terreiro*—is to be offered a way of being and dwelling in the world with one’s whole body, a way of knowing through *ginga*.

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instrument: it leads the rhythm of the circle, determines the style of the game to be played, and “calls” bodies into and out of the circle, setting the tempo, cadence, and overall energy of the encounter.

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The Classroom as Ginga: on the experiences of “becoming a man,” “turning into a faggot,” and building knowledge in the circle

Abstract: This essay proposes thinking of the classroom as a circle, a place of exchange, vulnerability, and the collective construction of knowledge. Starting from a childhood memory in which I, still a child, pretended to be a teacher, the narrative intertwines with pedagogical experiences lived in courses on gender and race studies from an intersectional perspective, taught at Brazilian universities in recent years. The metaphor of *ginga*—borrowed from *capoeira*—is central to understanding how teaching can be playful, political, affective, and ethical, opening space for the body, emotion, and attentive listening. Inspired by authors such as bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Wilson Barbosa, Gilles Deleuze, and Emmanuel Lévinas, the text argues that arranging the classroom in a circle functions as a practice that decentralizes power, legitimates lived experience as a way of knowing, and builds learning communities in the presence of the Other who calls us into relation. Through classroom accounts, especially discussions around masculinities and difference, I argue that knowledge can be built from attentive listening, eloquent silence, and the willingness to confront tensions. The circle thus becomes a sacred space of coexistence with the Other, where *ginga* is necessary to engage with conflicts, affects, and diverse forms of knowledge. With this essay, I propose thinking of *ginga* as an epistemic and pedagogical tool that leads us to understand that teaching and learning in a circle require the full presence of the body and a disposition to be affected, to inhabit vulnerability, and to build—collectively—a knowledge in constant movement.

Keywords: Class. Gender. *Ginga*. Man. Circle.

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