JOGO DE MANDINGA
—GAME OF SORCERY—
A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF HISTORY, TRADITION,
AND BODILY PRACTICE IN CAPOEIRA ANGOLA

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Edward Luna Brough, B.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2006

Master's Examination Committee:
Dr. Candace Feck, Chair
Professor Melanie Bales, Adviser
Dr. Sheila Marion, Resource Adviser

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Graduate Program in Dance
Capoeira is an ambiguous, ambivalent activity developed by Africans and their descendants in Brazil. Although it is often presented as a kind of “sport” or “danced martial art” today, in reality the practice is a subtle mix of history, tradition, movement, trickery, play, deception, competition, improvisation, and personal sorcery (mandinga).

Under diverse and evolving historical circumstances, capoeira has been performed in many ways: as a subversive dance, an evasive form of self-defense, a strutting acrobatic display, an urban street fighting form, a semi-competitive game, a trick, a joke, and an idle pastime associated with street rogues, vagabonds, and lower-class workers. More recently, it has been transformed into a modern, multivalent art form, synthesizing many or all of these aspects for contemporary purposes. “Lowly” in its origins and “unsavory” in its history, capoeira is thus perhaps the most visible Brazilian cultural expression outside of Brazil, and arguably the second most important cultural export of Brazil after the samba.

Among the many contemporary iterations of capoeira, however, the oldest extant form—capoeira angola, from the Brazilian state of Bahia—has resisted the reflexive modernization and streamlined pedagogy that has turned capoeira into an international martial art or sport. Capoeira angola, despite some modernizations, is still practiced as a secretive, streetwise form passed down semi-formally from
one practitioner to another in lines that can be traced directly to the early 1900s, and indirectly hundreds of years earlier. *Capoeira angola* is thus positioned by its practitioners as an authentic cultural tradition rooted in local history, communal memory, and Afro-Brazilian (or specifically, Afro-Bahian) identity.

This preliminary study weaves together objective research methods, subjective kinesthetic experience, informed speculation, observation, movement notation, and movement analysis to outline the more visible historical, philosophical, and physical aspects of the *jogo de mandinga* ("game of sorcery").
This work is dedicated to Edward Lionel Brough (1896–1976).
— A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S —

This work owes its existence to the mestres ("master teachers") of capoeira who have come and gone, and those yet to come. Above all, I would like to thank Mestre Caboquinho (José Carlos Bispo Dantas) for his patience, and for allowing this research to be undertaken, despite his distrust of anything written on paper. I would also like to acknowledge the Mestre's wife, Mestra Rapidinha (Roshani Dantas), and Contra-Mestre Biriba (Raquel Prymak) of T.A.B.C.A.T.

To my thesis adviser, Dr. M. Candace Feck, I owe endless thanks for her unearthly patience and her enthusiastic encouragement. I also thank my secondary adviser, Professor Melanie Bales, for initiating me into movement analysis; and my resource adviser, Dr. Sheila Marion, for her affectionate contributions to my notation of capoeira movement and her helpful stories about notating Karate katas.

In Bahia, I owe thanks to M Zé do Lenço (José Alves), M Barba Branca (Gilberto Reis), M Boca Rica (Manoel Silva), M Neco (Manoel Marcelo dos Santos), M Raimundo Dias, M Renê (Renê Bittencourt), M Bigodinho (Reinaldo Santana), M Curió (Jaime Martínez dos Santos) and his wife M Jararaca (Valdelice Santos de Jesus), M Augusto (Augusto Januário Passos da Silva), Taata N'Kese Mutá (Jorge Barreto Santos), Treinel Advogado (Ricardo Dias), Mauro Melo, Professora Ritinha, M João Pequeno de Pastinha (João Pereira dos Santos), M Jogo de Dentro (Jorge Egídio dos Santos), and M João Grande (João Oliveira dos Santos) in NYC.
Among my colleagues, I would like to single out Marc Woten, André (*contra-mestre* for M Zé do Lenço), T.J. Desch-Obi, Joshua Lee Monten, George Payapilli (Contra-Mestre Cheirosinho), and Marlon Barrios Solano. Among my students and friends, I thank Christopher Farris ("Bujinho"), Dana Cox ("Boca Linda"), Brian Griffin ("Avô"), Adam Boggs ("Cachorro Verde"), Dan Bryan ("Baleado"), Tom Stovicck, Clinton King, Eric Omohundro, Laura Davis ("Avexada"), Christina Providence, Teena Custer, John Scurry, Brian Murphy, Sara Mase, Luis Carbaljal, Natalie Waters, Janene Giuseffi, Justin Lines, Barbara Van Gilder ("Pipoca"), Laura Tompkins, Rapheal Randall ("Cabelo Duro"), Kendall Perkinson and Dickie Haskell, Basak Durgun ("Come Formiga"), Allison Sieber ("Panela Quente"), and especially my Brazilian friends: Luciano Willadino Oliveira ("Maracatú Mistério"), Paulo F. U. Gotardo ("Capineiro Capaz"), Nelson Carson ("Tché Bagual"), and Melissa Quintanilha ("Ipanema"). Among other helpers, I thank Misty Kerns and the staff of the Department of Dance, Professors Susan Hadley, Bebe Miller, Nicole Stanton, and Vera Maletic (emeritus); mentors J. Ronald Green and Ann Bremner; benefactors Dr. Melanye White-Dixon, Carol Robinson and Stace Rierson (Center for Latin American Studies), BalletMet, Helen P. Alkire, and Rory Benson; and fellow dance scholars Shawn Hove, Beatrice Ayi, Sandra Mendes, Chad Hall, Jeff Fouch, Scott Lowe, Annie Beserra, and Noelle Chun.

Thanks also to my father, Thomas Robert Brough, my mother, Maria Teresa Luna (1939–1999), Sonya Bañales Brough and her family (Victor, Aaron and Victor Eduardo), Mikey Thomas, and Robert Strati. To all my students of past and present, I owe thanks for their energy, interest, and attention. A final thanks to my cousin and friend, Francisco Fernández Landero Luna, for believing in me.
— V I T A —

23 Aug 1970........................................ Born, Columbus, Ohio
1995.................................................. B.A., Photography & Cinema,
                                 The Ohio State University
2002–present................................. Instructor, Capoeira Angola
                                 Dance Elective Program
                                 The Ohio State University
2002–present................................. Instructor, Capoeira Angola
                                 Tribo Afro-Bahiana de Capoeira Angola
                                 Tradicional (T.A.B.C.A.T.), Columbus
                                 Student Organization, Ohio State

— F I E L D S  O F  S T U D Y —

Major Field: Dance
Emphasis: Choreography, Improvisation, Labanotation, Movement Analysis
Other: Capoeira, Portuguese, African and African-American Studies, Brazilian
       Studies, Music, Theatre Performance

vii
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Nomenclature</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION: NOW AND THEN</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now: a capoeira game in the present</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then: a capoeira game in the 1930s.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two capoeira games</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of continuity</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of variation and change</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hints of history</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the analysis</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards a methodology of capoeira studies</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My apprenticeship</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 1: “SECRET” HISTORIES.................................................................40

PART 1: A GENERAL HISTORY OF CAPOEIRA.................................................41
Other games of the Americas...............................................................43
Modes of amusement and resistance.......................................................43
Nineteenth-century capoeira.................................................................44
Bahia........................................................................................................46
Mestre Bimba and capoeira regional.........................................................48
Capoeira angola and the return of Mestre Pastinha....................................51
The proliferation of capoeira regional.......................................................52
The decline and appropriation of capoeira angola.....................................55
The revival of capoeira angola.................................................................56

PART 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.................................................................58
Early references to capoeira.................................................................59
Early twentieth-century literature.........................................................61
Rego: Capoeira Angola: ensaio sócio-etnográfico.....................................65
Scholarly works of the 1970s.................................................................66
Growth of the field: practitioner accounts.............................................68
New approaches....................................................................................72
Assunção: Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art...............82
Future pathways...................................................................................84

PART 3: SITUATING “HISTORY”..................................................................87
Unanswered questions...........................................................................87
A neglected culture...............................................................................88
Deliberate obscurity............................................................................89
Assessing documentary sources..........................................................89
Assessing oral history................................................................. 92
Informed speculation........................................................................ 93
The neglected source: movement.................................................. 94
Learning to listen............................................................................ 95

SECTION 2: TRADITION AND BODILY PRACTICE................................ 98

PART 1: TRADITION........................................................................... 99
The transmission of capoeira before standardization....................... 100
The modernization and standardization of capoeira pedagogy.......... 102
Mestre Pastinha: the pedagogy of capoeira angola.......................... 104
Mestre João Pequeno........................................................................ 106
Mestre João Grande.......................................................................... 109
The diversity of “tradition”............................................................. 112
Mestre Curió.................................................................................... 113

PART 2: MESTRE CABOQUINHO AND HIS TEACHINGS.................... 120
Move to the United States.............................................................. 122
Detroit.............................................................................................. 125
Maintaining the link to Bahia.......................................................... 127
Warmups......................................................................................... 129
Labanotation: introduction............................................................. 129
Sequences....................................................................................... 135
Implications for capoeira play....................................................... 139
Levels of the game.......................................................................... 139

CONCLUSION.................................................................................. 142
Glossary......................................................................................... 143
Bibliography.................................................................................... 147
LIST OF FIGURES

FIG. 01  • MESTRE CABOQUINHO STARTING A CAPOEIRA GAME ................................................. 3
FIG. 02  • A CAPOEIRA GAME ........................................................................................................ 11
FIG. 03  • THE ENGOLO (OR N'GOLO) .......................................................................................... 41
FIG. 04  • A NEGRO FIGHT IN SOUTH AMERICA' .......................................................................... 42
FIG. 05  • JOGAR CAPOEIRA, OU DANSE DE LA GUERRE .............................................................. 44
FIG. 06  • SALVADOR, PELOURINHO ............................................................................................ 46
FIG. 07  • "IT'S NOT EASY TO GRAB A CAPOEIRISTA..." ......................................................... 48
FIG. 08  • MESTRE PASTINHA ......................................................................................................... 50
FIG. 09  • CAPOEIRA REGIONAL .................................................................................................... 52
FIG. 10  • CAPOEIRA SEM MESTRE ............................................................................................... 64
FIG. 11  • RUI BARBOSA ................................................................................................................ 90
FIG. 12  • THE NINTH LESSON OF MESTRE BIMBA: TAKEDOWN .............................................. 103
FIG. 13  • MESTRE JOÃO PEQUENO DE PASTINHA ........................................................................ 105
FIG. 14  • MESTRE JOÃO GRANDE ............................................................................................... 109
FIG. 15  • M JOÃO GRANDE FLOOR EXERCISE .......................................................................... 111
FIG. 16  • MESTRE CURIÓ ............................................................................................................. 113
FIG. 17  • M CURIÓ CIRCLE EXERCISE ....................................................................................... 114
FIG. 18  • M CURIÓ CIRCLE EXERCISE ....................................................................................... 115
FIG. 19  • M CURIÓ FLOOR EXERCISE .......................................................................................... 115
FIG. 20  • MESTRE CABOQUINHO ............................................................................................... 120

xi
Usage of the term capoeira

- capoeira (no quotes)

In this text, I use the term capoeira to describe the practice generally and generically. The lack of italics indicates that the word has begun to enter general usage in English. I likewise use the term to generally describe older iterations of the form prior to the 1900s. According to Mestre Caboquinho and many other practitioners, the traditional style of Bahian capoeira has been called capoeira angola only since the 1930s. Previously, it was known simply as capoeira. Perhaps confusingly, many latter-day practitioners, many of whom train in both traditional and modernized styles, also use the term capoeira to denote their own more generalized or hybridized versions of the form. In the text, I make occasional strategic reference to both connotations, distinguished clearly.

Other uses and/or similar terms:

- capoeira or capoeiras (italics) is a nineteenth-century term that refers to a practitioner or practitioners of the form. This term was replaced by the term capoeirista sometime in the twentieth century, but is still used to discuss capoeira practitioners before the 1930s.

- capoeiragem is another nineteenth-century term that refers specifically to the practice of capoeira, and is used sparingly in the text.
- **capoeira angola** (lowercase, italics) marks the traditionalist capoeira of Salvador, Bahia. Italics designate it as a specialized form of the general practice of capoeira. The use of lower case is in keeping with various writings on social dance/music forms (e.g. *samba*, *salsa*, *merengue*, and so on).¹ Some teachers—including my own—do, however, prefer to write Capoeira and Capoeira Angola (capitalized).

- **capoeira regional** (lowercase, italics) is the stylized, modernized form of Bahian capoeira created in the 1930s by Mestre Bimba. Occasionally, I refer to it as *capoeira regional de Bimba*, or by its earliest name, *luta regional baiana* (“the regional fight of Bahia”) to distinguish it from later modernized and hybridized styles of capoeira based on *capoeira regional*.

- “**contemporary**” capoeira (lowercase, in quotes, no italics) functionally refers to modernized, hybridized styles of capoeira, often described by scholars and promoted to more general audiences as *capoeira contemporânea*. I have chosen to use the term in quotes to reflect the reality that most practitioners of these styles rarely use the term *capoeira contemporânea* themselves, instead preferring the un-marked term “capoeira” to suggest that their is a unified practice made up of the two Bahian styles (*capoeira angola* and *capoeira regional*) plus other variants and/or additions. Many of these groups also identify themselves as *capoeira regional*.

The use of quotation marks is also deliberately meant to reflect the skepticism and pessimism expressed by many practitioners of traditional capoeira against the modernization and/or appropriation of the practice.

¹ Contrary to what might be expected, capoeira is not italicized, in part because I want to maintain the distinction between capoeira as a general practice, and the older use of *capoeira* (italics) to designate a practitioner, as already noted.
Usage of the term *mestre*

The Portuguese word *mestre* is often translated to English as “master.” Matthias Röhrig Assunção\(^2\) has helpfully recognized that this translation presents problems. In Portuguese, for example, a slave-owner was usually known as *senhor* (or colloquially, *sanhô*), which in English simply means “Sir” or “Lord.” The term *mestre* is thus better thought of in the sense of “master craftsman.” Accordingly, I translate the term into English as “master teacher” or simply “teacher.”

In the text, I prioritize the Portuguese *mestre*, and use it as follows:

- *mestre* or *mestres* (lower case, italics) refers to the Portuguese word, or the general concept of a capoeira teacher or teachers.

- When referring to recognized capoeira teachers, I use their full honorific title (e.g. “Mestre Caboquinho”) whenever possible. In some clearly-marked instances, I refer to an individual teacher as “the Mestre.” I refrain from omitting the honorific of *mestre* (except if referring to an individual before their capoeira training began), as this is widely considered disrespectful (e.g., I will not refer to my own teacher simply as “Caboquinho”).\(^3\)

- When repeating the term frequently in a short span of the text, I abbreviate “Mestre” to “M”: as in, M Caboquinho, M Zé do Lenço, M Pastinha, and so on. “CM” refers to Contra-Mestre (assistant or half-*mestre*).

---


3. Only those who know Mestre Caboquinho well, or who are not his students, may refer to him as anything other than Mestre Caboquinho. Among friends and family, he is often called “Caboquinho,” “Cabo,” or even “Cabo.”
Other notes

- Other specialized words and usages are introduced in the text.
- Non-English words are almost always *italicized*. Readers will find many of these words in the Glossary at the end of this work.
- I usually defer to the Portuguese in this text, supplying English translations in parentheses or footnotes where appropriate. In most cases, translations are mine.
- To provide emphasis, I occasionally use *underlines*.
-INTRODUCTION-

NOW AND THEN
Now: a capoeira game in the present

I begin this study with my description of a typical performance of *capoeira angola*, known as a *roda* ("wheel" or "circle"). This account has been distilled from over four years of personally attending, participating in, and/or hosting dozens of capoeira performances, primarily as a student of Mestre Caboquinho (b. José Carlos Bispo Dantas, 1963) and his organization, T.A.B.C.A.T. (the Tribo Afro-Bahiana de Capoeira Angola Tradicional). Many of these performances have taken place in the Mestre’s adopted city of Detroit, Michigan, in my own home city of Columbus, Ohio, and in the spiritual birthplace of capoeira: the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. My description therefore not only reflects my experiences as a North American apprentice under the guidance of Mestre Caboquinho, but also captures the “reality” of *capoeira angola* as it is performed under many other *mestres* in Bahia itself.

The two performers depicted here are slightly fictionalized versions of my own students.
Eight musicians sit side-by-side on long wooden benches with their backs to the wall. At one end, a musician sits behind a conga-like barrel drum known as the atabaque, followed by another musician who grasps a double metal bell called the agogô. A third musician braces a reco-reco, or bamboo scratcher, under the armpit. The next two musicians hold pandeiros, or Brazilian tambourines, followed by three musicians with long, one-stringed musical bows, called berimbau. The last and largest berimbau, called the berimbau gunga, is held by the leader of the proceedings: Mestre ("Master Teacher") Caboquinho.

Two players squat facing each other at the Mestre’s feet without looking at each other. A half-circle of performers sit in front of the musicians, completing the capoeira arena, or roda. Most of the capoeira performers wear t-shirts with the academy logo, dark pants, and dark tennis or dress shoes.
The Mestre is clad completely in white, and dons a broad, white hat. All around them, an audience sits or stands, waiting expectantly.

Mestre Caboquinho gathers himself and calls attention by tapping his berimbau's large gourd with a thin, hand-held stick. When the crowd settles, he begins to play a slow, deliberate rhythm, dragging out the two notes of his instrument before settling into a recognizable pattern that is soon joined by the other two berimbaus. Once their pattern is also clear, the two pandeiros join with a simple hit-slap-hit that complements the other rhythms.

The Mestre, satisfied with this five-instrument opening, gives a long cry of “Iê!” that fills the air. He starts to sing a ladainha, or an incantatory song that may be story, challenge, or lament. This one is ironic:

*A mulher pra ser bonita, não precisa se pintar*

A woman, to be pretty, need not paint herself

*O homem pra ser valente, não precisa matar*

A man, to be brave, need not be a killer

*A força que a mulher tem*

The strength that a woman has

*O homem nunca mantém*

A man can not maintain

*Com a força de parir*

With the strength to give birth

*É lá vai vintêm*

Is not valued with coin

*O homem dedo cortado*

A man with a cut on his finger

*Ele diz não vou trabalhar, camará…*

Will say, “I can’t work,” my friend…*

The Mestre’s ladainha ends with this call of “camará” (or “my friend”), after which he begins a series of shorter cries, called chulas, in the following form:

*Iê, viva meu Deus!*

Yea, long live my Lord!

---

With the first of these cries, the last three musicians—playing the scratcher, bell, and drum—finally begin to play, and all the players answer with a resounding chorus, adding their own camará (“my friend”):

**CHORUS:**  *Iê, viva meu Deus, camará!*
  Yea, long live my Lord, my friend!

**MESTRE:**  *Iê viva meu Mestre!*
  Yea, long live my teacher!

**CHORUS:**  *Iê, viva meu Mestre, camará!*
  Yea, long live my teacher, my friend!

**MESTRE:**  *Iê, quem me ensinou!*
  Yea, the one who taught me!

**CHORUS:**  *Iê, quem me ensinou, camará!*
  Yea, the one who taught me, my friend!

**MESTRE:**  *Iê, sabe jogar!*
  Yea, he knows how to play!

**CHORUS:**  *Iê, sabe jogar, camará!*
  Yea, he knows how to play, my friend!

**MESTRE:**  *Iê, jogo de mandinga!*
  Yea, the game of sorcery!

**CHORUS:**  *Iê, jogo de mandinga, camará!*
  Yea, the game of sorcery, my friend!

**MESTRE:**  *Iê, chegou a hora!*
  Yea, the time has arrived!

**CHORUS:**  *Iê, chegou a hora, camará!*
  Yea, the time has arrived, my friend!

The two squatting players begin to react, by raising their open hands to the musicians with each of these chants, as if thanking them. One of the players is a smallish white woman in her early twenties, whose capoeira nickname is “Boca Suja” (“Dirty Mouth”), after her habit of using *palavrões* (“bad words”). The other player is a light brown-skinned man nearing thirty, known as “Bruto,” named after the Portuguese-language version of Popeye’s arch-enemy Bluto, whom he is said to resemble.
The Mestre then begins a *corrido* song to set the tone of the game:

**MESTRE:**  
*Ave Maria meu Deus*  
Hail Mary, my Lord  
*Nunca vi casa nova cair*  
I’ve never seen a new house fall  
*Nunca vi o menino cair*  
I’ve never seen a little boy fall  
*Nunca vi a menina cair*...  
I’ve never seen a little girl fall...

**CHORUS:**  
*Ave Maria meu Deus*  
Hail Mary, my Lord  
*Nunca vi casa nova cair*  
I’ve never seen a new house fall

The Mestre lowers the *berimbau* between the two players, indicating that they may begin. With this signal, the players bless themselves, shake hands, and raise their hands to the air, as if calling to a higher power. They then place their hands on the ground and rise to perform a short handstand in unison, then drop down to a deep lunging position. With the Mestre’s song continuing all the while, the players then creep into the circle together to play capoeira.

The game begins tentatively and deliberately, like a collaboration, with each attack acting as a kind of “question” calling for a specific defensive “answer.” They take turns crouching, bending, and stretching their bodies over and around each other in a series of attacks, feints, dodges, cartwheels, and occasional backbends. Only the feet, hands, and head touch the ground.

Eventually, the movements become faster and trickier, giving the appearance of a real fight. Yet there is little contact between the players, who skillfully sidestep or crouch under each other’s attacks. Likewise, there is little aggression, as both players laugh and smile throughout the game. Attacks are performed primarily with the legs, extending from standing or inverted positions. The hands are rarely used offensively. Instead, they sculpt loose patterns in the air, supporting the movements of the legs and often distracting the other player.
One unlikely weapon is the headbutt, used very selectively. At one point, Bruto performs a wide cartwheel. During his movement, Boca Suja waits for the right moment and butts his open ribcage with her head, knocking him off balance. Bruto lands awkwardly and laughs at his own mistake. The Mestre smiles with him, and begins to sing a song to mock his fall:

**MESTRE:** *Bem-ti-vi botou*

The little bird put

*Gameleira no chão!*

The big tree to the ground!

*Bem-ti-vi botou...*

The little bird put

**CHORUS:** *Gameleira no chão!*

The big tree to the ground!

The game continues to get “hotter” and more confrontational. Boca Suja, perhaps overconfident about her well-placed headbutt, tries to recklessly trip Bruto. This time, Bruto shakes his head disapprovingly and calls for a *volta ao mundo* (“circle around the world”) by drawing a circle in the air with his finger. Both players then begin to jog around the perimeter of the *roda* in a counter-clockwise circle opposite each other, to relax and “restart” the game. After a revolution or two, they return to the foot of the Mestre’s *berimbau*, touch hands, and start anew. The Mestre begins another song to help calm things down:

**MESTRE:** *Mundinho cuidado*

Be careful, my child

*Esse jogo de angola é mandinga!*

That game of *angola* is sorcery!

*Esse jogo de angola é mandinga*

That game of *angola* is sorcery!

*Esse jogo de angola tem mandinga!*

That game of *angola* has sorcery!

**CHORUS:** *Mundinho cuidado*

Be careful, my child

*Esse jogo de angola é mandinga!*

That game of *angola* is sorcery!
After another round of slower question-and-answer movements, Bruto shows a sudden kick that nearly strikes Boca Suja squarely in the face. Knowing full well that he has “gotten” her, he immediately pulls his leg away, steps back, smiles, and raises his hands in a gesture of mock apology to her. This movement is known as a chamada, or the “calling.”

In the background, the Mestre whoops with delight at this display, and changes songs again to reflect the mood:

**MESTRE:**  
*Pomba voou, pomba voou*

The dove flew away, the dove flew away  
*Pomba voou, gavião pegou!*

The dove flew away, the hawk hit it!  

**CHORUS:**  
*Pomba voou, pomba voou*

The dove flew away, the dove flew away

The nervous-looking Boca Suja backs away from Bruto, relieved not to have been hit, and quickly returns to the foot of the berimbau to gather herself. A moment later, Boca Suja looks at Bruto as he continues to hold up his hands, and points to herself as if to jokingly say, “are you calling me?” She then shakes her knees in mock fear and performs a headstand at a safe distance from Bruto. She lands, carefully approaches Bruto’s outstretched hands, and meets him palm-to-palm. Bruto then leads a kind of partnered, three-step “waltz” that ends when he invites Boca Suja to perform a carefully controlled cartwheel before him.

She hesitantly complies, but at the end of her movement, Bruto appears to suddenly pull out a knife and slash her throat. Of course, the “knife” is just his outstretched hand, eliciting gasps of laughter from the audience. Boca Suja takes Bruto’s apparent revenge with good humor, grasping at her “slit” throat and “sewing” it back together, bringing more laughter.

The Mestre, carefully observing this “theatre” out of the corner of his eye, signals the end of this game with his berimbau. The two players agree to call it a draw and return to the foot of the berimbau, shaking hands and embracing in reassured camaraderie. After this acknowledgment, and the trading off of a few musicians, the Mestre then points his berimbau to select the next two players.
The games continue in this fashion for some two hours, after which the Mestre begins to sing a “farewell” song (despedida). He stands up slowly, followed by all the musicians, singing:

**MESTRE:** Adeus, adeus
Farewell, farewell

**CHORUS:** Boa viagem
“Bon Voyage”

**MESTRE:** Eu vou me’embora
I’m leaving

**CHORUS:** Boa viagem
“Bon Voyage”

At this point, most of the observers also stands up, and the musicians begin to walk in a circle led by the Mestre, while the song continues. Games also continue to be played in the circle, but become much shorter, with eager players suddenly “buying in” or cutting into each other’s games. These shorter games are an opportunity for the players to even scores, kick higher and faster, and show off their acrobatics.

After the Adeus Adeus song goes on for some ten minutes, Mestre Ca-boquinho hands the berimbau gunga off to another player and “buys in” himself, playing several of his students in quick succession and amusing everyone with his exaggerated movements. With little effort, he trips a student whose kick is aimed a little too high, sending him to the ground with a thud. Confident that he has made his point in the game, the Mestre smiles, helps him up, and shakes his hand. Laughing, he gives the cry of “lê!” to officially end the roda.
Then: a capoeira game in the 1930s

Nearly seventy years earlier, in September of 1938, the pioneering anthropologist Ruth Landes witnessed another capoeira *roda* in Salvador, Bahia. This particular performance was part of a festival on the Itapagipe peninsula of the city. She attended this game at the invitation of her colleague, the Bahian historian and ethnographer Êdition Carneiro.

The following description is just one of many experiences recorded by Landes during her year in Bahia (1938–1939), which were later published in 1947 as *The City of Women*, focusing primarily on the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*. With the exception of page numbers and page breaks, I have quoted her description of this *roda* here in its entirety, and have maintained the author's original typography and notes, as marked by asterisks (*).
We had arrived at the spot where the men were forming for capoeira. Watchers were crowded four deep around a wide circle, and there was not a woman or a priest among them. To one side of the innermost ring stood three tall Negroes, each holding a berimbau with one end resting on the ground. Two more musicians soon came—one with a chacalho, or metal rattle, and the other with a pandeiro, or tambourine. Edison and the others helped me push front, and we were glad of the diversion.

Two capoeirists were squatting there facing the musicians. One was the champion Beloved of God, with the Christian name of Samuel. He was tall, black, middle-aged and muscular, a fisherman by trade. His challenger was The Black Leopard, a younger man, shorter and fatter. They were barefooted, wearing striped cotton jersey shirts, one with white trousers, the other with dark, one with a felt hat, the other with a cap which he later changed to a hard straw hat. Squatting in their hats and bare feet, one had his left arm on
his left thigh, the other had his right arm on his right thigh, and they stared straight ahead, resting. It was required of them to keep silent, and the requirement carried over to the audience.

The orchestra opened the events by strumming an invocation, and this monotonous accompaniment too was essential to the occasion. It was a sort of whining nasal-toned framework within which the men executed acrobatic marvels, always to the correct beat, while the musicians chanted mocking verses:

"I stood at the foot of the cross
Saying my prayer
When there arrived Catherine,
The very image of the Devil.

"Eh, eh, Ah-Ruanda!
Missy, let's go away!
To beyond the sea!

"It's a sharp knife, Missy,
It's for piercing.
Missy, throw it to this side,
Missy, throw it to that side.

"Eh, eh, long live my master
And my mistress, who taught me!
Master, leave me to the vagrant life!
Missy, to the capoeira life!

"Missy, may the earth revolve!
Master, may the world go on!"

* This song and those following, to [p. 16], translated from the Portuguese of Edison Carneiro, *Negros Bantus*, pp. 149–153, 155, 158, 133, 138–140.
It was a song of challenge and hope and resignation, containing fragments of rebellious thoughts. It did not possess a simple theme well worked out, but it summarized a type of life and of protest. And it opened the fight.

Beloved of God swayed on his haunches while he faced his opponent with a grin and gauged his chances. The fight involved all parts of the body except the hands, a precaution demanded by the police to obviate harm. As the movements followed the musical accompaniment, they flowed into a slow-motion, dreamlike sequence that was more a dancing than a wrestling. As the law stipulated that capoeirists must not hurt each other, blows become acrobatic stances whose balancing scored in the final check-up, and were named and classified. Various types of capoeira had evolved, with subtleties in the forms and sequences of the blows and in the styles of playing the berimbau.

Beloved was prodigiously agile in the difficult formal encounters with his adversary, and he smiled constantly while the ritual songs droned on:

“They told my wife
That a capoeira man had conquered me.
The woman swore, and stamped her foot down firm
That this could not have been.”
And the berimbau changed again:

“There was I. Oh! There was my brother,
There was my brother and I.
My brother rented a house
But neither he paid, nor I!”

Impertinently, with slow, calculated, beautiful movements, Beloved butted his adversary with his hatted head, catching him lightly in the pit of the stomach, upsetting him so that he fell on his head. Thereupon the orchestra struck up triumphantly:
“Zum-Zum-Zum,
Capoeira kills one!
“The cutting knife is bad,
Prepare your stomach to catch it!”

The challenging echoes silenced, the round over, the two men walked and trotted restfully in a counter-clockwise circle one behind the other, the champion leading with his arms high in the air, and the other grasping his wrists from behind while the orchestra played and sang teasingly:

“In the days when I had money
My comrade called me ‘kin.’
After my money was gone
My comrade scorned me as ‘bold.’”

Gradually, having rested, the one in front wheeled to face the one behind, and they parried to the beat of the songs, never still, balancing from one foot to the other, watching for openings.

“Comrade, attention!
Capoeira goes at you!”

warned the berimbaus. The two faced each other, Beloved swaying, Leopard backing away, always rhythmically. As Beloved advanced bending from the waist, lowering his head for the telling blow at the other’s middle, Leopard curved forward intending to evade him. Actually he created an opening into which Beloved charged with his right leg, his left one stretched parallel with the ground to support him. Leopard’s arms swung back loosely, and he fell forward over the butting head in a clean arc. Laughing quietly in appreciation, the two rose, loping in circles to relax while the orchestra applauded:
"Lo, he is a messenger of the king!  
He is from Ruanda!  
What can one do with a capoeira?  
He is an African sorcerer. *  
And knows how to play."

They sparred again, and again Beloved was the one to attack, half squatting as in a Russian dance, swaying, arms curved forward for balance. Instead of following through with his head as before, he worked to one side and suddenly raised up his body. Leopard bent to charge, but Beloved swung his weight to his right leg and cleared his opponent's head with his left, causing him once more to fall sprawling!

Now another insisted upon entering the ring. He had attempted to do so earlier but had been ignored. Impatiently he pushed Leopard aside, pointing indignantly to the corner where scorekeepers were chalking the points on the ground, points Leopard had failed to make. And sulkily Leopard yielded his place.

The hero Beloved wiped his streaming face and back, and bared his head to cool it. Through everything the onlookers remained silent, only shuffling to ease their positions and inner excitement. Soon the bows whined an invocation for the new round:

"Who taught thee this good magic?  
It was the mistress' nigger boy.  
The nigger costs good money.  
Good money needs to be earned."

"Fall, fall, Catharina,  
Rise from the sea, come see Dalina."

*Mandingo.
“Tomorrow is a holy day,
Day of Corpus Christi.
He who has clothes goes to mass.
He who has none
Does as I do!

“Fall, fall, Catharina . . .”

To me this was a performance incongruous and wonderful; to the others it was wonderful and completely absorbing. To them it was right. But the phrases startled me into conjectures about slavery, rebellion, and mockery, and I was astounded most at the manner of the performance, which robbed capoeira of its original sting. The police had removed the sting, and the blacks had converted the remains into a weird poignant dance. Did the songs carry meaning to the people now? Did they recall the struggles that inspired them, or did they merely dramatize black men, as candomblé dramatized black women? The rows of watchers were still, and their faces were impassive.

Again, the challenger and the champion began to trot with knees bent, arms swinging loose, Beloved amusing himself with intricate little movements of his feet. Suddenly a boy jumped into the center of the ring flourishing a pot of money. He had just made the rounds with his hat requesting contributions for the fighters; and the orchestra, which rules the occasion, had decided that instead of apportioning the money, it should be left to a new pair to try for with their mouths, each fending off the other à la capoeira. The boy announced this decision and placed the pot on the ground while the berimbauas teased:

“Would you play with a capoeira?
He is a tricky devil . . .”

And Beloved won! But with the heart of a champion he returned the pot to open the struggle again:

“Now you can play!”
This time the newcomer won. The crowd broke up, painfully uncomfortable under the blistering two o'clock sun. Edison was delighted with the exhibition, having watched it like a connoisseur, and he boasted later that he had helped to organize a new capoeira club that would hold exhibitions every Sunday.
Two capoeira games

These two accounts serve to introduce my approach to capoeira history, tradition, and bodily practice. I open the following analysis with a detailed inventory of the similarities and differences between the two descriptions and their overall implications. The limitations of this approach then provoke an examination of wider sources and strategies to unlock the mysteries of the jogo de mandinga.

For the moment, this analysis assumes that the two accounts may be taken at face value, and that they represent typical games of their respective eras.

Similarities

Taken together, these accounts depict capoeira in much the same way: as a playful, semi-competitive game performed by two players who move in a stylized manner, utilizing elements of trickery, improvisation, humor, and theatricality. Both capoeira performances are described as public, social events that takes place within a circle, or roda, with its own music, rituals, traditions, and transitions.

The two rodas begin with an introductory sôco song, and two players squatting at the feet of the musicians while awaiting the signal to enter. During intervals between “rounds” of play, the game is not played. The game between Bruto and Boca Suja, for example, ends peacefully with handshakes and an embrace while the Mestre selects the next two players. The game between Beloved and Black Leop-
ard, although interrupted by a challenger, still transitions smoothly as Beloved cools himself and waits for the newcomer to enter.

The nature and structure of capoeira play is also very similar. The players perform their movements in a kind of back-and-forth "conversation" that flows seamlessly between attack and defense, with each player paying careful attention to the other. Many of the movements also appear to have strategic value, setting up expectations of cooperation in order to defy them with trickery.

The movements themselves are stylish, elusive, feigning, calculated, swaying, squatting, and crouching, as the players show various kicks, hop from one foot to the other, parry back and forth, and perform acrobatics such as cartwheels. The use of the hands to strike or grab another player is discouraged or prohibited, and there is very little contact between the players overall. One exception appears to be in the case of headbutts, which are applied to the opponent's stomach or torso region.

In both accounts, there are ritualized "breaks" that interrupt and "restart" the game. These subroutines consist of the players either jogging in a counterclockwise circle (called the _volta ao mundo_ in my account) or raising arms and placing hands together (called the _chamada_). These subroutines may occur after the application (or near-application) of a potentially violent movement, and appear to be another way of preventing violence in the game.

Music plays an essential role in both accounts, with each _roda_ surrounded by a chorus of voices and an orchestra of instruments, centered around three _berimbau_, along with _pandeiros_ and other instruments. The orchestra makes important contributions to the energy of the games, as the players sway to its rhythms and

19
respond to its changes in speed and tone. Likewise, the songs sung by its members often comment wryly on the game. For example, when Bruto is felled by the headbutt, the Mestre’s song intones: “The little bird put / The big tree to the ground!” After Black Leopard takes a headbutt from Beloved, the orchestra sings “The cutting knife is bad / Prepare your stomach to catch it!” In turn, the musicians also appear to respect the music, as when the players observe silences between games, and when Bruto and Boca Suja answer Mestre Caboquinho’s signal on the berimbau gunga.

Landes does not identify the types of songs, but they appear to closely correspond (in tone and structure) to the song categories and sequencing of the present, from the opening ladainha, to the intermediary chulas, and game-playing corridos. Their imagery is also quite similar, with icons from Catholicism (God, the Virgin Mary, crosses, prayer), portrayals of women (who are the subject of both opening ladainhas), praises to capoeira teachers (mestres), warnings about the shiftiness and the mandinga/sorcery/magic of the game, references to Africa (Angola and its capital, Luanda/Aruanda), and everyday Afro-Brazilian life. [Indeed, nearly every line of every song quoted by Landes, and originally transcribed by Carneiro, is still used in capoeira angola performances today.]

Among the four main players, the most notable similarity is their use of nicknames (apelidos), apparently given to point out a memorable characteristic. Their styles of dress also quite similar. The students of Mestre Caboquinho are clad in “t-shirts with the academy logo” and “dark pants,” as might be expected from a group that self-consciously follows their teacher. In Landes, the players wear “striped cotton jersey shirts, one with white trousers, the other with dark” (as seen
in the almost identical costuming in Fig. 0.2). Although these shirts do not necessarily signify an organized group, they do suggest a degree of uniformity.

All four players do not “fight,” but rather “play,” apparently for the sake of the game itself. Accordingly, they conduct themselves with “good sportsmanship” and respond to potential violence or disruption by reaffirming the rules of the game. When Bruto almost strikes Boca Suja, he politely “calls” her. In turn, she does not respond violently, but backs away, collects herself near the berimbau, and prepares to answer. Likewise, in response to the third player’s interruption, Black Leopard yields his place (albeit “sulkily”), and Beloved cools his head while waiting for the berimbau to start anew. A moment later, when the boy with the money pot interrupts this game, the players do not protest. Instead, they accept the orchestra’s decision to call for the “money game.” When Beloved wins the first round decisively, he nobly offers the money up for a second game, which is won by the interloper.

Significantly, all of this seems to occur with very little verbal communication, with each player implicitly understanding the context, rules, and purpose of the game.

**Implications of continuity**

These similarities seem to suggest that a roda performed under Mestre Caboquinho’s guidance in present-day North America is essentially the same as a roda performed for Ruth Landes in 1938 Brazil. These accounts therefore indicate that the capoeira of 1930s Bahia has been passed down to present-day North America in a kind of continuity, or cultural tradition. Although neither account provides
specific details about this process of transmission, a few references do indicate its general outlines and overall importance.

As noted, both descriptions refer to the importance of the capoeira teacher, or mestre. In his linking chula, Mestre Caboquinho sings the praises of his mestre:

"Yea, long live my teacher! / Yea, the one who taught me! / Yea, he knows how to play! / Yea, the game of sorcery!" In Landes, the orchestra sings: "Eh, eh, long live my master / And my mistress, who taught me!" Later, another song asks: "Who taught thee this good magic? / It was the mistress' nigger boy?"

From these references, there is no way to know how capoeira is actually taught, but it is clear that its transmission by a mestre (master teacher) or other adept (such as the mistress' négo) is a major component of maintaining capoeira cohesively through time.

In both accounts, capoeira teachers are also associated with mandinga, sorcery, or "good magic." Mestre Caboquinho refers to mandinga in his aforementioned chula, and in a corrido that warns: "Be careful, my child / That game of angola is sorcery!" Elsewhere, another song in Landes warns: "He is an African sorcerer (Mandingo) / And knows how to play." These references not only suggest that capoeira is transmitted from teacher to student, but that its secretive, African "magic" is only available to those who have been properly taught how to use it.

---

6. As used here, "mistress" (or iaïã in the original Carneiro transcription from Negros Bantus), is almost certainly a vocal interjection, not evidence of a female teacher.

7. In Carneiro: "Quem te ensinô essa mandinga? — Foi o négo de sinhá." The term négo may indeed be translated as "nigger boy," but is closer to "black man" or even "man," as it is used in Black English in the U.S. In Brazil, it is often used as a term of affection.
Differences

Perhaps the most significant difference between the two accounts is that the roda under Mestre Caboquinho is performed outside of its traditional Afro-Bahian context, in isolation from other Afro-Bahian practices, as a specific style of capoeira known as capoeira angola. By contrast, in 1938, the game is simply described as “capoeira,” and is part of a wider field of Afro-Bahian culture.8

In the present, it is also clear that the players are under the singular leadership of Mestre Caboquinho. They wear uniforms and appear to be followers of the Mestre and his group. The Mestre distinguishes himself from his students by wearing white from head to toe. Mestre Caboquinho leads the roda, overseeing the context of capoeira play, its entrances and exits, as well as the pace, tone, and content of the music—in short, everything but the performance of the game itself. This is due to his command of the berimbau gunga, which leads the capoeira angola orchestra and is the main marker of status in today’s capoeira angola. For example, Mestre Caboquinho uses his berimbau gunga to “call” Bruto and Boca Suja, who answer by immediately returning to the foot of the berimbau. He also uses his berimbau to individually select the next two players.

In contrast, Landes does not make it clear if there is an overall leader equivalent to Mestre Caboquinho, or if one is even needed. Nor does she note the existence of a berimbau gunga. Of course, Beloved plays a central role in her description, but he is depicted as a player, not a leader. Only near the end of her account does Landes finally allude to the fact that the orchestra “rules the occasion,” as it sets the parameters of the “money game.” Otherwise, when there are interruptions

---

8. Landes’ description of capoeira is in fact couched between two descriptions of samba.
such as those from the challenger and the boy with the money pot, there is no apparent objection or intervention. The challenger's interruption also suggests that anyone may "cut in" to the game at any time. All of this suggests a more informal, collective, and leaderless practice quite unlike the context of Mestre Caboquinho and his group.

Extending from this, the two accounts suggest very different models for the learning of capoeira. In the present, Mestre Caboquinho is the unambiguous authority figure, an apparent "professional" who is singly responsible for teaching capoeira, leading his group, and leading the roda. In turn, his students recognize his authority as mestre, respect his group rules, and wear his group's uniform. These are clear indications of a strongly-asserted master-disciple model.

Meanwhile, in 1938 Bahia, there is little evidence of this. Although the music mentions the importance of teachers and teaching (as already noted), none of the performers or members of the orchestra are singled out either as teachers, disciples, or members of a capoeira organization. This implies that although capoeira is passed down through formal instruction by a single teacher, it is performed without regard to rank or formal organization. It also suggests that formal teaching it is complemented by informal observation and active participation in a capoeira community.

The fact that the capoeira taught to North American students is known as capoeira angola also implies a self-consciousness that is not noticeable in 1938, where the game is simply known generically as "capoeira." This suggests that capoeira angola is a specific cultural "product," whereas in 1938, capoeira is played without self-consciousness.
In general, the use of ritual/traditional actions seems more prevalent and specific in the present-day account. In addition to tapping the gourd of his *berimbau* to begin, Mestre Caboquinho also uses the cry of “Iê!” to open the *roda*. Before entering the game, the players make prayer-like gestures to the musicians, shake hands, bless themselves, and perform a handstand and lunge; at the end, they shake hands again. To end their game, the Mestre gives an obvious signal on his *berimbau gunga* before picking the next two players. At the end of the *roda*, he leads a prolonged “farewell” procession with a quick succession of high-energy games, before finally ending with a second call of “Iê!” None of these details are found in the *roda* recorded by Landes.

On the other hand, there are also a number of rituals and details that are peculiar to the Landes account. One of these is the notion of “scoring.” Early on, Landes suggests that the players are “scored in the final check-up.” Near the end, she describes the newcomer’s insistence on cutting into the game, as he points to where “scorekeepers were chalking the points on the ground.”

Landes also notes that the players perform capoeira movements “to the correct beat,” and “follow the musical accompaniment.” Although the players in the present-day are not said to move to the music in any specific way, Landes later asserts unequivocally that “[y]arious types of capoeira had evolved, with subtleties in the forms and sequences of the blows and in the styles of playing the *berimbau*.” This suggests a direct correlation between specific *berimbau* rhythms and capoeira movements, which does not appear to be the case under Mestre Caboquinho.

The ritual and protocols of the “money game,” with its collection of money and crafty capoeira-like manner of play, is another peculiarity that is not noted in
the present. The “money game” also marks the end of the 1938 roda, which breaks up rather abruptly after only two rounds, due to the heat of the early afternoon sun.

The styles of dress, meanwhile, differ only slightly in detail. The students of Mestre Caboquinho wear “dark tennis or dress shoes,” whereas in Landes, the players are “barefooted.” They also wear various types of hats, whereas in the present, the only hat described is worn by Mestre Caboquinho.

Other differences between the players are far more distinct. In my introductory comments, I note that the portrayals of Boca Suja and Bruto are based on two of my own students. However, I do not say anything about their ethnicity, class, or position in the capoeira world. As it turns out, the real “Boca Suja” is of Anglo descent, while “Bruto” is of African/Irish/mixed-race descent. Both are students and members of the T.A.B.C.A.T. organization under Mestre Caboquinho, with approximately two years of experience, who do not have recognized “titles.” They also happen to be university-educated, middle-class North Americans in their twenties who have formally paid to learn the traditional style of capoeira.

Meanwhile, in Landes, the two named players are Bahians of African descent. Landes describes Beloved (known in Bahia as Samuel Querido de Deus) as “black, middle-aged and muscular, a fisherman by trade.” Meanwhile, the Black Leopard (Onça Preta) is “a younger man, shorter and fatter,” and most certainly black (although this is not explicitly stated, Onça Preta is so named for his dark skin). Three of the musicians are also described as being black.

Although none of the players are described as mestres, and they do not appear to represent any specific capoeira organization, they all appear to be highly
adept at capoeira. In several songs, they are described as *capoeiras*, using the archaic term to designate a practitioner of the form. They are all members of the marginalized, lower-class, poorly educated majority of 1930s Bahia, as suggested by Beloved's trade as a fisherman (actually a boatman, or *saveiro*), the two main players' lack of shoes, and their overall social milieu. Several songs also refer to lower-class life, with lines celebrating vagrancy (and its equivalent, capoeira), chronicling the many mixed blessings of money, and warning about the deadly dangers of capoeira and knife-fighting.

Indeed, as depicted in song, the world of capoeira in the 1930s is also one of danger and violence. One song refers to "a sharp knife" meant "for piercing." Another warns of death: "Zum-Zum-Zum / Capoeira kills one! / The cutting knife is bad / prepare your stomach to catch it!" Even when it is not deadly, the *capoeira* (practitioner) is not to be trusted: "Comrade, attention! / Capoeira goes at you!" "Would you play with a capoeira? / He is a tricky devil..." These songs, while still sung in today's *capoeira angola*, describe a world that is far from the polite, educated world of the typical North American university student.

Another difference is with regard to the role of women. Although Boca Suja is the only female player depicted, she has no difficulty playing capoeira with a man. The Mestre's opening song appropriately praises the strength of women as Boca Suja is about to enter, and is possibly dedicated to her. At the same time, with its disparaging comments about manhood, it also seems to poke fun at Bruto. Several other women also seem to be on hand as players and audience members (as suggested by the women in Fig. 0.1, from another typical *roda* in Michigan). Meanwhile, in 1938, Landes notes that there was "not a woman or priest" at the
game, making her presence there somewhat remarkable. The only other women
mentioned are those represented abstractly in song.

Finally, the two audiences who watch the games again call attention to the
cultural divide between the two accounts. In the present, a presumably mixed,
North American audience responds to the dramatic and humorous events of the
roda with great enthusiasm. In the 1930s, the audience consists entirely of fellow
lower-class Afro-Bahians, with the exception of the two scholarly observers. This
audience appears to treat the game as a more mundane affair, sitting attentively,
but showing little outward emotion.

Implications of variation and change

The two descriptions suggest that capoeira has been performed in at least two
distinct ways in the last seventy years. As such, capoeira cannot be characterized as
a singular practice with a single performance style, but must be seen as a plural
practice with various iterations. When read in terms of history, the differences also
suggest that in the transition from 1930s Bahia to present-day United States, ca-
poeira has evolved and changed in rather specific and significant ways:

First, it seems that the practice of capoeira has traveled thousands of miles
from its traditional Afro-Bahian context, where it was traditionally part of a wider,
more dangerous culture, to a North American context, where it is performed in
relative isolation and safety. Capoeira has also gone from a more collective, leader-
less practice where anyone may play at any time, to one in which a single individ-
ual, the mestre, is in charge and hand-selects the players. Likewise, it is no longer
learned in a general way, through formal instruction, observation, and participa-
tion in a community; it is now learned specifically as capoeira angola, by means of formal organizations and a strict master-disciple model.

Since the 1930s, some capoeira rituals have also become more specific and more apparent, such as the signals and calls used by the musicians. Others appear to be new additions, such as the Mestre’s use of the berimbau gunga, actions by the players, and the final “farewell” circle. Still other rituals have been minimized or eliminated, including the practice of “scoring,” the specific correlation between berimbau rhythms and capoeira movements, and the “money game.”

Moreover, capoeira is no longer played exclusively by shoeless Afro-Bahian men who are fully aware of their poverty and marginalization as Afro-Bahians. Instead, it is played by North American students of the form, who wear shoes and standardized uniforms, and include women among them. Lastly, the game is no longer seen primarily by fellow Afro-Bahians who observe it dispassionately; it is now witnessed mostly by outsiders who applaud the game enthusiastically as an intriguing demonstration of non-North American, Afro-Brazilian culture.

Unfortunately, neither account provides much information to explain precisely why or how these changes have occurred over the last seventy years, let alone in earlier decades or centuries previous.

Hints of history

In my account, history is only vaguely hinted at through song, as noted in the preponderance of Afro-Brazilian themes. Landes herself suggests that the opening song of the orchestra was “a song of challenge and hope and resignation, containing fragments of rebellious thoughts.” Furthermore, “[i]t did not possess a simple
theme well worked out, but it summarized a type of life and of protest." This suggests a more obvious link between capoeira and notions of hardship and rebellion, especially given the African and Afro-Brazilian status of the two players, who in the 1930s were certainly members of the first generations to be born after the end of slavery, abolished in 1888.

With regard to capoeira history before the 1930s, there is very little evidence. The only substantive references are found in Landes, who notes that capoeira "involved all parts of the body except the hands, a precaution demanded by the police to obviate harm." She does not attempt to place this "precaution" within any particular historical context, but a second observation is even more revealing: "As the law stipulated that capoeirists must not hurt each other, blows become acrobatic stances." This indicates that some time before the 1930s, capoeira underwent a process of repression that transformed it from a practice of "violence" to one of "play."

Limitations of the analysis

Still, many questions remain unaddressed, especially with regard to the purpose of capoeira, its internal logic, and the manner in which it has been passed down. This analysis has revealed little about how and why capoeira was taken to North America, or the reasons or process by which capoeira has changed in this transition. It has only given tantalizing hints about the reasons or process by which capoeira was transformed from a practice of "violence" to one of "play." It has also said virtually nothing about earlier periods of capoeira history, or its origins.
Also, as noted at the outset, this analysis has assumed that each text may be taken at face value, which turns out to be quite problematic. Mine, for example, is written from the point of view of a legitimate student of Mestre Caboquinho, with over four years of experience. However, it is not meant as a historical text, but only as a glimpse into capoeira angola as it is typically played today. In this, I must admit that Landes’ writing had a direct influence on my own. Thus, in order to make my account more valid, and to justify its use in a historical analysis, I must provide a more detailed account of the Mestre’s teachings, and how he has passed them to me.

The Landes description, meanwhile, is an excerpt from her book, The City of Women, which is considered one of the pioneering works on Afro-diasporic religion, and an early example of “subjective ethnography.” Her description of capoeira may therefore be thought of as a legitimate work of scholarship. However, Landes wrote her account as a thoroughly untrained observer of capoeira, who undoubtedly made errors and glossed over important details in her description. Moreover, as already noted, the focus of her research was not capoeira, but candomblé.

Landes also observed capoeira as a complete outsider to Afro-Brazilian culture. As a white, North American, Jewish, female anthropologist researching Afro-Brazilian religious practices, Landes discovered to her disappointment that there were many places a light-skinned woman of “polite” upbringing could not go in 1930s Bahia (which remains true to some extent today). As such, her description is that of a woman observing what was then an almost entirely male practice, with her mixed-race, Bahian informant and collaborator by her side.
Édison Carneiro, who provided Landes the opportunity to witness this game, also had a marked influence on her work. He not only served as her primary informant on Afro-Bahian culture, he was also her amorous companion during her year-long stay in Bahia and Brazil. In Landes' account of capoeira, Carneiro also provided most of the song translations, which are drawn from his 1937 book *Negros Bantus* (as Landes herself footnotes).

One unacknowledged borrowing from Carneiro is her suggestion that various styles of capoeira had evolved "with subtleties in the forms and sequences of the blows and in the styles of playing the berimbau." This is again a direct reference to a statement by Carneiro.

Such influence was the logical outcome of their time together. Carneiro's own work also remains well regarded by scholars of capoeira today, largely because of his vocal support of Afro-Brazilian art forms, especially *capoeira angola* and *candomblé*. Yet it is also true that the highly ideological nature of Carneiro's work raises questions about the impact of his politics on the work of Landes. For example, he was well known for favoring and actively promoting the traditional, more game-like, supposedly "African" style of capoeira. He may also have been partially responsible for inspiring traditional capoeira practitioners to adopt the term *capoeira angola* to answer to the rise of modernized capoeira, which was just becoming known as *capoeira regional* in the 1930s.

---

9. I have not personally examined *Negros Bantus*, but all of Carneiro's relevant writings on capoeira are excerpted in a pamphlet entitled *Capoeira, Cadernos de Folclore* 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte/MEC, 1975). See especially the songs on p. 10-13. As already implied, the translations provided by Landes contain several inaccuracies.


Another problem with the analysis is the assumption that each game represents typical capoeira game of the period. While I may be qualified to make that assertion with regard to my own account, I cannot make the same assertion for Landes, without introducing other descriptions from the period. Thus, in order to say something more substantive about capoeira history, other sources must be examined, which will undoubtedly complicate and/or contradict the view of capoeira history and practice as it has been presented by these two, highly resonant accounts.

Towards a methodology of capoeira studies

Yet even a broad expansion of this investigation—to include other historical descriptions or depictions of capoeira, information on the historical context of capoeira performance, the overall context of African or Afro-Brazilian practices in Brazil, and their links to Africa itself—still does not guarantee access to the real “secrets” and mandinga (“sorcery”) of capoeira.

Indeed, capoeira has remained elusive, especially to historians and scholars relying primarily on written texts, which rarely, if ever say anything about the form from the point of view of its practitioners. In fact, most of the traces that can be found of “capoeira” in the historical record were written precisely by those mandated to eliminate the practice, and show virtually no concern for preserving capoeira as a legitimate expression of African or Afro-Brazilian culture. Because of this history of repression, many of the more traditional practitioners of capoeira remain highly skeptical of books and/or attempts to “capture” the form by standard documentary means. Instead, they emphasize a “lived” understanding of the
form that is articulated through playing the game itself. Yet this reliance on oral or “bodily” history is often difficult to quantify and/or reconcile with the historical record.

In order to undertake a study of capoeira that can actually unlock some of its mysteries, it becomes necessary to sway between conceptual approaches, carefully balancing between objective analysis, subjective interpretation, informed speculation, and “embodied” knowledge gleaned by training, playing, and listening to the game and longtime practitioners.

Using this methodological approach, there remains one final point to be made regarding my opening comparison. Earlier, I admitted that the Landes account was very influential to my own, which appears to weaken the legitimacy of the comparison. However, the real reason I found the Landes description so compelling is that she captured the spirit of capoeira as I already knew it. Read from the point of view of an “insider,” her description seemed incredibly accurate. This is even more remarkable given her status as a complete outsider to the form.

Purpose

The remainder of this thesis follows the trajectory suggested by this introductory discussion, broadening the investigation to include a wider range of materials such as primary and secondary historical texts, practitioner accounts and manuals, works of recent historical scholarship, and online sources, all informed and measured against my own experiences listening to capoeira practitioners, and my training, playing, and teaching of capoeira. Through this process, I present this preliminary glimpse into the history, traditions, and bodily practice of capoeira.
Design

Thus far, my research has more or less fallen into two main lines of inquiry. The results of the first line are summarized in Section 1: "Secret" Histories, on the history, purpose, development of capoeira. Part 1 offers a user-friendly history of capoeira that briefly summarizes my historical and experiential research. Part 2 describes how capoeira and its history has been represented in the literature of the form. Part 3 assesses the sources of capoeira history, and examines the reasons why they answer so few of its unanswered questions.

The results of the second line are summarized in Section 2: Tradition and Bodily Practice. Part 1 looks at how capoeira has been passed down as a tradition, and how capoeira angola continues to be passed down by a few teachers today. Part 2 is a more specific look at capoeira angola as it has been relayed to me by Mestre Caboquinho.

Summary of sources and data-gathering methods

Since 2001, I have consulted a wide range of written materials and electronic resources to support my historical investigations. Most of these have been accessed through the extensive system of libraries at The Ohio State University, the NYPL Schomburg Center, and online sources. Some materials (books, magazines, interviews, informal conversations) were also gathered from various sources in Bahia.\textsuperscript{12} I have also familiarized myself with the wider field of "capoeira studies," including an ongoing review of materials on capoeira in Portuguese. Because Portuguese is

\begin{footnotesize}
12. Here I must note that I have not yet attempted to undertake research at historical archives in Brazil itself, due to my current lack of training in documentary research.
\end{footnotesize}
also the language of most practitioners, I have also become nearly fluent reader
and speaker of the language.

My "embodied" research spans the same length of time, beginning with an
introductory elective class offered by a graduate student in dance at Ohio State in
the year 2000–2001. Since that time, I have trained, played, and observed capoeira
at various academies throughout North America, Europe, and Bahia. With this
generalized study, I have become familiar with the wider practice of capoeira, its
different styles of play, and its pedagogical models, with particular emphasis on the
more specific modes of capoeira angola.

To support the movement aspects of this study, I have also been introduced to
Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), as informed by the work of Rudolf Laban and
Ingrid Bartenieff, under the guidance of Professor Melanie Bales, with helpful sug-
gestions from Professor Emeritus Vera Maletic. Under Dr. Sheila Marion, I have
also learned to use the Laban system of movement notation to preliminarily docu-
ment capoeira movements in graphic form. Under Brian Windsor, I have also
learned to use motion capture technology at Ohio State's Advanced Center for
Computing and Design (ACCAD) to document capoeira movements.13

My apprenticeship

My main "body" of research has been my four-plus years of training under
Mestre Caboquinho himself, my own experiences playing and observing the game,
and my apprentice teaching of capoeira angola in his name. I have trained with the
Mestre some fifty times, primarily in Detroit, Michigan, and occasionally Ann Ar-

13. The sessions of motion-captured capoeira movements, including one featuring Mestre Caboquinho himself, will
be used in future research.
Approximately a dozen sessions with the Mestre have been hosted either in Columbus or in Bahia. Virtually all of these classes have consisted of lecture/discussions, music and culture sessions, physical training, and capoeira play, ranging from two hours to six hours in length. Through this training, I have become accustomed to the difficult physical demands of *capoeira angola*. I have also been able to witness and experience the Mestre’s methods of forming new *angoleiros* first hand, using a master-apprentice model that has often defied my attempts to rationalize or measure it concretely.

Mestre Caboquinho, like many teachers of capoeira, embodies many contradictions. His teachings do not always “make sense” from the point of view of Western pedagogy, making my experience of training under him all-too-reminiscent of the contradictions encountered by Carlos Castaneda in his (supposed) apprenticeship under the sorcerer Don Juan. For example, even as the Mestre encourages his students to train capoeira movements diligently, he also gives up hours of class time to long, circular discussions that seriously limit training time. In this, the Mestre’s teachings have been heavily colored by his Bahian upbringing, including a very informal (“Brazilian”) sense of time, a simultaneous love and distrust of his students, and a deeply-rooted pessimism against those who misrepresent *capoeira angola* or seek to mix capoeira with other fighting forms.

My own travels to Bahia have greatly expanded my understanding of these issues, and the wider field of *capoeira angola*. I have spent a total of thirteen weeks in Bahia, primarily in Salvador, with several shorter trips to nearby areas. In 2004 and 2006, I was part of the Mestre’s official two-week trips to Bahia, and remained
for several additional weeks on each occasion.\textsuperscript{14} In 2005, I also traveled there alone for three weeks.\textsuperscript{15} All of these trips have been documented primarily through field notes and a number of photographs and field recordings. Documentation has often been constrained by prohibitions against recording devices, and the difficulties inherent to documenting and participating in capoeira simultaneously.

Parallel to these experiences, I have also taught an introductory elective class on \textit{capoeira angola} under the auspices of Professor Susan Hadley since 2002. As of June of 2006, some two hundred students have learned the basics of the art through the twice-weekly, ten-week course. At the same time, I have also led an informal capoeira study group at Ohio State since 2001, which became an official chapter of the T.A.B.C.A.T. organization under Mestre Caboquinho in late 2003. Leading this group has consisted of planning and teaching three two-hour class sessions every week, as well as organizing various group activities, public performances, and workshops throughout the Central Ohio area. It has also entailed the creation of promotional materials and the coding/maintenance of a group website (\textit{www.tabcatcolumbus.org}). My teaching experiences have themselves been documented mostly in the form of post-class notes, supplemented by a personal archive of collected student journals and assignments.

As a teacher, and now as an official “trainer” (\textit{treinel}) of \textit{capoeira angola}, I have begun to learn how to put the Mestre’s difficult master-apprentice model into place in my own students. This study will therefore reflect the influence of Mestre Caboquinho and other \textit{mestres} in Bahia, whose teachings have allowed me a small

\textsuperscript{14} With support from Thomas R. Brough and Sonya Bañales.

\textsuperscript{15} Supported by a Tinker Field Research Grant and colleague Rory Benson.
measure of understanding of the “reality” that lies behind capoeira’s many disguises. In this, I am merely following their humble example, taking on the daunting responsibility of conveying this “reality” to the next generation as, as all good *capoeiristas* must eventually do.

I must nevertheless emphasize the “preliminary” nature of this study. Not only are new materials being discovered and written at a rapid pace, my own understanding of the form is ongoing and ever-evolving. Likewise, the study itself has been updated and reedited through the course of over two years, which has undoubtedly led to various inconsistencies, dead ends, questionable scholarship, and outright errors.

In answer to this, I can only relate a recent reprimand given to me by Mestre Caboquinho, reminding me that I am still very much a “student” of capoeira. Likewise, I am still in the early stages of learning how to capture it in written and notated form. As such, this thesis may best be read as transitional report on a some of my findings thus far.

[A slightly corrected and updated version of this thesis may be found on the T.A.B.C.A.T. Columbus website, at *www.tabcatcolumbus.org/jogodemandinga*. Some of this research will also continue to be explored on a parallel site, which will also be linked from *www.tabcatcolumbus.org*. Comments and corrections are welcome.]
—SECTION 1—

"SECRET" HISTORIES
—PART 1—

A GENERAL HISTORY OF CAPOEIRA

FIG. 03 • THE ENGOLO (OR N’GOLO)
Drawings by Neves e Sousa, c. 1965

Origins

The practice of capoeira is said to be linked to a number of dance-fighting games, challenge dances, and warrior arts found throughout Bantu-speaking areas of Africa, especially the Central African regions known today as Angola, the Congo, and Mozambique. These are the same areas from which a large percentage
of Africans were taken and transported to Brazil throughout the 17th and 19th centuries, as part of the ruthless trade of slavery.¹⁶

While traditional African iterations of these forms have, like Africa itself, undergone radical transformation in the last several centuries, a few contemporary dance-fighting games found in Africa today (for example, the engolo of southwest Angola, the moringue of Madagascar, and the dundunba of Guinea’s Mandinka) still utilize various capoeira-like movements such as acrobatic leaps, headbutts, kicks, and leg sweeps.¹⁷

---

¹⁶. For more on African warfare and war training throughout the colonial period, see Thornton (1988).

¹⁷. For more on the moringue, see Powe (2001). For more on the engolo, see Neves e Sousa (1965) and Desch-Obi (2000). Both of these forms are also well summarized by Assunção (2005, 49–57). For more on the Guinean dundunba (“dance of the strong men”), see Africa Writs, 17 July 2006 <www.africawrites.com/thismonth1.html>.
Other games of the Americas

Over the course of nearly four hundred years of slavery (c. 1550–1889), a number of these African dance-fighting games were likely adapted and “reframed” to the New World context, in various ways. The existence of dance-fighting games in other African-American communities, such as the tripping/punching game maní of rural Cuba, the percussive kicking sport l’adja or danmye of Martinique, and the combative “knocking and kicking” of the southern U.S. offer interesting clues to the ways in which African forms were preserved and adapted to new conditions throughout the Americas.18 However, few of these arts (with the possible exception of l’adja) appear to have reached the level of complexity achieved by capoeira in Brazil.19

Modes of amusement and resistance

However they developed, and wherever they were found, these playful—and occasionally deadly—slave games were usually performed for amusement. In Brazil, they were often displayed as part of competitive dance circles known as batuques—the same circles that later brought us the famous samba.20

Some aspects of dance-fighting may have also been used in a combative context, either among rival slaves, or as one of many guerilla tactics available to rebel or runaway slaves. Some form of these arts may have been practiced in the qui-


19. In addition, there are many other combat games and practices of Africans, Europeans, and Amerindians (most notably stick-fighting and wrestling) that have yet to be seriously considered in this complex history. Further research will no doubt point to evidence of intriguing links among all of these forms.

20. For more on the context of the batuques, see Assunção (2005, 40–43).
lombos, or temporary backland communities established by runaway slaves.21 The capitães-de-mato, hunters sent to capture these runaways, were often Africans themselves, who may also have been adepts at the “hard” applications of these warrior arts.

FIG. 05 • JOGAR CAPOEIRA, OU DANSE DE LA GUERRE
J. M. Rugendas, Rio de Janeiro, c. 1830s

Nineteenth-century capoeira

Regardless of these tantalizing possibilities, our first notices of the word “capoeira,” as associated with a slave game, date to the colonial records of late 1700s and early 1800s Rio de Janeiro, the second capital of Brazil.22 In this increasingly

21. The most famous of these was the fifteenth-century community of Quilombo dos Palmares, which encompassed thousands of people and covered a radius of several dozen miles. Most, however, were smaller, opportunistic, parasitic communities on the edges of urban areas. See Taylor (2005, 85–147) for an excellent summary of the rise and fall of Palmares.

urban context, capoeira was known as a bloody “war dance” practiced by thugs, also known as capoeiras. By mid-century, it was associated with semi-organized street gangs known as malas. Throughout this period, the practice was recorded in the police records of Rio de Janeiro as capoeiragem, or the practice of capoeira, often linked with criminality and public disorder.

Capoeira was not merely a criminal pastime, however, as capoeiras were often found at the front of parade-like processions and religious celebrations. Capoeiras were also used by politicians as strongarm enforcers during elections.23

Moreover, other variants of capoeira were also reported throughout the 1800s in Salvador (Bahia), Recife (Pernambuco), São Luis (Maranhão), and Sorocaba (São Paulo), among others. After a number of local persecutions and legal statutes failed to wipe out the practice, the newly-established Republic of Brazil officially prohibited capoeiragem nationwide in 1890.24

In Rio, this led to a “purge” of the mala gangs that forced capoeira to become a marginalized underground art. It was kept alive sporadically by a few roguish characters such as Madame Satã (the famous transvestite), sports enthusiasts such as Sinhozinho (Agenor Moreira Sampaio),25 and as part of training regimens in a few military academies. Meanwhile, the remaining local variants of capoeira found throughout the rest of the country were destined to be replaced by the revitalized capoeira of Bahia in the 1950s.

24. Decree No. 847 of the Penal Code, 11 Oct 1890.
By contrast, in the former capital, Salvador, Bahia, and its surrounding sugar-rich recôncavo region, capoeira managed to thrive. This was partially the result of inconsistent enforcement of the 1890 prohibition, as well as the geographic diversity of the Bay of All Saints region. Furthermore, in Salvador, the maltas never reached the level of organization that they did in Rio, so no equivalent “purge” of capoeira had been necessary.

Bahian capoeira also took on the more deliberate appearance of a game—known colloquially as vadiação, or simply “idling”—through the use of instruments such as drums, tambourines, bells, and an ancient Angolan bow instrument called the berimbau. While Rio’s capoeira had sometimes been performed with drums, and the berimbau was linked to parallel activities such as the batuque, mu-
sic apparently lost its importance with the increasing criminalization of the art. In Bahia, capoeira—and its music—became important symbols of the playful subterfuge and resilience necessary for everyday survival.

Early twentieth-century capoeira in Bahia

In the early twentieth century, many mysterious figures inhabited the world of capoeira. Among them was the legendary Besouro (or Bisoro) Mangangá from the city of Santo Amaro, named for his ability to transform himself into a beetle to avoid capture by the police. He was also known for having a corpo fechado (or “closed body”) invulnerable to harm by metal. It is said that he was only killed (c. 1924) by being stabbed with a knife made of tucum wood.26

Many streetwise mestres of Bahian capoeira remained active in the face of the nationwide 1890 prohibition, performing rodas openly at various religious festivals and in the outlying neighborhoods and cities of the Bay of All Saints region. These men, mostly lower class workers of Afro-Brazilian descent, collaborated with sympathetic local authorities—some of whom were capoeiras themselves—and sought refuge in houses of the Afro-Brazilian religion candomblé during times of heavy persecution. Among these was a diminutive, slender young man named Vicente Ferreira Pastinha (1889–1981), who would emerge decades later as the most prominent spokesman for this traditional practice of capoeira. Throughout this period, capoeira was largely learned informally by observation, or taught in back rooms, closed bars, and backyard patios—often one student at a time.

Mestre Bimba and *capoeira regional*

Another famous *capoeira* of this period, nicknamed Mestre Bimba (b. Manoel dos Reis Machado, c. 1899–1974), grew tired of the political repression and informal teaching style of traditional capoeira. In the late 1920s, after playing and teaching traditional capoeira for several years, M Bimba decided to streamline the seemingly innocuous, folkloric pastime into an effective Afro-Bahian fighting form. Influenced by an old Bahian kicking game called the *batuque*, the introduction of Asian martial arts in Brazil, and the suggestions of some of his students (including a few who had been trained in other fighting arts and physical education), M Bimba eliminated many of the rituals of capoeira, standardized its movements, and
simplified its musical repertoire to create what is now called capoeira regional, or "capoeira of the region."

This style was initially called luta regional baiana (or "regional fight of Bahia") to avoid the illegal word, capoeira. In the 1930s, M Bimba founded one of the earliest formal academies of capoeira, called the Centro de Cultura Física Regional (CCFR), which was among the first to be officially recognized by the Brazilian government. This recognition—although only applicable to indoor capoeira "academies"—nevertheless paved the way for the eventual decriminalization of capoeira altogether.

M Bimba imposed strict rules in his academy and based his classes on a set of eight simple movement sequences. He also pioneered the use of uniforms and ranking ceremonies. These innovations helped make capoeira popular among Salvador's lighter-skinned middle classes for the first time. After a series of challenge matches and public demonstrations throughout Brazil, capoeira began to be seen as a uniquely Brazilian sport, fighting form, and cultural practice. By the 1950s, M Bimba's style came to be known as capoeira regional, quickly becoming the dominant form of capoeira in Brazil, and largely replacing remnants of local capoeira that still existed outside of Bahia.

Capoeira regional was the first "style" of capoeira to be self-consciously created to appeal to a wider audience, while the older vadiação remained a more spontaneous expression of everyday Bahian life. However, capoeira regional was not intended to replace the older capoeira. While M Bimba was undoubtedly a fighter at heart, and often spoke out against "old-fashioned" capoeira, he did not completely sever his own connections to Afro-Bahian culture. If anything, he used
his highly individualized—and extremely beautiful—style of capoeira to preserve the distinctions between Afro-Brazilian culture and the new global culture of capitalism that threatened to erase it.

To accomplish this, M Bimba purged his capoeira regional of most obvious allusions to Afro-Brazilian ritual. For example, he eschewed the use of the ata-bague drum, a symbol of the candomblé religion. At the same time, he was a master drummer in the religion, and even protected many of its adherents from persecution. By all accounts, M Bimba also continued to play capoeira in the old way himself. This suggests that Mestre Bimba was well aware of how to divide his cultural heritage between its more visible aspects, and its hidden aspects.

FIG. 08 • MESTRE PASTINHA
Holding his berimbau
(Photo by Pierre Verger, 1940s)
Capoeira angola and the return of Mestre Pastinha

Nevertheless, the rise of capoeira regional was perceived as a threat by those who held on the older, more ambivalent capoeira of the past. As a result, the older form began to be called capoeira angola, in recognition of its likely origins in the Bantu practices of Africa. Among the many mestres who played and taught capoeira angola during this golden era (c. 1920–1960), were such men as Daniel Noronha, Maré, Samuel Querido de Deus, Curió (Velho), Waldemar da Paixão, Canjiquinha, Caiçara, and Cobrinha Verde. The description by Ruth Landes that opens this thesis (c. 1938) paints a vivid picture of a game between the boatman Querido de Deus and another capoeirista named Onça Preta.

There were also a handful of women who played capoeira around this time, including Maria Sete Homens, but the real story of women’s participation in this period remains untold. By contrast, women often held the highest positions of authority in candomblé, providing many capoeiras with protection and spiritual guidance.

Above all, however, it was Mestre Pastinha who would become the most widely known teacher and protector of capoeira angola. In the 1940s, M Pastinha came back after thirty years of semi-retirement to open his own academy, the Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola (CECA). Following a similar path to the one forged by M Bimba, M Pastinha’s academy quickly became an important focal point for capoeira angola, where many diverse capoeiristas came together under one roof. Guided by M Pastinha’s gentle demeanor, informal teaching style, and philosophical spirit, the playful—but still dangerous—capoeira angola thus became a valuable cultural heritage. In 1966, at the age of 77, M Pastinha became the first
teacher to bring capoeira back to the motherland, Africa, as part of the First Festival for Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal.

![Image](image.png)

**FIG. 09 - CAPOEIRA REGIONAL**
Recent postcard from Salvador, Bahia

The proliferation of *capoeira regional*

In Rio de Janeiro, capoeira *carioca* ("capoeira of Rio") had survived piece-meal as an underground criminal art, a sport, and occasionally as a military combative form. A few sportsman, such as Sinhozinho, taught capoeira movements without ritual or music, but otherwise there were few actual teachers of the form. In the 1940s and 50s, Bahian capoeira started making an impact in the city. M Bimba showed off his students there in the 1940s, and another Bahian mestre named Artur Emídio began teaching his own stylized fusion of capoeira in Rio in the 1950s.27

---

27. For more on Emídio, see Assunção (2005, 171–172).
By the 1960s, a group of young enthusiasts began calling themselves the Grupo Senzala, named after the slave barracks. These youngsters, many of them white and university educated, decided to take M Bimba's *capoeira regional* and add their own innovations. They incorporated extreme acrobatics, techniques from other sports and martial arts (such as *vale tudo*, or free-for-all fighting), and systematic rankings based on rope cords, or *cordas*.

Much of this happened without the guidance or blessing of a formal teacher of capoeira, and at a capoeira conference in 1968, M Bimba expressed disgust at what his art was becoming. Nevertheless, this new, more competitive form—often called “*capoeira contemporânea*”—eventually took the country and the world by storm. Through organizations numbering tens of thousands, competitive tournaments, and public demonstrations, the Grupo Senzala and its offshoots, such as Abadá-Capoeira and Omulu, eventually became the dominant force in capoeira. Others prominent groups established in this period include Mestre Suassuna’s Cordão de Ouro, Mestre Boneco’s Capoeira Brasil, Mestre Dinho’s Grupo Topábio, and dozens more.

Commercial interests later found this exciting, somewhat “de-Africanized” type of capoeira the easiest to market, featuring it in advertisements for Propel water, Nokia phones, and the BBC. Mainstream films such as *Only the Strong* (1993) and *Ocean’s Twelve* (2004) also featured it. The game company Namco also motion-captured capoeira to create the characters of “Eddy Gordo” and “Christie Monteiro” for their *Tekken* series of fighting games. Capoeira also became a stage-

friendly form, providing choreography for acts such as Cirque du Soleil, Jelon Vie-
ra's DanceBrazil, and even Latin pop star Ricky Martin.

More recently, "contemporary" capoeira has been promoted as an efficient system of self-defense, mixed and taught alongside Brazilian jujitsu, karate, boxing, and vale tudo. Increasingly, it is even being used as an aerobic workout equivalent to Tae Bo, under such creative names as "Capoeira Workout," "Capoeirobics," "Cardio Capoeira," or "CapoFit."

With its emphasis on modernization, innovation, and efficiency, "contempo-
rary" capoeira has become an international sport and martial art. In addition, with the increasing social acceptance of capoeira, women have become more and more involved in this once vagabond art form. A few—such as Mestrandas Edna Lima and Cigana of Abadá—have already achieved higher ranks. In this process, capoeira has also become a global "symbol" of Brazilianness: like Carmen Miranda, bossa nova music, and football soccer. However, many of the old-schoolers in Ba-
hia believe that the elegant simplicity of M Bimba's original capoeira regional and the playful ambivalence of capoeira angola have been lost or diminished in this process of globalization.

Mestre Bimba himself did not reap long-term rewards from this process of globalization. He spent his last years bitter and broke, and died in Goiânia in 1974, far away from his beloved Bahia. Since that time, a few of his most famous graduated students, such as the esteemed Dr. Angelo Decânio, Jair Moura, Mestre Acordeon, and Mestre Itapoan (Raumundo Cesar Alves de Almeida), have tried to rescue the spirit of his teachings, but among the hundreds of capoeira teachers who
claim to represent *capoeira regional* today, only M Bimba’s own son, Mestre Nenél, adheres strictly to the form as M Bimba taught it.

**The decline and appropriation of *capoeira angola***

In the 1970s, as *capoeira regional* continued to grow exponentially, *capoeira angola* suffered a period of neglect, no doubt exacerbated by the sad closure of M Pastinha’s academy. In the early 1970s, M Pastinha had been asked to temporarily vacate his space on the famous Pelourinho, but instead of returning it to him, the government turned the space into a tourist restaurant which is still in operation today. As a result of this and other insults, many *angoleiros* stopped teaching. Others (including Mestres Canjiquinha, Caicara, and Nô) even tried to copy M Bimba’s model, creating their own streamlined styles of capoeira for shows and performances. With the death of Mestre Pastinha in 1981, blind and penniless at 92 years of age, it seemed that the powers of *capoeira angola* were on the wane.

A few well-meaning practitioners of “contemporary” capoeira, recognizing the imminent extinction of the old traditions, began to study under *angoleiros* in order to enrich their own teachings. In the process, *capoeira angola* became just another “style” of capoeira, especially in “contemporary” schools, where practitioners have either tried to integrate the two modalities into a single, “unified” capoeira, or to divide between the “high and fast” style of *capoeira regional*, and the “low and slow” style of *capoeira angola*. From the point of view of most *angoleiros*, however, this needless reintegration has reduced the deeper, more mysterious aspects of *capoeira angola*—its rituals, playful ambivalence, trickery, *mandinga*, and sonorous musical orchestra—to mere caricatures.
The revival of *capoeira angola*

Luckily, in spite of the appropriation of *capoeira angola* and the continued growth of “contemporary” capoeira throughout the world, *capoeira angola* has remained in the hands of Bahian *mestres*. *Capoeira angola* finally began its own revival in the 1980s, thanks to the work of Mestre Pastinha’s eldest students—most notably, Mestre João Pequeno (b. 1917). Other elder students of Pastinha, such as Mestres João Grande (b. 1933) and Boca Rica, as well as a few younger ones such as Bola Sete, have also established their own schools.

The most prominent reviver, however, has been Mestre Moraes, a student of the two Joãos under Mestre Pastinha. Moraes, perhaps the most savvy of the *angoleiros*, established the Grupo Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP) in 1980, mobilizing black political consciousness and teaching a streamlined style of *capoeira angola* that was informed by years of playing as an *angoleiro* in the tough *rodas* of Rio de Janeiro. GCAP has been instrumental in the growth of *capoeira angola* worldwide, through its teachings, its popular CD recordings, and various offshoot organizations such as the FICA/ICAF of Mestre Cobrinha Mansa. Likewise, students of Mestre João Pequeno—including Mestre Jogo de Dentro, Mestre Barba Branca, and Professora Ritinha—have gained strength in recent years, while the famously mischievous Mestre Curió (who was also well known at Pastinha’s academy) has graduated the first female *mestra* in *capoeira angola*, named Mestra Jararaca.

At the same time, other Bahian *mestres*—including M Lua de Bobó, M Renê, M Neco, M Curió, M Augusto, M Zé do Lenço, M Raimundo Dias, and the author’s own M Caboquinho—have breathed new life into long-neglected, parallel
lineages of *capoeira angola* that date back Bahia’s old street *rodas*, and far beyond. Some of these *mestres* formed an organization called the Associação Brasileira de Capoeira Angola (ABCA) in 1993.

Non-Brazilians and women are also playing an increasingly important role in the future passage of *capoeira angola*. M Caboquinho, for example, has graduated two women to the level *contra-mestre*: CM Biriba and CM Rapidinha. With their guidance, and the determination of the students who follow them, the game of *vadiação* and its traditions are poised to survive for centuries to come.
PART 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

Capoeira has been noted in the written record as far back as the colonial records of late eighteenth century Brazil. It was also an important urban phenomenon throughout the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, little serious attention was turned to the form until the twentieth century. The burgeoning field of "capoeira studies" is thus a very recent phenomenon, in which most of the best books have only been published since the 1990s.

This is perhaps not surprising, considering that capoeira has generally been equated with criminality, idleness, and lower class, "primitive," African-derived culture, as I examine in Part 3. The neglect of capoeira thus parallels the overall repression and neglect of the African contribution to Brazilian culture. (echoed by M Cabo - study capoeira and you will learn history of Brazil). Likewise, the increasing status of capoeira as a subject worthy of study closely follows the rise of "Afro-Brazilian" studies overall.29

In order to present a wider view of this shift, I begin with a brief summary of the earlier references to capoeira before moving on to a more detailed examination of materials written in the latter half of the twentieth century. For the sake of ac-

cessibility, I have prioritized materials written in English, and those that are widely available. (I have a lot of work left to do in Brazil) Because the vast majority of works about capoeira are still in Portuguese (with little hope of future translation), it is important and useful to summarize the most relevant of those Portuguese materials.30 I shall also elaborate on the limitations of these materials whenever appropriate.

Early references to capoeira

An invaluable resource on the earliest references to capoeira is viewable online, through a web archive entitled Capoeira: Historical Documents Timeline.31 On this page, coordinated by Pol Briand and his partner Lucia "Palmares," a number of historical documents pertaining to capoeira have been transcribed with great care, including the earliest known reference to the form in a 1789 police report.32 Briand and Palmares also include excerpts from the nineteenth century travel accounts and descriptions of non-Brazilians such as Henry Koster (1816),33 Henry Chamberlain (1821),34 Johann Moritz Rugendas (1827),35 Jean-Baptiste

30. With a few exceptions, I shall translate most Portuguese titles within footnoted citations, not in the body of the text.
34. Sir Henry Chamberlain, Views and costumes of the city and neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from drawings taken by Lieutenant Chamberlain during the years 1819 and 1820, with descriptive explanations (London: T. M'Leau, 1822).
Debret (1834),

Charles Ribeyrolles (1859),

Emile Allain (1866),

as well as references from later Brazilian authors such as Machado de Assis (1885), Melo Morais Filho (1893), and Manuel Querino (1916), among others.

Nineteenth century newspapers that wrote about capoeira in Rio include the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, *Jornal do Comércio*, and *O Correio da Tarde*. Other primary sources from the nineteenth century include a number of government records that were not known by writers of that time. These include codices, official letters, judicial proceedings, manuscripts, legal declarations, and police and military records. Thus far, most documents have been drawn from the Secretaria de Polícia da Corte (Office of the Court Police), the Ministério de Justiça (Ministry of Justice), the Casa de Detenção (House of Detentions), general archives of the city of Rio de Janeiro, police archives, and a collection of Imperial laws, among many others. Most of these are held at the Arquivo Nacional (National Archive), the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library), and the Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos (Center for Afro-Asian Studies) in Rio de Janeiro. In addition, Carlos Soares has researched documents held at the Arquivo da Marinha (Marine Archives), the Ar-


quivo Histórico Ultramarino in Lisbon (Portugal), and the Arquivo Histórico Nacional in Luanda (Angola).41

In Bahia, capoeira was first cited by name in newspapers such as O Alabama, A Tarde, and Diário de Notícias. Otherwise, however, documentation on Bahian capoeira in the nineteenth century has been sparse (thus far). Antonio Liberac Pires and Josivaldo Oliveira have worked with documents held at the Arquivo Público Estadual da Bahia (Public Archive of the State of Bahia).42 The Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiaticos in Bahia is another important source, as is the personal archive of the Bahian researcher, Fred Abreu.

Early twentieth-century literature

While most of these archival materials are only available in Brazil, secondary materials from the early twentieth century are widely available in university libraries throughout North America and Europe. Increasingly, these texts are also being excerpted online.43 However, nearly all of these were written in Portuguese and have yet to be translated into English or other languages. Additionally, most of them consider capoeira only peripherally, or as part of a wider study of folklore that marked the beginning of “Afro-Brazilian” studies, an approach pioneered at the turn of the twentieth century by Raymundo Nina Rodrigues and his protégé

41. For a more complete list, consult Soares (1999).

42. See Liberac Pires (2004). I have not had the opportunity to consult any of these records myself, but I have included them here to confirm their existence and importance to the field. I also hope that my description can serve as an orientation for interested researchers. Other sources no doubt await discovery and analysis.

43. See, for example, the Brazilian online magazine, Jangada. 2006. 20 Apr 2006 <www.jangadabrasil.com.br>.
Artur Ramos. Among these types of materials, the most relevant to capoeira are Edison Carneiro’s *Negros Bantus: notas de etnografia religiosa e de folclore* (1937), Antonio Vianna’s *Quintal de Nago e outras crônicas* (1979), and Luis da Câmara Cascudo’s extensive *Dicionário de Folclore Brasileiro* (various editions). French sociologist Roger Bastide, who documented the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*, also wrote a short description of capoeira as part of his book *Imagens do nordeste místico em branco e preto* (1945).

Among works in English, Ruth Landes’ well-known *City of Women* (1947) also focuses primarily on capoeira’s sister art *candomblé*, but she also provides the vivid description of capoeira that opens this thesis. Donald Pierson, a prolific scholar of Brazilian studies, also provides some helpful details on capoeira in his 1942 study of race relations in Bahia.

Other published works include non-academic attempts to promote capoeira as a unique Brazilian martial art and/or athletic practice. The first of these was a pamphlet entitled *Guia do capoeira ou ginástica brasileira* (1907) written by an anonymous military officer in Rio de Janeiro known only as “O.D.C.,” who de-

44. See for example, Nina Rodrigues, *Os Africanos no Brasil* [The Africans in Brazil], 1905; Artur Ramos, *As culturas negras no Novo Mundo* [Negro Cultures in the New World] (São Paulo, SP: Ed. Nacional, [1935], 1979).


46. Antonio Vianna, *Quintal de Nago e outras crônicas* [The Back Yard of the Nago and Other Chronicles] (Salvador, BA: UFBA, Centro de Estudos Baianos, 1979) compiles writings from the early twentieth century.


62
scribes various capoeira positions and techniques.\textsuperscript{51} Apparently inspired by “O.D.C.,” another carioca (resident of Rio) named Aníbal Burlamaqui wrote his own pamphlet, entitled \textit{Ginástica nacional (Capoeiragem) metodizada e regrada} (1928).\textsuperscript{52} Burlamaqui, an athlete and gymnast, was among the first to propose the reflexive, purposeful modernization of capoeira.

These were followed by two works by one of Burlamaqui’s students, an athlete, sociologist, and specialist in physical education named Inezil Penna Marinho, who published \textit{Subsídios para a metodologia do treinamento da capoeiragem} (1945)\textsuperscript{53} and \textit{Subsídios para a história da Capoeiragem no Brasil} (1956).\textsuperscript{54} These works were highly nationalist in character, hoping to turn capoeira into the equivalent of a national gymnastic practice largely devoid of African or Afro-Brazilian character.

\textsuperscript{51} O.D.C., \textit{Guia do capoeira ou ginástica brasileira [Guide to Capoeira or Brazilian Gymnastics]} (Rio de Janeiro, 1907), republished by the Associação de Capoeira Baravento (Niterói, RJ).

\textsuperscript{52} Aníbal Burlamaque, \textit{Ginástica nacional (Capoeiragem) metodizada e regrada, [National Gymnastics (Capoeiragem) Methods and Rules]} 1928.


\textsuperscript{54} Inezil Penna Marinho, \textit{Subsídio para a história da Capoeiragem no Brasil, [Supplement for the History of Capoeiragem in Brazil]} (Arquivos da ENEFD, Rio de Janeiro, ano 9, n.9, p.81-102, Jan.-Jun.,1956a).
Another work in this vein was a popular handbook by Lamartine Pereira da Costa with the presumptuous title of *Capoeira sem mestre* (Capoeira without a Master Teacher, c. 1962),
which contains numerous illustrations, and has gone through numerous editions. The famous modernizer of capoeira in Bahia, Mestre Bimba (Manuel dos Reis Machado), also released his own LP and accompanying instructional pamphlet entitled *Curso de Capoeira Regional* (c. 1960).
Meanwhile, the self-styled protector of *capoeira angola*, Mestre Pastinha (Vicente Ferreira Pastinha), also released a book, *Capoeira Angola* (1964), which was compiled by a ghost writer—probably his student Colmenero—out of various comments,


interviews, and manuscripts. M Pastinha later released an LP of music and personal recollections, also entitled “Capoeira Angola” (c. 1968).

Among works of fiction, several books by Jorge Amado deserve mention. Amado, a longtime resident and aficionado of Bahia, depicted several characters as players of capoeira in the novels Jubiabá (1935) and Capitães da Areia (1937), to name a few. Also, in a 1960s edition of his highly popular regional “guidebook,” entitled Bahia de Todos os Santos; guia das ruas e dos mistérios da cidade do Salvador (1966), Amado sings the praises of Mestre Pastinha himself.

Rego: Capoeira Angola: ensaio sócio-etnográfico

Capoeira scholarship, however, does not begin in earnest until 1968, with the publication of Waldeloir Rego’s imposing four-hundred-page volume entitled Capoeira Angola: ensaio sócio-etnográfico. Rego, an ethnographer and historian, modestly frames his book as a mere “essay,” but it is in fact more like an encyclopedia, bringing many of the various strands of capoeira study together. The book, although only available in Portuguese, has become the standard reference manual for “old style” Bahian capoeira.


In it, Rego presents very detailed and methodical examinations of nearly every aspect of capoeira. His twenty-page etymology of the word “capoeira,” for example, presents no less than thirty possible definitions and/or origins of the term. The book also features examinations of the game itself, its history, and profiles of contemporary practitioners and their academies. He also presents historical entries on each of the instruments of the capoeira orchestra, lists of dozens of traditional capoeira songs, and a very comprehensive etymological glossary of capoeira terms. The book also contains shorter (but still thoroughly footnoted) chapters on capoeira’s influence on the arts, literature, film, and popular music.

Rego’s important achievements in this book merit further detailed assessment and analysis. For the moment, however, it is enough to note that despite its thoroughness, Rego neglects one crucial aspect of the form: its actual movements. This lacuna—surprisingly or not—has been the most persistent problem in the field of capoeira studies.

Scholarly works of the 1970s

The 1970s saw a rather dramatic reevaluation of “black studies,” prompted by the work of Franz Fanon, the move towards independence in Africa, and Black Power in the USA. In Brazil, this led to a rethinking of the contribution of Africans and their descendants to the national culture. For example, Afro-Brazilian practitioners of the candomblé religion began to proclaim the purity of their religion on its own terms, disassociating it from notions of its syncretization with the Catholic

---

63. This does not even include possible Bantu derivations of the word, which were only suggested later by scholars such as C. Daniel Dawson (1993), Kongoloese scholar (), and Peter Fryer (2000).
Church, which had often hidden *candomblé* through its elaborate rituals and hierarchy of saints.⁶⁴

However, for quite some time after Rego, new scholarly work on capoeira appeared only sporadically. One of these, Valdemar de Oliveira’s *Frevo, Capoeira et Passo* (1971) contains a thirty-five page chapter on capoeira, and adds research on the *frevo* and *passo* dances of Recife. Edison Carneiro also recompiled his findings on capoeira into a short pamphlet entitled *Capoeira: cadernos de folclore* (1975).⁶⁵

In her thesis entitled *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (1972), Mary Karasch began her pioneering work in the Arquivo Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, which later became a 1987 book by the same name.⁶⁶ Karasch was among the first to call serious scholarly attention to the frequent citations of the word “capoeira” in these archival documents, which laid the groundwork for later “hard” historians such as Thomas Holloway, Carlos Soares, and Antonio Pires, whose works I shall discuss shortly.

Gerhard Kubik, a German ethnomusicologist, presented a compelling account of the living links between Brazil and Africa in his book *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil* (1979),⁶⁷ which includes a chapter on *capoeira angola* specifically. Kubik is also the first to suggest that the word capoeira may

---


have origins in an African language, not Portuguese or indigenous Brazilian as most theories had proposed previously. Kay Shaffer’s in-depth study of the berimbau musical bow, *O berimbau de barriga e seus toques* (1977)\(^68\) starts with Rego’s musicological work, but finds that some of his research was already out-of-date only nine years later.

**Growth of the field: practitioner accounts**

Since 1980, the number of materials written about capoeira has grown slowly but steadily. Among the first of these were works written by longtime students of Mestre Bimba. These include *Capoeiragem: arte e malandragem* (1980)\(^69\) by Jair Moura, and *Bimba: Perfil do Mestre* (1982),\(^70\) by Raimundo César Alves de Almeida’s (Mestre Itapoân). While these might be categorized as “practitioner accounts” rather than the work of historiography proper, both authors attempted to follow academic standards of scholarship.

Another student of M Bimba, Bira Almeida (Mestre Acordeon), published the first English book on capoeira in 1982, entitled *Capoeira: A Brazilian Art Form*.\(^71\) Almeida’s chapter on the history of capoeira again draws heavily from the work of Rego, but he infuses it with his own personal reminiscences of meeting and training with his teacher. He also summarizes his efforts to systematize the art, as well

---


70. Mestre Itapoân (Raimundo César Alves de Almeida), *Bimba: perfil do Mestre* [Bimba: Profile of the Master Teacher] (Salvador, BA: Centro Editorial e Didático da UFBA, 1982).

as information on the instruments, music, and rhythms of capoeira (again, owing a
great deal to Rego). He also includes a section quoting written works by his own
students (most of them North American), a nostalgic chapter about Mestre Bimba
and his philosophies, and several descriptions and photographs of capoeira tech-
niques and movement sequences. The later, better-known second edition, entitled
Capoeira: A Brazilian Art Form: History, Philosophy, and Practice (1986),72 omits
the student commentaries and specifics on training methods in favor of more de-
tailed historical notes, general comments on training, and a more generous use of
illustrations throughout. Both editions read as a hybrid between history, personal
philosophy, recollection, and advice.

Almeida’s most recent published work in English is an article from 1996, en-
titled “Capoeira: An Introductory History,” originally published by The Latin
American Institute,73 and now available online. In this, one of the most thorough
and widely-distributed histories of capoeira, he presents a wide-ranging and well-
balanced view. However, like most of his work, it tends to be colored by his expe-
rience as a practitioner of modernized capoeira,74 which leads him to dismiss many
of the historical claims and traditions of capoeira angola, a form he claims only
exists in its “contemporary” form.75

72. Bira Almeida (Mestre Acordeon), Capoeira: A Brazilian Art Form: History, Philosophy, and Practice (Berkeley,


74. For example, he does not refrain from positioning his own work in the continuity of capoeira history through his

75. “Contemporary Capoeira Angola codified some elements of Capoeira Angola, developed an articulated dis-
course based on ‘traditional values,” and a well-defined political agenda based on Afro-centric perspectives.” Al-
meida (1996).
The work of Nestor Capoeira, a longtime capoeira practitioner and well-known “red cord” of the organization Grupo Senzala, is of a similar vein. N. Capoeira published his first edition of _O pequeno manual do jogador de capoeira_ in 1981, which was later translated into English (and several other languages) as _The Little Capoeira Book_. This book has probably been the most widely distributed book on capoeira to date. As might be expected from the title, the book reads like a “handbook,” outlining history, philosophy, and movements of capoeira. The book also includes illustrations of the eight movement sequences of Mestre Bimba.

N. Capoeira’s subsequent books, _Galou já cantou_ (1985) and _Os fundamentos da malícia_ (1992) were also widely distributed, and contained the author’s wide-ranging investigations into capoeira history, philosophy, personal recollection, conversations with scholars such as Julio César de Tavares and Muniz Sodré, proceedings from conferences, and interesting tangents into such areas as Hindu mythology and the spirituality of candomblé.

In 1995, the English translation _The Little Capoeira Book_ was only the second book about capoeira published in English. _Os fundamentos da malícia_ was later re-edited into English as _Capoeira: Roots of the Dance-Fight-Game_ (2002).

---

76. The last name of “Capoeira” is apparently a pseudonym that the author has taken up in order to downplay the honorific title of “Mestre,” which he believes is overused. See N. Capoeira (2002, 294).

77. The “red cord,” or corda-vermelha, was previously the highest rank possible within the Grupo Senzala.


adding new sections on philosophy, history, exercises for capoeira training, and recollections of presentations from the 1990 World Samba Capoeira Meet in Rio de Janeiro. In 2003, a revised edition of *Little Capoeira Book*\(^3\) also added recollections from several other important meetings from 1968, 1969, and 1984.

N. Capoeira’s writings are an important addition to the literature, which, like the work of Almeida (M Acordeon), present a relatively honest, insider’s view of capoeira. The wide distribution of both of these author’s works also guarantees that they will continue to be among the most accessible and influential of books on the subject for general readers for some time to come. However, their work is marred by a writing style that is highly personal and idiosyncratic. And especially in the case of N. Capoeira, there is a near lack of source citations—not to mention a frustrating absence of subject indexes—that needlessly limits the scholarly usefulness of his work.

Mestre Bola Sete (José Luís Oliveira), one of Mestre Pastinha’s younger students, published his own account called *A Capoeira Angola na Bahia* (1989, revised 2003).\(^4\) His book is similar to the work of Almeida and N. Capoeira in that it is highly personal, but in some ways it is also a complement to Rego’s exhaustive work, including lists of many of the past and present *mestres of capoeira angola* (including a list of seven women who played the game long ago), photographs of many of the movements of the game, and nearly one hundred pages of capoeira songs. A second book, entitled *Histórias e estórias da capoeiragem* (1996, revised


2006)\textsuperscript{85} contains a number of personal reflections about the world of capoeira in the 1960s and 70s, including stories about his experiences training under Mestre Pastinha and his group.

**New approaches**

A seminal academic work by Julio César de Tavares, entitled “Dança da guerra: arquivo-arma” (1984),\textsuperscript{86} marks the beginning of a more scientific approach to capoeira. In this work, which is arguably the first academic thesis on capoeira, Tavares suggests that capoeira has functioned as a kind of “bodily archive,” or “a non-verbal repertoire of communication, a bodily-gestured channel of communication, a gesticulated bricolage, and the condensation of a bodily knowledge from an African matrix.”\textsuperscript{87} However, other than this work, the call to consider important questions of embodiment in capoeira has been largely ignored.

Thomas H. Holloway, a noted scholar of Brazilian history, published an influential article for the *Hispanic American Historical Review* in 1989, entitled “‘A Healthy Terror’: Police Repression of Capoeiras in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro.”\textsuperscript{88} Holloway is one of the first scholars to base his research on a detailed examination of the Arquivo Nacional (National Archive) and the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) in Rio de Janeiro, where he examined references to

---

\textsuperscript{85} José Luís Oliveira Cruz, *Histórias e estórias da capoeiragem* (History and Tales of Capoeiragem) (Salvador, BA: P555 Edições, 2006).


nineteenth-century capoeira in Rio. Such a rigorous academic approach had scarcely been attempted since Rego, and Holloway’s work in many ways has set the tone for a renewed emphasis on “hard” history.

J. Lowell Lewis, currently a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney, published the first widely-available academic book on capoeira, entitled *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira* (1992).89 In it, he draws heavily from performance studies, anthropology, game theory, and his own practice of the game. His most important contribution is in terms of movement studies, with his preliminary use of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) to examine the movement tendencies of the game, and of Bahians in general. To date, his suggestive work represents the only serious scholarly attention turned to the movements of capoeira. The book is also notable because it focuses primarily on *capoeira angola*, which he helpfully identifies as “the ludic [playful] style...more in line with an African esthetic.” This is distinct from the modernized, or “agonistic” style of capoeira, which tends to “correspond more closely with contemporary Western traditions.”90 This dichotomy between “ludic” and “agonistic” has been useful in my own analysis. One minor problem he leaves for future research, however, is his overemphasis of a hybrid style he calls *atual* (“actual,” or “present day” capoeira), that is now more often referred to as *capoeira contemporânea* or, in my text, “contemporary” capoeira. Beginner students who read this book therefore often believe the term *atual* represents yet another style of capoeira, although in fact this term is rarely used.


90. Lewis (1992, 114).

73
Two books by Carlos Eugênio Libano Soares, entitled *A negregada instituição: os capoeiras na Corte Imperial, 1850–1890* (1999)\(^{91}\) and *A capoeira escrava e outras tradições rebeldes no Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (2001)\(^{92}\) are the result of very detailed analysis of the archival documents of Rio de Janeiro. Using methods similar to those of Holloway, Soares reconstructs a vivid picture of capoeira in nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro that is incredibly detailed and thorough. Soares’ work has set a very high standard of scholarship that will be difficult to surpass. Nevertheless, it is striking to note that in nearly one thousand pages of materials, actual descriptions of the movements of capoeira are still quite scarce.

In English, two other notable books have included chapters devoted to capoeira. Barbara Browning’s *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (1995)\(^{93}\) is largely a practitioner-style account about samba, *candomblé*, and capoeira written in a free-ranging, journalistic style. Her book is nevertheless an important addition, drawing from classic texts, as well as an awareness of the literature on embodiment. Through her work, she hopes to “allow a synthesis of time and signs, which would be the only way to account for the complex speaking of the body in Brazil.”\(^{94}\)

Peter Fryer’s *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil* (2000)\(^{95}\) is a musicological survey that includes a ten-page chapter placing the mu-

---


usic of capoeira in the wider, extremely complex context of Afro-Brazilian music. Fryer’s musicological work is quite expansive, and his account on capoeira also contains the earliest incidence I have found of an English description of what is probably capoeira in Bahia in 1856. Fryer’s work on capoeira does contain some problems, such as the puzzling omission of the most frequently cited etymology of the word capoeira—from the indigenous cad-puêra—in favor of Portuguese and African suggestions. He also appears to rely too heavily on the supposed “oral history” of the form, mistakenly linking more recent academic theories of capoeira’s origins to the authentic tradition.

Also in 2000, T.J. Desch-Obi published a thesis examining the contemporary Angolan dance-fighting form called the engolo, often cited by scholars and practitioners alike as the most likely African origin of capoeira. Desch-Obi’s work appears to silence those who claim that capoeira developed in Brazil out of various African and Brazilian elements. Yet in writing his somewhat convincing account of the continuity between the engolo and its Brazilian iteration, Desch-Obi makes some serious errors, not the least of which is overemphasizing “survivalist” notions of the passage of cultural forms, without accounting for the drastic changes that have occurred in the region, even in the last thirty years (let alone the last two


97. See Fryer (2000, 30). Here, the author categorically states that “there is an oral tradition in Salvador according to which capoeira originated in... an Angolan dance [the ngolo].” As I shall note, this theory originated in the 1960s—too recent to count as the kind of “oral history” Fryer is suggesting.


99. By “survivalism,” I am referring to an anthropological concept developed by Herskovitz (1958) which emphasizes the survival of specific cultural traits across time. This theory, while still important, has been supplanted by notions of “creolization.”
hundred years). Perhaps more damning, he also fails to provide a single bit of new evidence other than his own, self-referential account. For example, he provides no new photographs or illustrations to prove his assertion that the movements of the *engolo* are almost identical to those of capoeira, and only includes the same drawings used to first suggest the theory in the 1960s. He also mentions his informants somewhat obliquely, without providing much in the way of details. And he fails to explicitly state the names of the city or villages in which he witnessed the *engolo* matches, leaving it to the reader to infer that it was in and around the city of Quilengues, Angola.

More widely distributed than his thesis is an essay by Desch-Obi entitled “Combat and the Crossing of the Kalunga” (2002). In it, the author links capoeira and other “combative practice rituals” with a Central African cosmology that “linked human combat to the interplay of spiritual forces across the *kalunga*, or the threshold between the lands of the living and the dead.” Another essay, entitled “Deadly Dances: The Spiritual Dimensions of Kongo-Angolan Martial Art Traditions in the New World” (2005) recapitulates this work.

These essays make several important connections between the movement arts of Africans in the Americas and their Central African counterparts, thereby opening a window to the possible internal, spiritual connotations of these movement forms. But again, Desch-Obi’s scholarship is problematic. For example, although


he presents the concept of the *kalanga* in a unitary manner, my own preliminary examination of African religion of the Kongo-Angola region (perhaps demonstrated best by the work of Carlos Estermann\textsuperscript{103}) suggests a much more complex picture than that painted by Desch-Obi.

The work of Edward L. Powe provides an interesting counterpoint to that of Desch-Obi. Like Desch-Obi, Powe has traveled extensively and had the opportunity to study African-derived martial arts in great detail, which has resulted in the publication of a series of small-run books under the title *Black Martial Arts*, including one volume on capoeira and congo,\textsuperscript{104} and another on the East African island region of Madagascar, Reunion, and Comores,\textsuperscript{105} where several fighting forms similar to capoeira appear. Also like Desch-Obi, he is an Afro-Centrist who believes a “smoking gun,” or a likely antecedent of capoeira, will someday be found in the hinterlands of Africa.\textsuperscript{106} Yet unlike Desch-Obi, Powe’s published works are full of illustrations and specific source citations. For example, in his chapter on capoeira, Powe reproduces his own *capoeira angola* training certificate (signed by Mestre Pastinha himself) from 1968. He also includes a short section in which he provides recent photographs of his own demonstration of capoeira movements. He also provides images and names of most of his informants, in a far more transpar-


\textsuperscript{106} Powe (2002, 171).
ent manner than Desch-Obi. Unfortunately, these books are not widely available, limiting their impact to those who can access extant copies in library collections.107

Thomas Green has written two thoughtful entries, “African Martial Arts” and “Capoeira,” in his encyclopedia entitled Martial Arts of the Modern World (c 2001).108 He describes how traditional “African combat systems” often relied “on the rehearsal of combat movements through dances,” but also admits that the documentation of this is scarce. With regard to capoeira, he reminds his readers that “[c]onsiderable debate exists among practitioners and historians as to whether capoeira is the New World development of an African martial art or a system originating in the New World with African influences...”109 Green also provides helpful summaries of other African combative arts found throughout the Americas.

Historian Antônio Liberac Cardoso Simões Pires is among the first to apply the research approaches of Holloway and Soares to Bahia. His Bimba, Pastinha e Besoura de Mangangá: Três personagens da capoeira baiana (2002),110 is a short work summarizing much of the extant material about M Bimba and M Pastinha, while adding an account of the famously mysterious Besouro Mangangá, compiled from research done in Besouro’s home town of Santo Amaro da Purificação, Bahia.

107. Even though these volumes have all been published recently, they are already out of print in 2006.


Liberac Pires’ most recent work, entitled *A capoeira na Bahia de Todos os Santos: um estudo sobre cultura e classes trabalhadores (1890–1937)* (2004), originally began as an attempt to unearth an equivalent font of documentation in Bahia as Soares had worked with in Rio de Janeiro. However, Liberac Pires soon discovered that Bahian capoeira was not usually prosecuted under the specific nationwide prohibition on the form; instead, arrests were made for more general crimes, such as causing “disorder.” He was then forced to turn to the manuscripts of various capoeira *mestres*, including Mestre Noronha (Daniel Noronha), whose written recollections from the 1970s were compiled into a short pamphlet by Frede Abreu as *O ABC da Capoeira Angola: os manuscritos do Mestre Noronha* (1993). Noronha helpfully listed a number of turn-of-the-century *capoeiras* whose names corresponded with some of those found in the arrest records. This allowed Liberac Pires to reconstruct a history of Bahian capoeira of the period, and link it to the ambience of lower class life in Salvador.

Fred Abreu is himself a longtime researcher and tireless archiver of capoeira materials in Bahia. He has compiled several documentary works, such as the aforementioned manuscripts of Mestre Noronha. His most recent publications include a retrospective/collection on a well known but little-heralded capoeira


teacher named Mestre Waldemar, and a detailed examination of the scarce citations of capoeira in nineteenth-century Bahia.

Dr. Angelo Decânio, perhaps the oldest of Mestre Bimba’s students still living, has done similar work in collecting the documents of Mestre Bimba and Mestre Pastinha. His website Capoeira da Bahia, for example, features a wide-ranging collection of his recollections and advice, plus downloadable facsimiles of Mestre Pastinha’s manuscripts. He has also collected the various sayings of Mestre Pastinha and Mestre Bimba into two documents that are also available to download.

Floyd Merrel’s Capoeira and Candomblé: Conformity and Resistance through Afro-Brazilian Experience (2005) is another wide-ranging personal account by a practitioner of capoeira angola. Merrell’s work, although admittedly not “anthropology…sociology…historical treatise or literary analysis…” is nevertheless imbued by philosophical grounding that offers interesting new ways to consider capoeira. He positions capoeira as a kind of “excluded middle,” arguing that “…slaves’ actions, reactions, and responses were devised in such a way as to give


the appearance that they were matters of either/or imperatives for the masters. But they were not."

Greg Downey has recently published *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art* (2005),\(^{119}\) which was mostly a refashioning of his 1998 dissertation.\(^{120}\) In both, Downey draws heavily from phenomenological theory, which allows him to look at capoeira not as an object of analysis, but rather "from the inside out, asking how the world looks after one has spent enough time in the roda."\(^{121}\) Downey’s most important contribution is thus to carefully imbue his writing with a knowledge gleaned from training and practicing capoeira himself. This allows him, like Merrell, to dissimulate academic theories in favor of the immediate, kinesthetic aspects of the game, left largely untheorized by practitioners. In this, he considers the implications of daily work habits (such as the African habit of carrying loads on the head) and their influence on capoeira, as well as the ways in which capoeira nurtures its practitioners to maneuver through the world (as suggested by chapters entitled “The Rogue’s Swagger,” “Closing the Body,” and “Walking in Evil”). His physical descriptions of capoeira movement are also informed by his more recent research on neurological patterns in physical learning. Downey is therefore only the second scholar to seriously consider the importance of movement in capoeira.

---


Two other recent works of scholarship that deserve notice are Josivaldo Oliveira’s *No tempo dos valentes: os capoeiras na Cidade da Bahia* (2004) and Pedro Abib’s *Capoeira Angola: cultura popular e o jogo dos saberes na roda* (2004). Oliveira’s work follows on the heels of Liberac Pires to investigate the context of Bahia’s infamous “tough guys,” while Abib examines *capoeira angola* as filtered through the study of popular culture.

**Assunção: Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art**

Matthias Röhrig Assunção, a senior lecturer in history at Essex University, has published what is probably the most thorough historical account of the development of capoeira published thus far, entitled *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art* (2005).

Among his most important contributions is his reliance on “hard” documentary evidence. This leads him to dismiss many of the more romantic notions of capoeira’s development as “fakes.” Eventually, this leads to a rather devastating critique of Desch-Obi’s work, which is characterized by Assunção as leaning too heavily on Afro-Centric notions of continuity.

---


125. See especially Assunção (2005, 5–9).

Assunção also provides an analysis of six “master narratives” that operate in capoeira history: Eurocentric repression, Brazilian nationalism, Afro-Brazilian and Afrocentric studies, regional competition, corporatization, and class conflict. This precedes chapters on the cultural context of the “Black Atlantic,” the nineteenth century capoeira scene in Rio (which summarizes the work of Holloway and Soares), a crucial chapter on early twentieth century capoeira in Bahia (perhaps the first to put all resources on Bahia in one place), detailed examinations of the development of M Bimba’s modernist capoeira regional, the rise of traditionalist capoeira angola under M Pastinha, and up-to-date information on contemporary iterations of the form. Drawing from nearly every source currently available, Assunção has written a specialist’s book that is very close to “definitive,” and will certainly remain the most thorough book written about capoeira in English, perhaps even in Portuguese, for quite some time.

However, even such a highly rigorous, seemingly unimpeachable historical text has its own “narratives.” Assunção bases much of his analysis on a model of creolization, which is a somewhat outdated approach, and happens to correspond with the view of “contemporary” or modernized capoeira. By offering a compromise in the “struggle over which group is more ‘entitled’ to reappropriate capoeira: diasporic blackness or Brazilian national identity,” Assunção reinforces the positions of those who seek to collapse the differences between modernized capoeira and more traditionalist capoeira angola. Further, suggests that “the issue of creolization in capoeira can provide a middle ground for a more consensual narrative” between these two “incompatible master narratives.”

Ultimately, although his book is intended primarily as an historical account, Assunção follows the long line of academics who have neglected the actual movements of the form. Strangely, he even quotes, with little comment, the seminal 1984 work of Tavares (discussed earlier), centered on issues of embodiment. As I shall discuss shortly, this lacuna is not limited to the field of capoeira studies.

Future pathways

Gerard Taylor, a freelance writer from the UK, recently published the first volume of his own history of capoeira, entitled Capoeira: The Jogo de Angola from Luanda to Cyberspace (2005).\textsuperscript{128} This volume covers the early period of Brazilian history until the late 1800s, and the place of capoeira within that history. The book reads less as a historian’s account of capoeira history (i.e., Assunção), and more of a journalist’s account meant for general readers. Taylor’s contribution provides a replacement for the older, more widely distributed “practitioner” histories of Almeida and N. Capoeira. Nevertheless, Taylor makes a few problematic jumps in his text. For example, he usually provides exhaustive sources throughout his text, but then curiously fails to provide them at other, more speculative junctures. The most glaring example of this is when he gives a tantalizing hint about the primitive history of capoeira in Bahia, without providing documentation to back up his assertion.\textsuperscript{129}

Also, like Assunção, Taylor is a practitioner of the “contemporary” style of capoeira and a longtime follower of the London School of Capoeira Herança,


\textsuperscript{129} Taylor (2005, 289).
which is strongly linked to the Associação of Capoeira Senzala of Mestre Sombra. While this does not necessarily compromise his project (and, unlike Assunção, he states his biography quite clearly in this regard), questions about the ideology of “contemporary” capoeira are valid to raise. At any rate, this first volume says little about capoeira’s movements.

Web-based, internet research on capoeira has also become increasingly important, as has already been noted. Such research represents a very mixed bag, as with many other fields. For example, there are several reliable, useful sites—such as those of Pol Briand and Lucia Palmares, Dr. Angelo Decânio, the French site www.capoeira-infos.org, and articles on Brazzil Magazine, to name a few—that contain many primary and secondary materials. The proliferation of internet forums or discussion groups has also broadened the conversation immensely. In my own research, I have come across several key pieces of evidence by simply scanning threads in such venues as The Capoeira Café, Planet Capoeira, and Capoeira Online.

The downside is that there is also an enormous amount of erroneous information about capoeira on the web. Dozens of sites simply copy one another’s as-

130. Mestre Sombra’s Senzala group, based in Santos, São Paulo, Brazil, should not be confused with the Grupo Senzala and its offshoots from Rio de Janeiro. However, both groups may be categorized as “contemporary” capoeira.


134. http://www.beribazu.co.uk/forum/


sumptions, mistakes, and even HTML coding.\textsuperscript{137} Even on Wikipedia, which is other- 
wise a remarkable research tool, the entry on capoeira (as of December 2006) 
contains a number of factual errors, not to mention political biases, despite the fact 
that it has been edited by dozens of people thus far.\textsuperscript{138} As is the norm when consider-
ing internet resources, caution is the rule.

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{137} For example, I have seen my own work on the web stolen and reconfigured without (and occasionally with) 
permission.

\textsuperscript{138} See \url{en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capoeira} for main entry, or 
Unanswered questions

The ever-growing volume of materials on capoeira belies the fact that many of the biggest questions about capoeira still remain unanswered. Namely:

· How and where did capoeira develop? Did it “arrive,” more or less intact, from Africa, at a certain point in time? Or was capoeira the result of a long process of mixture, reinvention, and creolization that took place over many generations, under many influences?

· What part(s) of Africa did the presumptive antecedent(s) of capoeira come from? When did Africans from these areas start arriving in Brazil, and how many arrived? Can these antecedents still be found in present-day Africa? To what extent have they changed or stayed the same?

· Or was capoeira more of a Brazilian creation? If so, was it actually used as fighting form in the bush, and how? Or was it primarily a slave amusement performed on rural plantations? Could it have been both? Or was it only developed in urban areas?

· What about the fighting forms and dances of the native Brazilians? Did they leave a mark on capoeira too?

· When did creoles, freedmen, and Europeans become involved in capoeira? How much did they contribute to the art?
· How widespread was the practice of capoeira and did local variants develop on their own?
· Was capoeira spread throughout the Americas—and perhaps even taken back to Africa—by manumitted slaves and black seamen? Or did other Afro-American forms similar to capoeira develop on their own?

While some of these questions betray their own ideological biases, they suggest that capoeira history has remained stubbornly obscure overall, in spite of many attempts to illuminate it. The disappointing truth is that much of the history and development of capoeira will likely remain unknown, for reasons I now suggest.

A neglected culture

Taken as a whole, capoeira has until very recently been regarded as a marginalized form performed largely by marginalized people in a marginalized corner of the world. Even when attention was given to the form by Brazilians themselves, it was often rather dismissive.139 Only with the work of Moraes Filho in the 1880s140 did capoeira begin to be seen as a Brazilian mestiço ("mixed blood") practice worthy of some national pride. Capoeira—along with other forms of African and Afro-creole expression—was thus neglected well into the twentieth century, and arguably, to the present day.

---
140. Alexandre José Mello Moraes Filho, Festas e tradições populares do Brasil/Festivals and Popular Traditions of Brazil (Belo Horizonte: Ed. Itatiaia, EDUSP, 1979).
Deliberate obscurity

Capoeira was also actively hidden by its practitioners precisely because of this atmosphere of repression and marginalization, a context in which practitioners would have no doubt done whatever they could to avoid punishment, protect their cultural and/or spiritual secrets, and maintain a sense of their own identity.

Deception and circumlocution thus served Africans in Brazil in a practical way, allowing them to hide the reality of their beliefs behind apparent falsehoods, “disguising a fight in dance.” This strategy also represents a countercurrent against the European values of the Enlightenment, in which transparency and intellectual honesty are among the highest virtues.

There are also many reasons to believe that racism and repression are still real in Brazil.141 Given all of this, there are a number of good reasons why practitioners of capoeira angola, many of them Afro-Brazilian, might keep important aspects of their traditions to themselves. Without an inside knowledge of the form, and the careful guidance of a mestre, many important aspects of capoeira may thus remain inaccessible.

Assessing documentary sources

Most accounts on capoeira history thus far have relied on documentary sources that are less than ideal. Much of the written documentation on Africans and their movement forms was written by travelers, traders, and invaders who were not concerned with preserving or describing the deeper aspects of African culture for posterity.

Another oft-cited problem is the supposed destruction of records regarding Brazilian slavery. The claim, often repeated by capoeira practitioners as one of the primary obstacles to further historical research on capoeira, is that in 1890, Rui Barbosa, Finance Minister of the recently-declared Republic of Brazil, ordered all documents to be burned.\footnote{142 See declaration in Carneiro (1967, 89).} However, the decree itself appears to have applied only to those documents held by the Ministério de Fazenda (Ministry of Finance). As I shall demonstrate in Part 3, the work of scholars such as Mary Karasch, Holloway,
Carlos Soares, and Liberac Pires would suggest that this order was not carried out in the case of most criminal documents.\textsuperscript{143}

At any rate, most of the government documents citing capoeira were written from the point of view of authorities, whose primary purpose was to protect the populace from the dangers of supposed \textit{capoeira} thugs, rather than to document a cultural practice. Likewise, the newspapers of nineteenth and early twentieth century Brazil also reflected biases of their own, primarily in terms of supporting or opposing particular government policies.

Among other primary materials, the travel and cultural accounts of visitors such as those of the Bavarian Johann Moritz Rugendas and the Parisian Jean-Baptiste Debret\textsuperscript{144} have also presented problems for the modern historian. While they are extremely valuable, and in some cases quite detailed, they still represent European points of view. In this, they are not free of the racist beliefs of the nineteenth century, which decried African culture as "primitive" and "degraded."\textsuperscript{145} Moreover, some recent interpretations have looked at these materials without a sensitivity to the actual historical context of such works.\textsuperscript{146}

Meanwhile, most practitioner manuals and accounts are of too recent a vintage to be of much use to investigations of capoeira before the twentieth century. Additionally, the bulk of these were written well after the modernization of ca-

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{143} Capoeira practitioners also tend to believe that this was done to repress the history of slavery, but this is complicated by the fact that Barbosa was in fact a lifelong abolitionist. The best evidence indicates that the government merely wished to make it more difficult for ex-slave owners to demand compensation for their loss of labor. See, for example, the web essay "Rui Barbosa: Justiça e Liberdade." \textit{Projeto Memória.} 2004. 20 Apr 2006 <http://www.projetomemoria.art.br/RuiBarbosa/glossario/queima-papeis.html>.

\textsuperscript{144} Examined in more detail by Assunção (2005, 76).

\textsuperscript{145} See, for example, the work of Georges Cuvier (1812) and Arthur Joseph de Gobineau (1855).

\textsuperscript{146} Assunção (2005, 7) notes a particularly egregious example of this from Robert Farris Thompson.
\end{flushleft}
poêira had begun, by practitioners who actively took part in the modernization process themselves. The words and philosophies of pre-modernization capoeira have therefore been represented rather piecemeal, by a few manuscripts and collections of quotations that have been compiled (and sometimes heavily edited) by later scholars such as Abreu and Decânio.

Assessing oral history

To better hear the voices that have been “silenced” by this lacuna, scholars have tried to turn to the oral tradition of the form. Oral history is thought to tell a different kind of truth than that of written history, intended to root present-day communities to the past. As such, oral history is not necessarily meant to provide the same kind of “reliable” knowledge required by traditional historiography. Also, as Assunção and others have pointed out, it is often difficult to differentiate the “authentic” oral history internal to the form, and the influence of scholars and theorists projected back onto the tradition itself.

This frustrating state of affairs has tempted many—including a number of well-intentioned scholars and practitioners—to make unsubstantiated claims and even fabricate non-existent evidence, as pointed out by Assunção.


148. Occasionally, the way Mestre Caboquinho frames a particular historical issue appears to reflect the influence of one of my own questions. For example, in recent months, after several discussions on the matter, he has begun to emphasize the term “capoeira contemporânea” over “capoeira regional” when discussing modernized capoeira. It is difficult to say, however, whether this is the direct result of our conversations, or his own formulation.

149 See, for example Assunção (2005, 5–9).
Informed speculation

Others, such as historian Joseph C. Miller, have pointed to the positive use of informed, speculative inquiry. Miller, who writes on issues in African and Brazilian history, has already applied this approach to consider how Africans might have retained, reinvented, and restored their identities under the conditions of Brazilian slavery. While he admits that this can be a “dangerously conjectural” approach that might offend some “methodological purists,” he also argues, as I have already shown, that current methodologies tend to project the assumptions of present-day academics, as well as those of the slave holders themselves, back onto the past.¹⁵⁰ For example, he finds it problematic that current discussions are “too often in polarized terms of ‘survivals’ of African culture(s) against ‘creolization,’” outdated terms that have tended to objectify African cultures in terms of “ethnicity” rather than considering a more complex picture that allows scholars to hear how the reported actions of slaves might have “expressed other meanings of their own, meanings more autonomous and more African than merely reactions to, adaptations of, or assimilations to the norms of their masters.”¹⁵¹

My own research has also made use of this kind of speculation, drawing inspiration from some of Miller’s own conclusions, as well as my own training in capoeira angola to suggest how Africans and their descendants may have used something like capoeira to keep their culture intact. In this regard, I also believe that it is possible to carefully apply this kind of speculative approach to one of the most neglected “primary sources” of capoeira history: its movements.


¹⁵¹ Miller (2004, 82).
The neglected source: movement

As I have already noted, movement has been seriously neglected by most scholars of capoeira history. This lack of consideration is partially a consequence of movement's status as "immaterial" culture, which, like oral history, makes it unreliable from an epistemic point of view. However, it also reflects a long standing lack of theoretical interest in the body, a lacuna that in recent years has finally been addressed by scholars in dance and the social sciences.152

Yet scholars outside of the field of dance still tend not to consider movement as a possible source of "history," and usually fail to familiarize themselves with the tools available to movement scholars, including Laban Movement Analysis, Labanotation, Motif Description, Benesh Movement Notation, and digital technologies such as motion capture.

Of course, there are very real dangers in projecting current iterations of the form into the past. As suggested in my historical outline, historical questions about present-day or recent capoeira practice obviously cannot be answered solely by examining present-day African forms. Among the many reasons for this is the fact that too much has changed—apparently. For example, in the few historical descriptions of capoeira exist before the early twentieth century, none correspond exactly to the form as it is practiced today. As I hinted in the introduction, even many accounts from the twentieth century diverge from each other.

This certainly presents problems for those wanting to establish a clear link to the current practice of the form, while on the other hand it gives self-conscious

modernizers the justification to claim, as many have done, that capoeira must “evolve” to survive.153

Indeed, this is a more subtle and complex issue than most historians and practitioners want to admit. But to echo Miller’s point again, most scholars have either tried to emphasize historiographies of survivals/continuities (Kubik, Desch-Obi, Dawson) or creolization/hybridization (N. Capoeira, Almeida, Assunção) rather than a broader view that considers both. Furthermore, there is a general skepticism that capoeira angola has any real connection to the capoeira before 1900, even though almost no scholar—with the notable exception of J. Lowell Lewis, and to some extent, Greg Downey—has undertaken any kind of systematic examination of capoeira movements. Most have been content to simply list the names of movements, or their taxonomies, while practitioner accounts and manuals usually present them in the form of practical “exercises” for learning.

Learning to listen

Still, a scholarly examination of my experiences in capoeira angola in the twenty-first century does not guarantee a verifiable link to the past. As my opening comparison makes clear, there are currents of continuity as well as change in capoeira, and the lack of information about previous periods of capoeira practice make it difficult to offer any reliable conclusions about capoeira movements through history. But in the end, I am primarily interested in accounting for the centuries of history claimed by Mestre Caboquinho and many other practitioners of capoeira, often represented by the arbitrary figure of “500 years,” presumably re-
ferring to the date of Brazil’s discovery, 1500. Instead, I merely hope to suggest other ways to “hear” such claims.

Here I will cite the influence of a particular essay by Brenda Farnell, the esteemed anthropologist of movement at the University of Illinois. In “It Goes Without Saying—But Not Always,”154 Farnell points to the limitations of observational or interpretive models in the analysis of movement performance. Drawing from her own “personal ethnography” and a particular epiphany while observing dances in Nigeria, she realized that

*I had no way at all of knowing what they thought they were doing* [italics in original]. In other words, I was busy interpreting and making judgments about the meanings of their body movements and their uses of the performance space entirely according to my own language and culture.155

Later, she describes her work documenting and analyzing Plains Indian Sign Language, and how her classification systems did not always correspond to those of her consultants. In learning to listen more deeply to her consultants, she made important breakthroughs that “no amount of careful observation or experience...could have revealed...”156

In 2005, I suddenly became very conscious of the fact that in my three-odd years of researching and training, I had never asked a very simple question: what does Mestre Caboquinho think about when he plays capoeira? I soon realized I had not really been listening to his teachings. Especially in the case of capoeira his-

---


156. Farnell (1999, 155).
tory, I realized that I had often just asked him questions based on the work of other authors, throwing him my "theory of the week." Meanwhile, many of the answers I sought were already there, not only in the Mestre's long lectures to me and his students, but in his own game.

Among the many things that became clearer to me was the fact that his only intention is to reproduce the capoeira of his youth—a capoeira with legitimate links to decades of history—to his North American students, exactly as it is done in Bahia.

I also began to understand that in doing this, the Mestre is not merely trying to reproduce *capoeira angola* in his students for its own sake. Similarly, I also realized that most of the Mestre's teachings—even those regarding history—speak with a greater concern for the game as it is played today, rather than with the past. While *capoeira angola* is certainly the result of history, and is maintained by self-consciously promoting itself as a "tradition" with links to a fabled past, it is the present iteration of the game, now, that is of the utmost value. This suggests that capoeira is perhaps not meant to answer to needs of verifiable, objective history, but rather its own needs, within the game.
SECTION 2

TRADITION AND BODILY PRACTICE
—PART 1—

TRADITION

The traditions of *capoeira angola*

The traditions of *capoeira angola* are expressed within the context of the capoeira circle, capoeira play, its movements, music, various subroutines, and protocols for entering and exiting the game. These have already been described in my account of a *roda* under Mestre Caboquinho, and another witnessed by Landes, and include a opening musical incantation, the crouching of two players to enter the game, certain types of movements and ways to cope with violence, running commentaries by the music, and a peaceful end to the game. According to many practitioners of the form, such traditions are very old, linking at least to the early twentieth century, and arguably centuries earlier, to the first arrival of Africans in Brazil.

Whatever the historical validity of these claims, these traditions do remain quite consistent throughout the *capoeira angola* community today. For example, all the rituals and protocols described in both accounts would be widely if not almost universally recognized by all *capoeira angola* adepts. Yet little work has been done to explain how these traditions have historically been passed down.
The transmission of capoeira before standardization

Information about the passage of capoeira before its academization in the 1930s remains rather scarce. Soares and Assunção have described some of the rites and rituals of nineteenth-century capoeira in Rio de Janeiro, including some information on the size of capoeira gangs (maltas) and their organization. However, there is very little information about how the form was passed down in those organizations. In Bahia, there is even less to go on, because not much is known about capoeira there before the early 1900s. Still, there are a few examples from oral history and anecdote that may help illuminate this period.

Mestre João Pequeno, perhaps the oldest living teacher of capoeira angola, and others have described how in the “classic” period of Bahian capoeira (c. 1900–1950), capoeira was initially learned mostly by close observation, or by getting mixed into the context of capoeira culture. M João Pequeno himself claims that what brought him to capoeira was “the desire to be a valentão” (rough guy). There are also indications that those who really wanted to learn the secrets of the game had to be taken in by an older player or teacher, as in the case of the young Mestre Pastinha, whose teacher Benedito taught the frail youth how to use capoeira to protect himself.

But the process of finding a teacher could also be an arduous task. According to a scenario painted by Mestre Marrom (José Venceslau Batista Brito), it was not always easy to find out where an older mestre might live, or whether he was

157. I have also heard aspects of this story repeated by M Caboquinho, M Acordeon, and others.
159. M Marrom is a capoeira teacher from the neighborhood of Brutas, Salvador. The following anecdote is from a discussion at a capoeira angola workshop hosted by M Caboquinho, Ann Arbor, MI, Nov 2005.
even a *capoeira* at all. The teacher might deny he knew capoeira, and only after persistent visits would show a single movement.

As described in the history, capoeira in Bahia was harshly—albeit inconsistently—repressed during prohibition. It therefore remained quite unsavory by reputation, even years after its decriminalization. This fact, and the persistent disdain for African-based culture, meant that there were good reasons to hide the fact that one was a *capoeira* until relatively recently.

M João Pequeno describes the context before his training began soon after his arrival in Salvador in the 1940s:

> No tempo da Capoeira proibida, quando entrei na academia de Pastinha não era proibida, era reprimida como até hoje continua sendo, ela era ensinada nos fundos de quintais ou nas salas dos mestres de Capoeira, com as portas fechadas.

In the time capoeira was prohibited—when I entered the academy of M Pastinha it was not prohibited, it was repressed just as it continues to be today—it was taught in the back yards or in the classrooms of capoeira *mestres*, with doors closed.\(^{160}\)

Mestre Caboquinho also once described his first image of capoeira, which, although of more recent vintage (c. 1970) evokes something of the mystery and wonder that might have characterized this older style of teaching. The Mestre relates how his father took him to a local training studio where capoeira was taught. Looking under the door, the young boy could only see the lower half of two men doing the mysterious movements of capoeira.

---

Of course, capoeira training and circles were often not hidden at all. As has already been noted, *rodas de capoeira* occurred in public for various occasions throughout Bahia in the early twentieth century, and were later performed for tourists in the years after legalization, especially on the ramp of the Mercado Modelo, where modernized capoeira groups still perform to this day. From what I have gathered, training was not much different. It could be conducted informally in open-air huts, or *barracões*, that dotted the Bay of All Saints region. Mestre Pastinha’s own recollection\(^{161}\) of teaching capoeira to his fellow students in a Naval academy for youths in the early 1900s also provides some idea of the diverse settings in which capoeira training might have taken place. All indications, however, point to the fact that with a few exceptions like the Naval academy, most teachers only taught a handful of students at a time.

The modernization and standardization of capoeira pedagogy

Most scholars and practitioners credit Mestre Bimba as the first to move towards standardization in a systematic way. He is also said to have been the first to create standardized sequences of movement, but it is not known for certain if he invented the idea, or whether he merely streamlined the more informal pedagogical process suggested above.\(^{162}\)

Moreover, as Assunção and others have outlined, the development of Mestre Bimba’s system of *capoeira regional* did not occur all at once. It developed gradually over course of the 1920s to the 1950s, and was influenced by a few of his

---

161. As noted by Assunção (2005, 153).

162. Indeed, it seems that Aníbal Burlamaqui came up with ideas quite similar to those of M Bimba as early as 1928, in Rio de Janeiro. It remains uncertain if this was any influence on M Bimba up in Salvador. See Assunção (2005, 17).
better-educated students such as José Cisnando Lima in the 30s and 40s, Angelo Decânio in the 40s and 50s, and Jair Moura in the 50s and 60s.

**Nona Lição**

**Rasteira**

Comece gingando Caim-
ido para trás, apoie-se no
solo com as mãos e procure
derrubar o adversário, ar-
rostando-o violentamente
com a perna bem estirada
(fig. 9A) e os pés como na
fig. 9B.

A *rasteira* pode ser dada
em qualquer ocasião (*De-
fera Pessoal*). Para se de-
fender da *rasteira*, seu ad-
versário aplica a *saída-de-
aí* (Fig. 9D).

**FIG. 12 • THE NINTH LESSON OF MESTRE BIMBA: TAKEDOWN**

From handbook to *Curso de Capoeira Regional*, c. 1960
(From collection of ABCA)

However it developed, it seems to have been largely designed as a simplifica-
tion of a more diverse practice, centered upon eight partnered sequences. A few
movements were also apparently added, such as the hand strikes known as the *tele*-

103
fone and the godeme. Another set of movements, the cintura desprezada ("depreciated waist") consist of choreographed throws similar to those in judo. Still, on balance, capoeira regional reduced the number and variety of movements of capoeira. This does not mean, however, that capoeira regional became merely a skeletal version of the older vadiação. It obviously became a powerful force in its own right, used as a devastating fighting form in tournament matches all over Brazil, and eventually spreading throughout the country through the students of the Mestre.

Mestre Pastinha: the pedagogy of capoeira angola

Conventional wisdom says that M Pastinha was responsible for the equivalent systematization of capoeira angola. While this is an oversimplification, it is certainly true that M Pastinha brought together many of the "loose ends" of the practice under his influence. He was also probably among the first to introduce more "Western" pedagogical models such as linked sequences of movement to capoeira angola.

Even so, M Boca Rica, who began training with M Pastinha in the early 1950s, has indicated that M Pastinha's teaching style was quite informal. At least in the case of longtime students, M Pastinha gave minimal direction and correction. M Boca Rica describes a typical class as consisting of the Mestre more or less sitting on the other side of the room, disconnectedly calling out simple sequences, and offering little correction. I believe that the current teaching models used in capoeira angola are...

163. According to present-day traditions, capoeira angola was said to have eschewed the use of hands in the game.
poeira angola are a compromise between the use of set movement sequences and the informal spirit of secretive, back room instruction. This is echoed in N. Capoeira’s summary of a comment by M João Pequeno, one of M Pastinha’s best-known students and teachers, who says that has found “an intermediary method between the ‘traditional method’ and the ‘mass method’ of modern times.” Ap-propriately, I now take a look at the pedagogical approaches of M João Pequeno and his younger counterpart, M João Grande.

FIG. 13 - MESTRE JOÃO PEQUENO DE PASTINHA
Holding the berimbau gunga, c. 1980s
(Photograph from the collection of M João Grande)

Mestre João Pequeno

M João Pequeno de Pastinha (b. João Pereira dos Santos, 1917) was originally from Arací, Bahia, a small town north of Salvador. He moved to Salvador sometime in the 1930s or early 40s and began playing capoeira with M Barboso. By the 1950s, he was a mainstay at M Pastinha’s, earning the nickname of Cobra Mansa (“relaxed snake”) and quickly rising to the rank of assistant teacher, or contra-mestre. In this role, he is said to have taught most of the well-known angoleiros from M Pastinha’s school, including M João Grande, M Curió, and M Moraes. After the decline of M Pastinha’s center, M João Pequeno eventually opened his own academy under a nearly identical name, the Centro Esporitivo de Capoeira Angola/Academia de João Pequeno de Pastinha, in 1982.

Although the Mestre no longer actively teaches, I have experienced his pedagogical “system” through younger teachers such as M Barba Branca, M Jogo de Dentro, Professora Ritinha, and Professor Aranha, each of whom was present at the 1982 opening. I have also visited the Mestre’s academy at the Forte do Santo Antônio (and at its temporary home at the Forte do Barbalho) in Salvador a number of times.

What becomes immediately apparent is that M João Pequeno’s approach is much like the playing style of the Mestre himself: spare, economical, and clean. Classes are based on the perfection of a small set of capoeira movements, repeated and recombined in different ways. According to the Mestre, his system is designed to prepare students to play well in the roda in about three months.166 He counsels, however, that

...capoeira se aprende com o amadurecimento, cada dia que passa a gente aprende mais. O mestre Pastinha dizia sempre: “ainda estou aprendendo Capoeira” e eu continuo falando que com o aluno mais duro que chega na academia para aprender Capoeira com este eu aprendo Capoeira.

...capoeira is learned with maturity, every day that passes one learns more. M Pastinha always used to say: “I am still learning capoeira” and I continue saying that with the greenest student who arrives in the academy to learn capoeira, I will learn something about capoeira with him.167

Warm-up exercises are conducted by walking or jogging in a counterclockwise circle, with the teacher in the center. While the students are moving, the teacher may show an attack, asking all the students to respond with the correct defense. After the warm-up, basic capoeira movements are performed by facing the “front” and mirroring or copying the teacher. At times, the teacher will partner students together to perform simple call and response sequences.

The most complex exercise consists of the teacher calling out a longer sequence of movements for students to perform. While each student performs the requested sequence, the teacher responds with the correct “answers.” For example, the teacher may call for a particular dodge (negativa) in response to a kick, followed by a return attack, answered by an additional dodge. With the progression of class, the teacher may call out additional movements before the student is finished with the first sequence. This can develop to an elaborate series of movements, performed back and forth between teacher and student but always determined by the teacher. This exercise is designed to emphasize call and response reflexes that are useful in the game. It also effectively teaches a student how to play

capoeira and respond correctly in the roda. At this stage in training, however, students are not making any decisions, only learning the correct, "practical" responses of the game. Only after the aforementioned three months of training do students begin to improvise on their own.

The end of class often features preparations for acrobatic movements, including a back "walkover" (salto mortal) and walking handstand (bananeira), assisted by the teacher or by fellow students. The back "walkover" is performed with the teacher or a student sitting sideways on all fours, while a row of students throw their bodies into handstands, and then fall over the sitting person, rolling backs and landing on the other side. The walking handstand consists of going into a handstand and having the teacher or a fellow student secure the hips, in order to allow the student to begin to "walk" on the hands. In addition to exercises such as these, various strengthening exercises are also performed throughout the class.

The structure and content of these classes are quite consistent. One slight variation was a movement taught by Professora Ritinha, called the aú de Santo Amaro ("cartwheel from Santo Amaro"), a modified cartwheel that she admitted was of her own invention. Even so, she expressed great pride at her strict adherence to the teachings of her mestre, and complained bitterly about the lack of seriousness and respect among his current students. In the academy itself, Professor Aranha leads arduous classes that are often over three hours in length.

The emphasis on playing capoeira is also apparent by the number of public rodas performed at the academy every week. Whereas most academies in Bahia only host a single roda every week, at M João Pequeno's academy there are fully four rodas a week: Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. These rodas are
long affairs that may last from two to four hours. Until recently, one could always find the elder mestre slumped in his chair at the edge of the capoeira orchestra, holding only a short stick, content to observe the games, occasionally pointing out some detail or stopping players from bringing violence into his “house.” The mestre would end the games with the songs “Eu já vou, beleza” (“I’m leaving, my beauty”) and “Adeus, adeus” (“Farewell, farewell”), and give a short speech of gratitude to the audience, spoken into the gourd of his berimbau gunga.

![Mestre João Grande](image)

**FIG. 14 - MESTRE JOÃO GRANDE**
Fashioning a berimbau, New York City, 2002
(Photo by the author)

Mestre João Grande

M João Grande (b. Joao Oliveira dos Santos, 1933), the second of M Pastinha’s best-known students, began capoeira somewhat late in life. Having been born in the village of Itagi in the south of Bahia, he made his way to Salvador by the 1950s. Already in his 20s, he began training with M João Pequeno under the aus-
pices of M Pastinha. He also trained with others who visited M Pastinha's school. Throughout the 1960s, he was often described as one of the best capoeiristas in all of Bahia.

After the lean years for capoeira angola in the 1970s, it was only in the late 1980s that M João Grande began to teach. In the early 1990s, he moved to New York City to open an academy, where he has steadily gained in stature, even gaining an honorary doctorate from Upsala College in New Jersey in 1995. Today, he is considered the most respected angoleiro living outside of Bahia.

My experience with the Mestre has included week-long visits to his New York academy in 2002 and 2003, and numerous other one-day visits.

It is significant to note that M João Grande's approach is quite different to that of his teacher, M João Pequeno, although the movement "set" is similar. Training is conducted primarily by means of partner line exercises that are more often seen in "contemporary" capoeira. This is not to suggest that he has absorbed any influence from the modernized style, but merely that there are similarities.

The average class begins without a warm-up, in the belief that capoeira should be used as the warmup. All the students gather on one side of the long room. The Mestre demonstrates or calls out a sequence he would like to see performed, which is then translated by a senior student and transmitted to the rest of the class (the Mestre does not speak English).
Two partners then begin on one side of the room, facing each other, and perform the sequence repeatedly in one direction, all the way to the other side of the room. The first set of partners is almost immediately followed by a second set of partners, and so on. Once all the partners have performed the sequence, they return going the opposite direction, sometimes adding another movement as called out by the Mestre.

As shown in Fig. ##, the Mestre usually observes from the opposite side of the room. The pattern of the sequence alternates from the Active (A) person to the Passive (P) responder, and reverses.

After a number of these exercises, which may consist of as many as four to five linked movements, the movement portion of the class sometimes ends with a demonstration of a truque, often performed in a small circle. M João Grande seems to be an endless well of craft and guile, for even in my short time there, I saw senior students shake their heads with disbelief at the number of tricks available to him. Indeed, trickery appears to be very much in line with his own style of play. The Mestre did not always explain the trick fully, and appeared to revel in

---

168. These diagrams are called “floor plans” in Labanotation. The symbols, called “pins,” represent individual performers. The dot represents the performer’s position, and the line extending from the dot indicates the direction the performer is facing. To readers already familiar with floor plans, note that no indication of “front” is necessary.
leaving his students with unanswered questions. As a result, the students of M João Grande tend to use more tricks in the roda, just like their teacher.

M João Grande emphasizes capoeira play by holding not only a long roda every Sunday, but adding two “training” rodas on Wednesdays and Fridays. These “training” rodas are virtually identical to a full roda, except that the Mestre may stop to give specific guidance and correction.

The diversity of “tradition”

My descriptions of the pedagogy of two students of M Pastinha suggest that M João Pequeno represents the streamlined side of M Pastinha’s teachings, with a reduced system that does not emphasize trickery, but leaves individual aspects to the individual student. Accordingly, from my observations and personal experience, each student will respond in an individual manner.

In contrast, M João Grande’s teachings are less systematized. On the one hand, his partnering “drills” emphasize horizontal, progressive movement, favoring one side of the body for an entire sequence of movements. In my experience, I found this horizontality and repetition immensely helpful in learning the movements and honing the timing of particular attacks and responses. On the other hand, these exercises have proven to be of limited use in the actual game, because they overemphasize the performance of each movement on only one side of the body, in one linear direction, which is not appropriate to the multidimensional nature of the roda itself.
Mestre Curió

M Curió (b. Jaime Martins dos Santos, 1939)\textsuperscript{169} began playing capoeira in the 1950s under various teachers, and spent time in the academy of M Pastinha in the 1960s. While he promotes his link to M Pastinha above all others, even down to following M Pastinha’s school colors of yellow and black, his style of capoeira is very much his own. Likewise, his academy, called Escola de Capoeira Angola Irmões Gêmeos (School of Capoeira Angola Twin Brothers), is imbued with a darkness and mystery that is carefully nurtured by the Mestre and his students, by means of strict rules against documentation of any kind and the apparently sacred

\textsuperscript{169} Not to be confused with an older M Curió who was active in the 1940s–50s.
nature of the space. Among the various academies I have visited in Bahia, the academy of Mestre Curió has been the most unique in this regard.

A brief examination of the teachings of M Curió may thus help define the boundaries of what may be considered *capoeira angola*. This discussion will also say something about the relevance of M Curió to M Caboquinho’s group, T.A.B.C.A.T. I must also note that M Curió is among the most secretive of all *angoleiros* active today, so I will try to limit myself to the basic features of some of his classroom exercises and personal style, rather than “reveal” anything about his actual movement system.

![Diagram of M Curió Circle Exercise]

**FIG. 17 • M CURIÓ CIRCLE EXERCISE**

M Curió (or more frequently in recent years, his wife M Jararaca) begins classes by conducting his students through a series of basic calisthenic exercises in a counterclockwise circle (See Fig. 17). Some of these exercises resemble those of football soccer, including running while kicking the heels backwards, or lifting the knees into the air. During this circle, students may also be asked to perform jumps, kicks, run backwards, sideways, or descend to the floor.

Once on the floor, low capoeira movements are often introduced, including walking on all fours in a downward dog-like position in both directions, or in a
crablike position (known as *queda de quatre* or "fall of four"), with belly turned to the ceiling and the hips hovering close to the ground.

![Diagram](image)

**FIG. 18 - M CURIÓ CIRCLE EXERCISE**

The Mestre then asks the circle of students to face center, and do a number of other exercises (see Fig. 18), including pushups, handstands, headstands, low jumps, and low kicks. Basic attacks and responses may also be performed, sometimes continuing with the counterclockwise movement in a circle. Depending on the number of students, these exercises also train students not to interfere or accidentally hit other students. This sometimes proves incredibly difficult to manage, but the Mestre simply reminds his students that a *capoeirista* must always be awake and aware.

![Diagram](image)

**FIG. 19 - M CURIÓ FLOOR EXERCISE**
The circle then breaks up, and students gather on one side of the room. This second part of class consists of “drills” across the floor (see Fig. 19). The instructor demonstrates or calls out a sequence of capoeira movements that are then performed by two students. The two students do not face each other, but rather face the other side of the room, towards an imaginary opponent. The pair (often an intermediate and a beginner) then shows the sequence on both sides of the body, up to four times. Once all the students have performed the sequence, the pattern is repeated on the way back, often with new elements introduced by the Mestre. Corrections often take place in the middle of each student’s performance, with the Mestre sternly (and often hilariously) reminding students of the reasons why one’s movements must be clear and well executed: “The guy is trying to get you!” “What kind of kick is that?!?” “You’re going to get hit if you keep doing it like that!” This is an important aspect of M Curió’s personal style, constantly chastising his students until they understand what they are doing wrong and correct it.

M Curió is the only mestre I have trained with that uses this kind of “drill” exercise, which I have found tremendously useful. Unlike the one-sided exercises of M João Grande, these exercises appear more practical in the game, because students perform the sequence on each side of the body, towards (or occasionally away from) an imaginary opponent, in much the same way as in the game itself. It also allows the Mestre to keenly observe his students one pair at a time.

There is also a more “martial” aspect to M Curió’s teachings. Many of his movements emphasize actual aspects of self-defense. In the basic ginga movement, for example, the forearms are used in a manner unlike any other academy I have
visited. In the middle of the *ginga*, students are told to swivel the forearms up from the elbow to deflect an attack, such as an incoming headbutt. The space between the feet is also supposed to be very small, shoulder width or less.

Kicks and other movements are often performed within a close kinesphere, or small personal space, consistent with the idea of “closing the body” (common to much of *capoeira angola* training), a concept that is also translated into M Cabo-quinho’s teachings, as I shall note momentarily. Returning to the terminology of LMA, kicks are also demonstrated with a “snap”-like quality (known as “punch,” or demonstrating the effort combination of direct Space, strong Weight, and quick Time), consistent with martial arts such as *kung fu*. M Curió is also careful to point out how dangerous capoeira can be, and that one should know how to “close” one’s game because a *cara* (“bad guy”) will always intend to do harm.

Despite these dark and serious warnings about the consequences of opening one’s game, Mestre Curió forbids any kind of violence in his own *roda*. On one occasion in 2004, I took a rather violent *rasteira* (“trip”) myself, landing quite hard on one knee. The Mestre stopped the game soon thereafter, presumably to protect me from further harm. On another occasion, a student of M João Pequeno lost his control trying to give a *rasteira* on another student. The Mestre stopped the *roda* and asked the student to leave, but only after giving him a long sermon.

As I suggested earlier, M Curió also imbues his academy with a great deal of his personal spiritual energy. He begins his *roda* by circling the space with incense, and a number of his students perform gestures (probably from *candomblé*) on the floor before entering and exiting the space. At the end of classes and *rodas*, the Mestre also gives a specific kind of handshake/knee tap to his students. This energy
often expresses itself in "dark" ways, as the Mestre is well known for his mischief and self-aggrandizement, as well as for spreading rumors about others and deceiving tourists or interviewers. However, M Curió is also tremendously light-hearted at times, filling the room with his maniacal laughter and always welcoming observers and visitors into a *samba-de-roda*.

**Further implications**

So far, I have only examined the teachings of those who self-consciously claim to be followers of M Pastinha. Yet it must be clear by now that even with these three examples, it is difficult to maintain that *capoeira angola* tradition may be best defined by its strict adherence to specific lineages. This problematizes any attempt to create a "family tree" of capoeira, as Sylvia Robinson of FICA has already done.\(^{170}\) In reality, many students—including M Moraes, who rather self-consciously links himself to M João Grande—have changed affiliations, floated around, and had many teachers throughout their lives. Some, like M Caboquinho, have had several teachers and decided to remain loyal to one.

In light of all of this, it is better to think of *capoeira angola* "tradition" as something more provisional, serving the needs of the present. As such, although each teacher uses very different pedagogical approaches, the overall goal is the same: to play the game, within boundaries established (somewhat unconsciously) by the community of *capoeira angola* practitioners. Furthermore, these boundaries

\(^{170}\) This chart is prominently displayed at the FICA headquarters in Washington, D.C., and several academies in Bahia, despite numerous errors, including the listing of Mestre Caboquinho as a student of Mestre Curió, which is only half-true.
are assumed to exist for reasons that have something to do with five centuries of African repression in Brazil.

This also resonates with the overall nature of stylistic variation within *capoeira angola*, through which individual participants add their own voice to the tradition, while at the same time, the overall community is integral to defining what is "inside" and what is "outside" of *capoeira angola*. This idea is common to many movement and dance traditions, and more than any arcane rituals or supposed African antecedents, is what really defines *capoeira angola* tradition.
Mestre Caboquinho: background

Mestre Caboquinho grew up in the cidade baixa ("lower city") of Salvador, in the working-class bairro ("subdivision") of Massaranhã. There, he earned his nickname when his father, José Vicente Dantas, noticed how his son’s frenzied
samba dancing made him look like a little caboclo ("half-breed" or "indian spirit"), or caboquinho ("little half-breed" or "little indian spirit").\textsuperscript{171}

The young Caboquinho's first image of capoeira, around the age of ten, was looking under the doors of a nearby boxing studio and seeing only the feet and hands of the capoeiristas training there. As the Mestre recalls: "I would ask my father, 'what is that?' He would say, 'coate...and find out.'"\textsuperscript{172} By the age of twelve, his father began to teach him the secrets of capoeira angola at the same studio. After several years, however, his father refused to teach him any longer, citing an old saying that "um santo de casa não faz mesmo milagre" ("a household saint will produce no miracles").\textsuperscript{173} Before sending him off on his own, however, he granted the seventeen-year-old Caboquinho the title of mestre, in 1980.

The young Mestre Caboquinho continued training under with other teachers throughout the city. In the early 1980s, he spent a week at the famous academy of Mestre João Pequeno (João Pereira dos Santos) at the newly acquired Forte of Santo Antônio, until one of the students there attempted to bite him in the ear. He also trained for some time with Mestre Alfonsinho, the son of a civil policeman, until that school was closed. Later, he joined the academy of Mestre Curió (Jaime Martins dos Santos), one of Salvador's most temperamental capoeiristas, where he was granted the title of contra-mestre ("half" or "assistant" master teacher) in the late 1980s.

\textsuperscript{171} Although definitions vary, a caboclo is often regarded as someone of mixed African and indigenous ancestry. The caboclos are also ancient indigenous spirits that are praised in many of the Afro-Brazilian religions of Northeast Brazil.


\textsuperscript{173} I.e., one must leave the nest in order to do great things.
When not training or assisting other teachers, the Mestre spent his time roaming the sloping streets and back alleys of Salvador, learning the inner and under workings of Bahian life. He played street capoeira, became a devoted follower of candomblé, and performed in all types of folkloric dance shows to earn a meager living. Due to a chance encounter, he had the opportunity to perform as a capoeirista holding a razor blade between his toes in Tisuka Yamazaki’s remake of the 1960s film, Pagador de Promessas.

Move to the United States

In 1989, the 26-year-old Caboquinho finally traveled abroad, throughout North America and Europe as part of Franco Fontana’s famous folklore and dance show, Oba Oba. In 1993, he returned to the US with another group, Scala Miami, and was invited to stay to teach capoeira by audience members who passed him little notes. During his seven years in Miami, the Mestre taught capoeira while continuing to work in various folklore shows, including several performed alongside pop star Gloria Estefan.

Despite his successes, Caboquinho also encountered numerous difficulties with his adopted culture. During his first two months in the US, for example, he remained inside the dancers’ hotel to avoid facing the humiliation of not being able to speak English. As he began to learn the language, he still faced many misinterpretations and miscommunications. Even today, his English is heavily accented and

174. Mestre Caboquinho worked with M João Grande, M Cobra Mansa, and others during this time

175. Franco Fontana is an Italian Brazilophile who continues to direct the show today. In the season of 1988–89, Oba Oba was the 12th highest grossing road show in the US, earning some $4,765,324. See obaobashow.com, 13 July 2006 <http://www.obaobashow.com/>.
greatly imbued by its Bahian character. His difficulty with the bureaucracy of the United States led to other problems and misunderstandings. At one point, for example, he absent-mindedly threw away his hard-earned green card, not realizing its importance (luckily, it was recovered).

Even with his growing familiarity with the U.S., he began to see that, especially in a culture like that of southern Florida, capoeira could only serve the needs of staged entertainment or martial arts, and did not reflect the “reality” and beauty of Bahia in all its complexity. His visits to capoeira encounters and academies across the country only made him more pessimistic about the capoeira scene in the US. Many of those schools practiced what can be characterized as “contemporary” capoeira, which often claims to perform both modernized as well as traditional capoeira, even though most of its teachings were invented in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the 1960s and 70s. As such, the Mestre sees “contemporary” capoeira as “incomplete,” watered-down, aggressive, and completely lacking in fundamentos (“fundamentals”). Yet because this was the capoeira that arrived first in the US, Mestre Caboquinho has had to spend a great deal of time trying to convince people that Bahia—and traditional capoeira angola—still holds the keys.

By the later 1990s, the Mestre also spent time in Puerto Rico and Mexico City, where he was among the first to present capoeira angola. At the same time, he began to recognize the urgency of his job as an angoleiro: to preserve the traditions of capoeira angola as they were passed to him. In 1997, seventeen years after being sent away by his father, Mestre Caboquinho finally returned to his father’s little-known lineage of capoeira angola. By that time, the elder José Vicente Dantas had grown too old to teach, so he granted his then-34-year-old son official stew-
ardship over the Tribo Afro-Bahiana de Capoeira Angola Tradicional,\textsuperscript{176} or T.A.B.C.A.T., an academy that had originally been established by Mestre João Bodeiro of Serrinha, Brazil in the 1950s.

However, even with the boost provided by this revived heritage, the Mestre still found it difficult to hold onto students in Miami, as they were often overwhelmed by the Mestre’s insistence on following \textit{capoeira angola “100\%.”} Some of these students simply stopped training, while others moved to academies that promised them both “styles” of capoeira. Only a single student remained with him throughout his Miami years: Rachel Prymak, or “Biriba,” who was deservedly rewarded by being graduated to the level of \textit{contra-mestra} in the year 2000, the first woman to receive that title in \textit{capoeira angola}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
4647 Michigan Ave, Detroit, Michigan
(Photo by the author)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{176} Translated as “The Afro-Bahian Tribe of Traditional Capoeira Angola.”
Detroit

In the year 2001, with the encouragement of a new wife, the Michigan-born Roshani (née Deraniyagale) Dantas, Mestre Caboquinho made a move further north to the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan, where he began to teach at three locations: the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), Wayne State University, and Michigan State (East Lansing). In Ann Arbor, the Mestre set up shop at the William Monroe Trotter Multicultural Center, where he finally reached a wider base of students, from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, and faced very little competition from other styles of capoeira. Nevertheless, the transitory nature of university life meant that few students stayed long enough for the group to build momentum.

At Wayne State, meanwhile, conflicts eventually arose with a group of “contemporary” capoeira practitioners who insisted that they, too, taught “capoeira angola.” Questions were also raised by a few Afrocentrists who disliked the Mestre’s emphasis on the Bahian, not the African characteristics of capoeira angola. As a result of this ambience, the Mestre left Wayne State in disgust in early 2004. The group at Michigan State, meanwhile, has survived, but remained small.

By the middle of 2004, the Mestre opened the Centro T.A.B.C.A.T., a capoeira angola academy located on Michigan Ave, on the near west side of Detroit. This center was intended as a permanent space where the next generation of students could be secured in the traditions of his beloved art. Unfortunately, the location—a dilapidated, industrial neighborhood with little foot traffic—was less than ideal. The rent was also surprisingly prohibitive, so after hosting a few successful events over the course of two years, the Centro T.A.B.C.A.T. was reluctantly closed down.
Nevertheless, the defiant Mestre soon moved his classes to the Vanguard Community Center on Grand Ave north of Downtown, where he again attracted a wide range of students, this time primarily African-American. In this area, only blocks away from the original Motown studios and the Submerge techno music building, the Mestre plans to open another center in the fall of 2006. The Mestre sums up his determination thus:

"Today, I live in Detroit, Michigan, to protect Capoeira Angola, to make my tribe grow and to teach my roots. I will continue to teach Capoeira Angola with my heart and I will stop only when Deus [God] tells me."

Why Detroit?

The Motor City and its surroundings may seem an unlikely choice to plant the seeds of an old Afro-Bahian game like capoeira angola. However, the two cities share some commonalities. Both have endured a great deal of history and long periods of neglect. For example, Bahia was Brazil’s most important commercial and political center from its founding in the 1500s until the arrival of the Portuguese court in the early 1800s, after which it lost much of its wealth and power. Detroit, meanwhile, has seen its status go from a gleaming futuristic city in the 1950s to a decayed, abandoned husk in less than thirty years.

Ironically, it is partially because of this neglect that both cities have seen African energies flourish. Both are well known for their African musical heritage. De-

177. This quote, as well as several details in the preceding account, was been taken from an online autobiography of Mestre Caboquinho, available at [www.tabcatcolumbus.org](http://www.tabcatcolumbus.org), 13 July 2006. The remainder of this history was compiled from various conversations with the Mestre, ranging from 2002–2006.


126
troit is the home of blues, jazz, Motown, techno, and hip-hop; Bahia is the home of samba, samba-reggae, afroxe, and axé music. They have also been important focal points of black or Africanist resistance. Detroit has nurtured the Black Panthers, street artist Tyree Guyton, and the techno music collective Submerge (home of Underground Resistance); Bahia has nurtured slave revolts (such as that of the Malês in 1835), the secretive religion of candomblé, and the subversive art of capoeira. In another parallel, Detroit is also a city that is predominantly black, with some 81.6% of the city’s population claiming to be of African descent.\(^{179}\) Thus, Detroit is arguably an optimal city to host the deceptive and celebratory capoeira angola.

Maintaining the link to Bahia

Out of respect for the ways in which capoeira angola developed in Bahia, however, the Mestre insists on keeping the practice the same in Detroit as it is in its spiritual home. The Mestre believes this is the only way to transmit the fullness, beauty, and “reality” of capoeira angola to an entirely new audience of North American students, while keeping the mysteries, rituals, and traditions of the form intact. He also believes that his students are the future of capoeira, and that it is his job to help them unlock the keys of the form for themselves. So although capoeira angola is inextricably linked to Bahia, he insists on teaching it without regard to nationality, color, gender, religion, sexuality, size, or disposition. In the Mestre’s estimation, capoeira is meant to be “free,” available to everyone. By keeping it

---

\(^{179}\) U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census. Here I should note, however, that the demographics of Detroit’s suburbs are virtually the mirror opposite.
same as it is played in Bahia, the Mestre believes that each student will inevitably find their own way in the game.

The Mestre has also been very keen to take his students to Bahia, to give them an opportunity to test his teachings in their native context. In 2002, 2004, and 2006, the Mestre organized three two-week summer T.A.B.C.A.T. trips for this purpose, taking his students to various academies and historical sites throughout the region. He has also used these trips as an opportunity to graduate his students in the traditional manner, in the presence of a community of capoeira angola practitioners, thereby showing Bahians that he is doing things the “right” way in the U.S. Through all of this, he hopes to convey to his students what it means to uphold “the Afro-Bahian Tribe of Traditional Capoeira Angola,” and everything it represents. I now turn my attention to describe some of his basic classroom teachings.
Warmups

M Caboquinho’s classes show some evidence of his time with M Curió, especially noted in the use of circle warmups, as already described. Other exercises appear similar to those I have experienced in the schools associated with M Pastinha.

The overall approach to warming up is quite simple, and somewhat distinct from traditional warmups used in the world of academic dance, for example. In Mestre Caboquinho’s classes, most warmups are simply a means to get the body moving in basic ways, in order to prepare students for more detailed, complex sequences of capoeira movements. Almost no time is given to stretching, and most movements are very simple. Sometimes, the Mestre warms his students up by using Brazilian pop music (such as Olodum) to lead an informal, tongue-in-cheek Afro-Brazilian dance session. This not only serves to warm students up but also to introduce students to the basics of Afro-Brazilian social dance.

In 2004, the Mestre also introduced what he calls the sequência da pedra (“sequence of the rock”) which consists of approximately six basic calisthenic and strengthening exercises, starting with thirty jumping jacks, sixty knee lifts, thirty torso circles, thirty ankle touches, thirty three-touch torso twists, and two sets of ten pushups and situps. Mestre Caboquinho claims that this sequence was originated by the founder of T.A.B.C.A.T., Mestre João Bodeiro, and may date back some fifty years.

Labanotation: introduction

In order to depict some of the exercises in this warmup sequence, I will introduce Labanotation. Labanotation is a system of movement notation developed in
the middle of the twentieth century by the Austrian movement scholar Rudolf Laban (1879–1958) and his followers. Labanotation has become a very useful tool for movement scholars that is known for its versatility and flexibility. Written from the point of view of a practitioner, for example, I have been able to adapt some of the basics of Labanotation to suggest the internal motivation of individual movements.

I do not attempt a systematic depiction of capoeira movements, but merely point a way forward for future elaboration. Nor do I attempt to provide a detailed guide to reading Labanotation scores. Instead, I give readers some indication of how to decipher its basic features, while providing detailed descriptions of what is depicted, in the hopes of encouraging more Labanotation scholarship.

Basic features

Labanotation scores are read from the bottom up, from the point of view of the performer. The "staff" is the central feature, whose middle columns indicate feet and other supports. The outer columns of the staff are used to indicate partial weight, while columns outside the staff indicate the positions of non-supporting torso, arms, parts of arms, and head (far right). The lowest part of the score, separated from the rest of the staff by a double line, is called the "starting position." Movement begins after the double line. In these particular examples, I have indicated that each movement is to be repeated, as noted by the numbers near the lower left and upper right corners of the staff.
The exercises

In Fig. 23 (below), the performer begins by standing normally with the hands to the side, and begins by lifting the right knee. At the same time, the left hand reaches for, and touches, the right ankle. This is repeated in quick succession and resembles “running in place,” but with the additional detail of touching the opposite ankle with each lift of the leg.
In Fig. 24 (below), the performer spreads the legs to a rather wide position (but not the widest possible) and reaches down with the left arm to touch the right ankle, while the right arm reaches up to the ceiling. The performer maintains the torso in a low position and repeats the action with the right arm reaching towards the left ankle, and the left arm reaching up.

**FIG. 24** SEQUÊNCIA DA PEDRA, ANKLE TOUCH EXERCISE
In Fig 25 (below), the performer stands with the legs apart and reaches the arms up to lead the torso in a complete circle starting to right, back, left side, down toward the floor, and back up towards the side. The symbols just inside the staff indicate that the legs also contract during this exercise, especially when reaching back with the torso. This exercise is repeated 10–15 times and then performed on the left.

**FIG. 25 ⊗ SEQUÊNCIA DA PEDRA, TORSO CIRCLING**
In Fig. 26 (below) the performer stands wide again, and reaches down to touch the floor with both hands, once to the front, once between the legs, and once to the back, before lifting the entire torso and twisting it to the right. The performer then repeats the three touches and raises to twist to the left.

![Diagram](image)

**CAPoeira ANGOLA**
WARMUP SEQUENCE - FLOOR TOUCH/TWIST
MESTRE CABCOINHO/
TRINEL PUÇA PUÇA

**FIG. 26** SEQUENCIA DA PEDRA, THREE-TOUCH TWIST
None of these movements are actually used in the capoeira game, but each isolates specific muscle groups that are used frequently in play. The torso circles and the three-touch twist, for example, prepare the body for a more difficult movement called *molejo* ("soft").

**Sequences**

Most classes then proceed into short sequences of capoeira movement. Unlike those of M João Grande, they are not performed opposite a partner in a linear fashion, but rather alone, and oriented towards an imaginary partner/player. In the past, the Mestre has used chairs, stools, or wooden poles as "partners," but he has increasingly moved away from this practice. The following demonstrates the first section of a longer sequence.
FIG. 27  •  CUCORINHA-NEGATIVA-RABO DE ARRAIA-ROLÉ-CUCORINHA SIDE
In Fig. 27, the performer begins in a crouching position with the arms crossed in front of the torso, called cocorinha (untranslatable). The performer then places both hands on the floor to the right, while extending the left leg slightly in a dodge called the negativa (“negative”). The performer then raises the hips up and shifts weight primarily to the left leg, with the hands also supporting. The right leg is lifted towards the partner (P) and the performer uses the hands to “walk” and spin the entire body on the left leg. This is called rabo de arraia (“tail of the manta ray”). After approximately a 3/4 turn, the performer rotates the body along the longitudinal axis, places the right leg on the floor, and continues spinning the body around this axis (rolê para fora or “roll out”) to land again in the crouching opening position (cocorinha), but facing to the left of the original “front.”

Typically, Mestre Caboquinho presents one part of the sequence and has his students practice it on their own. Once a given period of time has elapsed, he either has his students partner and perform the sequence together, or calls for a training roda in which all the students circle and two selected students perform the sequence in the center of the circle. The following depicts the original sequence as the “question,” with one of many possible “answers” by the partner. In such exercises, the partner’s actions are not specified, and are semi-improvised. Ideally, the “question” sequence is tested with a number of different “answers.”

After determining that his students have understood the basic principles of the first sequence, and understands how to use it in concert with a partner, the Mestre often adds an element of increased difficulty, such as the molejo, which is often a response to a rabo de arraia kick (see Fig. 28, overleaf).
If time permits, the Mestre again repeats the training *roda*, keenly watching the two partners to see if the new material was understood. He rarely gives corrections to individuals, and especially tends to leave beginners on their own to encourage them to figure it out on their own. However, with more difficult movements such as the one just depicted, the Mestre may call attention to certain details or offer images to help.

At the end of class, the Mestre is also fond of introducing a *truque* ("trick") in which the expected "question/answer" format of capoeira play may be upended.
For example, in the sequence already given, he might transform the initial *negativa* dodge into a surprise attack of some kind. As ever in capoeira play, there is a careful balance between cooperation and disruption.

**Implications for capoeira play**

The Mestre's style of teaching presents students with many of the basic reflexes of game. Each sequence, while seemingly isolated, is actually meant to be linked into the larger framework of capoeira play. In fact, most sequences taught by the Mestre contain several smaller "questions" and "answers" that are meant for practical use in the game. His lack of correction ensures that their is a wide range of individual variation, but likewise his corrections are often based on reigning in those who deviate too far from the given movements, and risk going "outside" the game, towards violence.

Students have an opportunity to put their lessons to the test at the end of class, when the Mestre often gives his students "five minutes" to play open games in which students may "buy in" or "cut" into an existing game. This "five minute" *roda*, which often lasts some twenty or more minutes, is not to be confused with the full-on *roda* described in the introduction. It is primarily for the purposes of training.

**Levels of the game**

The Mestre has suggested that his is a "complete" system for learning and playing *capoeira angola*. In doing this, he frequently refers to the levels and speeds

139
of the game, identified by the terms *primeiro ponto* ("1st point"), *segundo ponto* ("2nd point") and more rarely *tercer ponto* ("3rd point").

This in some ways corresponds to the typical pattern of sequences taught in the class. The first sequence is often more suitable for 1st point, or the equivalent of "low gear," and consists of slower, more deliberate movement. In effect, when one plays at 1st point, one is asking for a game, not primarily attempting to "get" or trick the partner. The movements tend to appear more cooperative, and function in a clear "question/answer" format. In LMA terms, this type of game would tend towards sustained Time/bound Flow (also called the "mobile state"). Such a game is also often punctuated by moments of sudden Time and/or direct Space (also called the "awake state").

The addition to the first sequence is often meant to be worked at 2nd point, which is the equivalent of "middle (or sometimes "high") gear," which the Mestre has also categorized as a "hot" game. In this type of game, the players attempt to keep their movements as deliberate as 1st point, but are ready to speed up as soon as a more confrontational "question" is asked. Again, this speed need not be about "getting" or tricking the partner, but it is undoubtedly faster paced, and more challenging. Partners may actually trip or take each other down, as long as it is not done with violent intention. In LMA, attacks meant to "get" the partner in the game often translate to "punch/thrust" (combining direct Space, strong Weight, and sudden Time), and tend to be "spokelike," or emerging from the center of the

---

180. Maletic (2004, 34) describes this state as "changeable, more mobile, at times agitated."

body in a linear manner. Attacks meant to be more cooperative tend to be in light
Weight/sustained Time, and are shaped in an “arclike” manner.

These sequences can all be used for an accelerated 2nd point that could po-
tentially be used for 3rd point. 3rd point, rarely mentioned by the Mestre, is where
capoeira can be used with damaging force, for actual self-defense or to disable
someone else. In terms of what is considered “inside” the game and what is “out-
side” the game, 3rd point should almost never be used inside the roda.

Implications

It is interesting to note that the three levels described by Mestre Caboquinho
also correspond to categories of resistance in Afro-Brazilian history: 1st point ex-
emplifies the ways in which capoeira is used as a dance, with little chance or need
for aggression or physical harm; 2nd point exemplifies a more demonstrative, cele-
bratory, and perhaps subversive game; 3rd point uses capoeira for actual combat.

This suggests that capoeira angola, at least under Mestre Caboquinho, still
contains iterations of capoeira that strongly resonate with the various applications
of capoeira throughout history. It also appears to have done so while maintaining
an Afro-Bahian “reality” or model that owes little to other so-called martial arts.
—C O N C L U S I O N —

These tantalizing hints of capoeira’s inner workings are just the beginning. This study has merely suggested a few directions for further research, whether it be a more thorough analysis of its sources, its teachings, or its movements. Among the most important things I hope to accomplish in future research is to notate capoeira sequences (through Labanotation, video, or motion capture visualizations) to better examine how capoeira movements illustrate the “question” and “answer” nature of capoeira play, among other “secrets” of capoeira angola.

These so-called “secrets” are now available to anyone willing to train in the form and listen to what it has to offer, so the practice seems well-positioned for the future. However, it remains to be seen whether the forces of modernization will continue to erode the traditions of capoeira angola, making it more difficult to unlock its real mandinga. The work of practitioners such as Mestre Caboquinho, and other dedicated students of capoeira angola, is thus urgent and ongoing.

[Please consult www.tabcatcolumbus.org/jogodemandinga for updates on ongoing research on capoeira. If this link fails to upload, simply query “jogo de mandinga,” “capoeira,” and/or the author’s name in relevant search engines.]
— Glossary —

General terms

angoleiro : player of *capoeira angola*

candomblé : Afro-Brazilian religion of the *orixás*

capoeira angola : traditional Bahian capoeira

capoeira contemporânea ("contemporary capoeira") : stylized capoeira from recent decades; emphasizes acrobatics and fast games

capoeira regional ("capoeira of the region") : stylized capoeira of Mestre Bimba

capoeiragem : the art of capoeira

dogo ("game") : the game of capoeira

malandro : streetwise tough guy, smooth operator

malandragem : the art of the *malandro* lifestyle

mandinga : personal magic or sorcery in the game

roda ("wheel") : the capoeira circle

truque : "trick"

vadiação ("hanging out") : synonym for capoeira
Musical terms

angola : berimbau rhythm
agogô : double bell
atabaque : drum
batería ("battery") : capoeira orchestra
berimbau : instrument that leads roda
biriba : wood used to make many berimbau
caixixi : shaker
chula ("song") : linking songs
corrido ("fast") : songs for playing the game
gunga : bass berimbau
ladainha ("litany") : opening solo song
médio ("middle") : middle berimbau
palminha de mão ("palms of the hands") : clappers
pandeiro : Brazilian tambourine
pé do berimbau : "the foot of the berimbau"
pedra : rock for berimbau
quadra : four-phrase song similar to ladainha
reco-reco : noched scratcher
samba-de-roda : "samba in a circle"
samba reggae : Afro-Bahian drumming procession, popularized by Olodum
São Bento grande : berimbau rhythm
vaqueta : stick for berimbau
viola : highest-pitched berimbau
Movement terms

*aarmada* : backwards spinning kick
*aú* : cartwheel
*aú de cabeça* : cartwheel on the head
*bananeira* ("banana tree") : handstand/headstand
*cabeçada* : head butt
*caracol* ("snail") : small spinning/stepping movement on one hand
*chamada* ("calling") : three-step partner dance
*chapa* ("plate") : kick with sole of foot
*chapa de costas* ("plate of the back") : chapa to the back
*chibata* ("whip") : side kick with top of foot
*cocorinha* ("little coconut") : low squat on two feet
*corta capim* ("cut the grass") : similar to "coffee grinder" in breaking
*cutilha* ("slicing") : hand movement
*gancho* ("hook") : heel hook
*ginga* ("sway") : mobile stance of capoeira
*macaco* ("monkey") : back jump from cocorinha
*malícia* ("treachery") : back and forth sway with gestures; capoeira strategy of double-dealing
*mandinga* ("sorcery") : hand gestures
*martelo* ("hammer") : side kick
*meia lua de frente* ("half moon in front") : front arcing kick
*molejo* ("soft") : *queda de rins* that becomes rolê behind the body
negativa ("negative") : dodge

ponteira : kick with point of foot

preso ("trapped") : elbow lock under hip

ponte ("bridge") : back bend position

pulo : "jump"

queda de quatro ("fall of four") : escape back

queda de rins ("fall of kidneys") : fall similar to breaking "freeze"

queda de tres ("fall of three") : crouching escape

rabo de arraia ("manta ray tail") : low kick

rasteira ("sweep") : trip takedown

rolê ("roll") : low evasive movement

rolê pra fora ("roll out") : evasive movement away from partner

sapinho ("little frog") : hop in cocorinha

tesoura ("scissors") : backwards takedown position

vingativa ("vindictive") : takedown setup

volta do mundo ("turn of the earth") : walking in counterclockwise circle
—BIBLIOGRAPHY—

Primary sources in English


Primary sources in Portuguese


160
Secondary sources


Campbell, Dugald. *In the Heart of Bantuland: A Record of Twenty-Nine Years’ Pioneering in Central Africa Among the Bantu Peoples, With a Description of Their Habits, Customs, Secret Societies*. New York, NY: Negro UP, 1969.


Web sources


Movement studies


FIG. 29 ■ “CAPOEIRA IS STILL ANGOLA”

“for you who come from there
please pay attention,
my capoeira may
not be your taste but
she is real life!”

MESTRE CABOQUINHO
SALVE

Detroit, Michigan
(Photograph by author)