

10-1-2006

# Visiting the Past, Reclaiming the Present: The Africanisms of Capoeira Angola

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## Recommended Citation

Sosa, Juan Esteban, "Visiting the Past, Reclaiming the Present: The Africanisms of Capoeira Angola" (2006). *ISP Collection*. Paper 272.  
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# **Visiting the Past, Reclaiming the Present: The Africanisms of Capoeira Angola**



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***Fall 2006***

*Iê!*  
*Viva meu mestre,*  
*Viva meu mestre, camará!*  
*Iê!*  
*Que me ensinou*  
*Que me ensinou, camará!*

This research is dedicated to  
Mestre Boca do Rio and to  
Grupo de Capoeira Angola  
Zimba for allowing me to  
become part of the Brazilian  
Angola family.

***Obrigado Camarás!***

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## ***ABSTRACT***

A key puzzle for contemporary scholars is how capoeira originated but more importantly the way in which it has been transformed. Along these lines, this study focuses on what is most commonly referred to as the mother or the traditional form of capoeira, that is capoeira angola. This research will examine the africanisms of Capoeira Angola and the way in which they have been maintained throughout centuries of its existence. Accordingly, this study places great emphasis on reclaiming the roots and traditions of this art form that has been appropriated and incorporated into Brazilian commercial and mainstream culture. I conducted my field work in Salvador, BA with Grupo de Capoeira Angola Zimba led by Mestre Boca do Rio. The research findings reveal that the Africanisms of capoeira angola—orality, call and response, religiosity, spirituality, reverence to ancestors and the past—are evident in its movements, its structure, its music, instruments and songs. This research underscores the significance of the rituals and traditions of Capoeira Angola and highlights and exalts the African culture and influence that tend to otherwise be left in the shadows.

Key Words: capoeira angola, traditions, rituals, africanisms

## Introduction

Capoeira is a cultural genre widely known in Brazil, although there are wide differences of opinion as to exactly what it is. There are no doubts, however, as to where it comes from—Africa. When the enslaved African were imported as merchandize here to Brazil, they brought with them their culture, traditions, and rituals. Moreover, with this forced displacement, they faced challenges and subordination due to the less-than-human treatment they received. As Almeida (1986) put it:

In spite of the oppression, the Africans and their descendants developed an extraordinary cultural, social, and political universe parallel to the social system imposed on them, keeping alive many expressions of African culture, some of them traditionally preserved, others gradually assuming new forms. Perhaps Capoeira is one of these expressions or at least a consequence of this process (15).

Due to the above ideology, capoeira has gone through a long process of marginalization. It has been criminalized, after always being associated with the poor, the criminals, the bad. In other words, with blacks or afro-brazilians. As a result it has been thrust into the bottom rungs of society. Capoeira has taken on a lot of different meanings but it continues to be widely practiced, however, in Brazil, primarily among Afro-Brazilians, but no longer exclusively. As a result of capitalism and commercialization, it has also been taken up by some members of the middle and upper classes who take capoeira classes offered by fitness centers (Bira 1986; Oliveira 1997; Kraay 1998). It went from being taught in the most remote places, to being taught in academies in urban and major cities. Furthermore, a stylized version of capoeira (regional) has been developed for stage performance and has attracted many new adherents to the sport.

In many of the literature I came across, more efforts have been focused upon tracing the origins of the word capoeira than clarifying the jôgo itself. Much more emphasis is placed on the trivial significance and origins of the word and not on the existence, and the practice of the jôgo (Bira 1986; Oliveira 1997; Kraay 1998). Trying to break away from that trend, the focus of this

research is on capoeira angola which is considered to be the mother form of capoeira. It is characterized by deeply held traditions, slower sneakier movements played closer to the ground and with the players playing their games in closer proximity to each other and to the ground than in regional. The father of capoeira angola how we know it today is considered to be Mestre Pastinha. Today, most of the history and dissemination that is accessible of capoeira angola comes from Mestres in Pastinha's lineage, but this is not to say that he was the only one or that he was the originator. Many others helped in the preservation and propagation of capoeira angola. The angola style, while emphasizing the traditions and history of capoeira remains a contemporaneous art in the vibrant street scene of Salvador, Bahia. There is a diversity of styles and players, all of the traditional form, playing or performing in a great range of styles and testing each other in various schools, groups, and in the streets.

Capoeira angola is believed to have originated in southern region of Angola in the continent of Africa among the Macupe tribes. Almeida (1986) quotes Mair Moura when he describes the ritual: "zebra dance, the N'golo, which takes place during the *efundula*, the celebration of puberty of young girls, where they stop being *muficuernes*, or girls, and pass to the role of women, ready for marriage and childrearing. The boy who wins the N'golo is directed to choose a wife from among the new initiates, without paying the dowry. The n'golo is capoeira" (16). Most capoeiristas and historians are in agreement on most of the details of this account of capoeira's origins. The following ladainha (this music form will be explained later in this paper) illustrates once more the origins of capoeira Angola,

***CAPOEIRA É UMA ARTE***

Ie!

Capoeira é uma arte que o nego inventou  
Foi na briga de duas zebras  
Que o N'golo se criou  
Chegando aqui no brasil

***CAPOEIRA IS ART***

Ie!

Capoeira is an art that blacks created  
It was with the fight of two zebras  
That the N'golo was created  
Arriving upon Brazil



Capoeira se chamou  
Ginga e dança que era arte  
em arma se transformou  
para libertar o negro  
da senzala do senhor  
hoje aprendo essa cultura  
para me conscientizar  
agradeço ao pai ogum  
a força dos orixás , camará !

It was called capoeira  
Ginga and dace that were art  
in a weapon they turned  
to free the black  
from the senzala of the master  
today I learn that culture  
to become conscious  
I thank my father Ogum  
the strength of the orixás, camará!

At present, the rapid spread of capitalism throughout the world has caused a crisis and has devastated cultures, traditions, and values. Eduardo Oliveira (2003) addresses this issue in his work where he analyzes and emphasizes the importance of the African cosmology and their descendents in the constant struggle against the antagonisms of capitalism and modernity. One of the most significant contributions of Oliveira's work is that it strongly and emphatically asserts that Africa, African peoples and their descendents, *have* a history, a culture, and an identity of their own. On the same token, this is the kind of trend and train of thought that I want to engage in with capoeira; to dig deeper and bring out to light those elements and values that have been suppressed and belittled due to the current status quo of the country and humanity as a whole.

The institutionalization of capoeira has increased drastically over time. I have had direct experience with other art forms and have seen how their contact with the market, the commercialization, and mainstream culture caused them to lose many of their original characteristics. From my first encounters with capoeira (regional) in Fortaleza, I thought whether capoeira has become completely commodified and commercialized. This doubt drove me to want to focus on capoeira angola, which is known as the mother form of capoeira. In light of my suspicion, I want to find out what is that has been preserved from that capoeira that came from Africa, more specifically from Angola, where its name comes from. Capoeira has been on a process of adaptation to this rapidly changing society. Upon observing how capoeira's rituals and traditions were assimilated and transformed into a culture of commercialism, I realized the need

to study it in its own unique existing form. The text that follows testifies to this contemplation and attempts to explore the Africanisms of capoeira angola.

### **Personal/Professional Motives for Choice of Research Topic**

We are always on some kind of search: the search for meaning in life, the search for love, the search for identity, the search for happiness, and so forth. Life itself is about these searches and the dark winding road that can lead us astray as we look for meaning in our existence. A consistent theme in my life has been precisely my quest for identity against overwhelming odds. Struggling against a culture that devalues the immigrant's as well as the "other's" intellect has had a significant impact on my life. I was torn between my personal and academic interests from day one. Where does my heart lie? Where is my passion? This was the first decision I had to consider to choose an area of personal and academic interest about something that I am extremely passionate about. What would I like to take back with me? Am I looking for an opportunity to contribute to my field? How am I going to share this with other people? What do I want to get out from this research as a person? These are questions that really put me to think about the bigger picture and the significance of my research on a personal but also on a greater level. The questions that were in the back of my mind were at all times were: Should I research an area/topic just because it relates to my field of studies or because I genuinely want to learn about that something? Can I combine them and be happy with my decision? But I ended up thinking about how I can prioritize issues that are all of great significance to me and to academia. Then after much thinking, if I was struggling between my personal and academic interests, why couldn't I just combine them?

In this era of capitalism and modernity, capoeira angola stands out as a rhythm of resistance. I decided to research capoeira angola because I see it as a way for me to learn about

myself, about my Black identity, and to explore a history and a tradition that had been neglected yet reclaimed by many. This is something that would have a great importance in the context of Brazil, and more specifically in the context of Salvador, BA. And capoeira is also a practice, a way of life, that beyond this text, I can take with me and make it a part of my everyday life.

### **Importance of Research**

I think that the importance of my research is the one thing that I have to highlight. Emphasizing the roots, rituals, and traditions of Capoeira Angola and how that has become ingrained in many people's identities and lives, is an important act in and of itself. Capoeira Angola has become a lifestyle for many of its practitioners. Accordingly, working on trying to understand how the traditions and the original ways have been preserved helps strengthen the art itself. I think that showing my interest and passion for this topic can mean a lot to the people I worked with and learned from. The dissemination of capoeira Angola is also an important step in its maintenance. A capoeirista cannot just know how to play, a true capoeirista also studies, researches, so that can be prepared in all aspects for any occasion.

Due to the importance of written texts/records, I also translated my final work to share it with those that helped me put it together and made sense out of my proposal and my experience. My contribution will mostly be on a personal level to Grupo Zimba. In a way, I feel that my work can turn into a legacy and a documented history and analysis of what it is that these capoeiristas are struggling with and with what ends. My courses in History have provided me with the skills necessary to understand the importance of studying the past in order to fully understand the present and try to successfully effect change. In this way, I consider that my research can become a way for the rising and future generations to learn and appreciate the

traditions, rituals, spirituality, religiosity, and significance of Capoeira Angola in their lives, on a personal as well as on a historical level.

### **Location of Research**

My research took place in Salvador, BA. It could not have taken place elsewhere in Brazil. Salvador is commonly referred to as the spiritual home of capoeira and one of the first cities where capoeira became extremely ingrained in its culture. I trained with Grupo de Capoeira Angola Zimba led by Mestre Boca do Rio, from the lineage of Mestre Moraes, with their headquarters located in Pituaçu, a neighborhood southeast of Salvador, BA. With this group and in Salvador I was able to learn and respect capoeira angola in its traditional and natural habitat. I strongly believe that the context of the research directly influences the research development and implementation. The city of Salvador is considered to be the spiritual home of capoeira. Its history and its significance began here in this city and spread out to other destinations. That legacy is still alive. The feeling is so strong that in Salvador it appears as though people live, eat, and breathe capoeira angola.

### **Methodology of Research**

The approach I took was qualitative, based on ethnographic fieldwork. Because in ethnographic field research, the data comes from observing and interacting with people in everyday social settings, I took the role of a participant and observer. Such role consisted of training capoeira and making observations while being a participant. I was introduced to the group and Mestre Boca do Rio by Angela, a group member herself. I joined the group, I practically became a group member and participated in all the events the group planned. The basic questions that guided my observations were: how do capoeiristas explain what they do? How are new members (like myself) taught the values, rituals, and traditions of Capoeira

Angola? What do capoeiristas mean by any special word, movement, action they use/perform? I tried to answer these questions through conversations and observations with the members of the group as often as possible before, during, or after the training sessions or the rodas. I established quick relationships with the people in the group. The observations and my reflections were all recorded in my work journal which I kept updated after each event.

My original intentions were to interview three Mestres of Capoeira Angola in Salvador but I ended up conducting an in-depth, standardized, open-ended interview with Mestre Boca do Rio with whom I practiced for three weeks. I turned the focus of this research into to Grupo Zimba and Mestre Boca do Rio. This limitation was due to the very fact that capoeira has been exploited. In response, the Mestres, especially those that are well known, have engaged in protecting their work. For instance, when I attempted to interview Mestre Curió after attending his roda, he replied that “a gente pega a informação e leva pra lá e eu fico aqui igual” (people get the information and take it over there (USA) and I remain here the same). Mestres now are very careful and more defensive in regards to their work. Access to their words, their opinions, and their work is not easily granted. That in itself is revolutionary. This is indicative of the power of one voice. They are taking power in their hands and attempting to guard their knowledge so that it will no longer be exploited. I respected their wishes. As a result, my observations and interviews were limited to Grupo Zimba. I interviewed Mestre Boca do Rio and trained with him. All of observations are from my training sessions twice a week and from the rodas every Saturday night. The reason why I was able to gain rapport and an insider status was because I acted more as a group member, as a disciple, rather than as a researcher.

I also treated this research as academic research. Accordingly, it also draws from relevant research on capoeira angola and African culture in Brazil. My goal was to engage in the ongoing

dialogue with these established scholars and the rest of the academic as well as non-academic spheres. I used this stage of my research as a foundation for the framework and approach I will undertake in my research.

Furthermore, it would have been impossible to merely capture in words or through readings the essence of capoeira. It was due to this reason that I had to practice it because to understand and live capoeira requires sweat, mental discipline, pain, and attending rodas. It was crucial for my research to interact and coexist with the people and the group I was practicing with because by seeing and understanding things from their perspective, looking at the setting and situations through the eyes of the participants, I was able to benefit personally and in the process draw accurate conclusions.

### **Hypothesis of Research**

The origins of capoeira have been disputed for centuries. When and how did it originate? Did it arrive with enslaved Africans or Africans created it once they reached Brazil? Who were the first *capoeiristas*? These questions cannot be answered with certainty due to the lack of recorded written history that exists today. In addition to this enigma, in this era of heightened globalization and capitalism, everything—including culture—is being priced, commercialized, and commodified. This is the case with capoeira angola as well. Historically, “things African” have been openly and publicly devalued and belittled. Along these lines, capoeira angola’s origins and traditions are at stake. As Brazilian culture has evolved, so has the meaning, significance, and practice of capoeira. What no one ever disputes, however, is that capoeira is an African creation. The hypothesis herein presented is predicated on the assumption that capoeira angola contains elements of the African culture that have been preserved throughout its

existence. The question that the latter case raises and that I am interested in investigating is: which elements of the African culture have been preserved in today's capoeira angola?

To accomplish my research in the time given I attempted to explore specifically three elements of capoeira angola: structure, ritual, and myth. The questions I will be addressing in relation to these elements are: How is it that the structure of capoeira angola is indicative of its rituals and its traditions? What are the rituals of capoeira angola? What meanings arise from these rituals that are associated with the African culture? Which are the myths of capoeira angola? Where did they originate?

### **Summary Statement of Findings**

Through observations, interviews and through the practice of the art itself, I discovered that distinctive elements of the African culture—orality, call and response, religiosity, spirituality, reverence to ancestors and the past—are present in capoeira angola. These elements of the African culture have been preserved in the structure/form (the bateria and the roda), the songs, the rituals, and the movements of capoeira angola. Through capoeira, we cannot remake history, but we reenact African culture, rituals, and heritage. As the latter case implies, this art form allows its practitioners to recognize and understand that African art forms are indicative that body, mind, and spirit of a peoples are not separated. Moreover, it is important to understand and think of how it is the African peoples demonstrate an African world view through their bodies and rituals. This is very evident in capoeira angola. An African world view that encompasses an understanding of a powerful unifying life force, heritage and identity.

## *Content of Research*

I conducted my research with Grupo de Capoeira Angola Zimba in Pituacú, Salvador. My fieldwork started when I first visited the roda of Grupo Zimba on Saturday Nov. 11, 2006. This is when I first witnessed the ritual of the game. As I recorded the following observation in my field journal:

“There was a bench set up for the bateria which is composed of three berimbaus (gunga, medio, and chula) in that same order, two pandeiros, one atabaque, one agogo and a reco-reco. All lined up together, with the Mestre almost in the center and everyone else around in a circle sitting on the floor waiting for their turns to join the game, to play the instruments or just to observe the games. The gunga starts the rhythm and the rest of the bateria follows like an army follows its leader. Then the Mestre sings the ladainha, while the two capoeiristas are sitting at the foot of the berimbau, praying and calling their guides/saints/orixás for protection. They are also concentrating their attention, and their minds onto the jogo that is about to start. Once the jogo da capoeira starts, everyone’s attention in the circle is focused on the two players in the center as well as on responding to the calls of the songs of the Mestre berimbau.”

The instruments, as stated above, three berimbaus (gunga, medio, viola), two pandeiros, an atabaque, a reco-reco, and an agogo make up what is called the “bateria.” All these instruments give color and its uniqueness to the sound of capoeira and its songs. This structure, however, is unique to capoeira angola. It cannot be found in any other sport, martial arts or even in capoeira regional. There exists a hierarchy of the instruments, with the berimbaus in command.

I cannot continue talking about the bateria and instruments without explaining more in depth the function of the berimbau. The berimbau is a symbol of capoeira. The berimbau is a hauntingly beautiful instrument. It consists of a curved wooden bow strung with a single wire cord, and with a resonating gourd attached at the base. The gourd pressed against his belly, the player strikes the cord with a small stick (baqueta) while simultaneously varying the pitch by manipulating a small tone or coin (dobrão) near the base of the instrument. There is something deeply sad and mysterious about berimbau music. It is said to be an instrument of communication with the dead (Rego 1968). Moreover, the berimbau is the leader of the ritual of



capoeira angola, not only because it dictates the rhythm of the game but also because it functions as a means of communication between the one playing the game and that playing the instrument. “Esta função exercida pelo berimbau na capoeira remete à função dos tambores na cultura africana que se constitui como instrumento de comunicação com linguagem própria. Desse modo, saber ouvir o berimbau é estar em consonância com todo o contexto do jogo e um modo de evitar surpresas” (Lima, 69) <sup>[1]\*</sup>. This is a very important comparison that Lima is making here when she claims that the berimbau in capoeira angola has the same function drums have in Africa. Drums in African culture play a key role, they are at the heart of any ceremony, ritual, or dance. As a result, a capoeira without berimbau is dead.

The African influence is also very well present in the other instruments of capoeira. The use of atabaque in Afro-Brazilian culture is associated with candomblé—the Afro-Brazilian religion. This is the instrument through which the “divinidades africanas” (African deities) speak in the ceremonies and rituals of candomblé. It is their way of communicating with the people. The orixás only communicate through the atabaque. The next instrument is the pandeiro which according to Rego (1968) is “um dos instrumentos da liturgia nagô de Cuba, havendo até pandeiros específicos para orixás, como é o caso de Exu” (Rego, 80) <sup>[2]</sup>. On the other hand, the last instrument, the agogo, “é um instrumento musical de percussão de ferro, entrado no Brasil por via africana...sua maior atuação é nas cerimônias religiosas afro-brasileiras, sobretudo para se saudar os orixás” (Rego, 87-8) <sup>[3]</sup>. As Mestre Boca do Rio explained to me the instruments “não são os mesmos, mas a referência é a mesma. O ritual é o mesmo” <sup>[4]</sup>. In this fashion, the instruments undoubtedly make part of that African cosmology. It is as though the instruments

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\* Translations for the quotes in Portuguese are provided at the endnotes.

were carefully chosen by the Africans when creating capoeira to represent their beliefs and their religiosity.

### **Music of capoeira:**

According to many capoeiristas and scholars, music is integral to capoeira (Bira 1986; Oliveira 1997; Kraay 1998). It sets the tempo and style of game that is to be played within the roda. The music is composed of instruments and songs. The tempos differ from very slow (Angola) to very fast (São Bento Regional). Capoeiristas sing about a wide variety of subjects. Some songs are about history or stories of those capoeiristas that made history, the fathers of capoeira today. Other songs attempt to inspire players to play better. Some songs are about what is going on within the roda, which are improvised. Sometimes the songs are about life. Others are lighthearted or even silly things, sung just for fun. Capoeiristas change their playing style significantly as the songs or rhythm from the berimbau commands. The music is important for the development of a good fighting rhythm, timing and concentration. Listening to it, the capoeiristas transport themselves to another level of consciousness and expand their perceptions of time, space, and movements. In this manner, it is truly the music that drives capoeira angola. As Mestre Boca do Rio said in a saturday roda, “a música é o espírito da roda” <sup>[5]</sup>. Mestre Boca do Rio believes that the music is the spirit of the roda. I understand now that the songs we use are reflective of a story of overcoming, empowerment, movements, liberation, and the ultimate search for freedom—the freedom of the spirit and the soul. These songs are indicative of the reverence to the ancestors, those that made it possible for all of us to be playing capoeira today.

The songs of capoeira are divided in three phases: the ladainha, the chula, and the corridos. The ladainha is the first to open the roda and the jogo. It transmits a message. It is ritual and myth together. The ladainha starts when the one that will sing, commonly the person playing

the gunga, screams: *IÊ*. This is associated with the religiosity of capoeira because it is a call for Ogum, for him to give permission for the roda to start. And once the roda starts, Exú takes over.

***E MAIOR É DEUS***

Iê !  
 Iê maior é deus  
 Iê maior é deus  
 Pequeno sou eu  
 O que tenho foi deus que me deu  
 Tudo tenho foi deus que me deu  
 Na roda da capoeira  
 Grande pequeno sou eu  
 Iê viva meu deus  
 Iê viva meu deus camará!...

***AND GOD IS GREAT***

Ie!  
 Ie God is great  
 Ie God is great  
 I am small  
 God gave me what I have  
 God gave me everything I have  
 In capoeira angola  
 I am a big little person  
 Ie long live my god  
 Ie long live my God, camará!...

When asked about what a ladainha was and its significance during an interview, Angela replied that the “ladainha é uma resa.” While the person is singing the ladainha, she continued, “tem pessoas que estão agachados no pé do berimbau resando, orando, para pedir proteção aos orixás ou a suas guias espirituais, enfim, cada qual em um universo próprio preparando-se para entrar na roda” (Interview #2) <sup>[6]</sup>. During the ladainha, only one person sings, and only the berimbaus can be loudly heard because the rest of the instruments have to remain lower not to interrupt with the feeling and lament of the ladainha with the berimbau. At the end of the ladainha, starts the second phase, the chula:

**- Iê, Capoeira, camará...**  
 Iê, que é de Angola!  
**- Iê, que é de Angola, câmara...**  
 Iê, sabe jogar!  
**- Iê, sabe jogar, camará...**  
 Iê, é mandingueiro!  
**- Iê, é mandingueiro, camará...**  
 Iê, cabeceiro!  
**- Iê, cabeceiro, camará...**  
 Iê, Aquinderei!  
**- Iê, Aquinderei, camará...**  
 Iê, água de beber!  
**- Iê, água de beber, camará...**

**-Iê, Capoeira, camará...**  
 Iê, is from Angola! (call)  
**- Iê, is from Angola, câmara...(response)**  
 Iê, know how to play!  
**- Iê, know how to play, camará...**  
 Iê, is mandingueiro!  
**- Iê, is mandingueiro, camará...**  
 Iê, cabeceiro!  
**- Iê, cabeceiro, camará...**  
 Iê, Aquinderei!  
**- Iê, Aquinderei, camará...**  
 Iê, water to drink!  
**- Iê, water to drink, camará...**

The chula is the intermediary. In this moment, the rest of the roda has to repeat what the person sings. This is when the call and response starts. In this phase, the players are still asking for protection of their saints, guides, orixás, and ancestors at the foot of the berimbau. The third and last phase, the corridos, indicates when the jogo can start.

**OI, SIM SIM SIM**  
**OI NÃO NÃO NÃO**

Oi sim sim sim  
Oi não não não  
**- Oi sim sim sim**  
**Oi não não não**  
Mas hoje tem, amanhã não  
Mas hoje tem, amanhã não  
**- Oi sim sim sim**  
**Oi não não não**  
Mas hoje tem, amanhã não  
Olha a pisada de Lampião  
**- Oi sim sim sim**  
**Oi não não não**  
Olha a pisada de Lampião  
Olha a pisada de Lampião  
**- Oi sim sim sim**  
**Oi não não não**

**OH, YES YES YES**  
**OH, NO NO NO**

Oh yes yes yes  
Oh no no no  
**- Oh yes yes yes**  
**Oh no no no**  
But today has, tomorrow doesn't  
But today has, tomorrow doesn't  
**- Oh yes yes yes**  
**Oh no no no**  
But today has, tomorrow doesn't  
Look at Lampião's footsteps  
**- Oh yes yes yes**  
**Oh no no no**  
Look at Lampião's footsteps  
Look at Lampião's footsteps  
**- Oh yes yes yes**  
**Oh no no no**

When the corrido starts, the jogo starts. The jogo can only take place if the corrido is sung. Capoeira songs generally express the ambiguity of the game. For instance, in the above corrido, as Browning (1995) points out, “the most obvious example is this simple call and response pattern: “oi, sim sim sim, oi não não não”—oh yes yes yes, oh no no no. This is the basic tension of the game—not a struggle between positive and negative forces but rather the exploration of what is negative, painful, or malicious within the ostensibly positive, whole, and benignant...The no in the yes, the big in the little, the earth in the sky, the fight in the dance—these are the riddles Pastinha passed on” (Browning, 107-108).

Moreover, it is important to identify in the musical elements of capoeira, its ritual function, its function of guarding traditions and its function of providing a space for reflection

since they revive the stories and the philosophy. The music, the instruments, the songs, and the lyrics are directly influenced by African culture. A distinctive characteristic of the music is that the songs are sung in a call and response format. *Call and response* was one of the most significant Africanisms brought to America by the enslaved Africans. Lawrence W. Levine (1977) defines it as the “pattern which Negroes brought with them from Africa and which was reinforced in America by the practice of lining out hymns—[which] placed the individual in continual dialogue with his community, allowing him at one and the same time to preserve his voice as a distinct entity and to blend it with those of his fellows” (Levine, 98). In this fashion, musical language becomes a sign of Africanness that emphasizes the collective, or as Levine articulates the “community,” rather than just the individual. This is very evident in the rodas da capoeira, where the person that plays the mestre berimbau sings and the rest repeats, in the same style as call and response. It is necessary to listen, to become a member of that unified voice in responding to the calls being made. Singing the songs in a call and response manner enhanced the atmosphere of the roda. Call and response, as an African art form, as Geneva Smitherman (1977) succinctly argues, “enables traditional black folk to achieve the unified state of balance and harmony which is fundamental to the African world view” (Smitherman, 104). Here she refers to the relationship between this communication dynamic and the traditional African world view. In this fashion, an Afro-centric worldview encompasses an understanding of a powerful unifying life force of every black person. This interactive system embodies communality rather than individuality. Emphasis is on group cohesiveness, cooperation, and the collective common good like in the roda. The roda was created as a strategy for protection. It symbolizes that collectivity. After readings and observations, I came to understand that capoeira angola is about community and collectivity. It is about coordinating and relying on other human beings to be

able to move on, in the game's roda as well as in real life. Perhaps this reflects the lives of the Africans who had to depend on one another to be safe and remain freed.

In the above context, when speaking with regard to the collective in the roda, I am not only making reference to the people physically present in that moment but also to the forces and spirits present. Like Mestre Boca do Rio stated, in the roda exists that “energia espiritual maior de fora—essa ancestralidade—os ancestrais estão presentes aí também” [7]. In the same way Angela commented: “aí na roda, a gente convida muitos dos ancestrais...a roda é um espaço sagrado. Naquela hora a gente não está sozinha. Os ancestrais estão conosco” [8]. In this manner capoeira creates a space where a peoples maintain a connection and become unified with the past.

### **Spirituality and Religiosity:**

Another important point is that which refers to capoeira and its linkages with candomblé. I have already made some references to this claim in the above parts of the paper. This is a more in depth analysis, however. I'd like to begin this comparison with an excerpt from an interview with Mestre Boca do Rio about the origin of the name *Zimba*, which was assigned to the group I trained with during the period of my research:

**Boca do Rio:** eu tive um sonho. E o sonho dizia assim: o seu grupo ele tem que ser Zimba. Eu acho que foi o meu orixá que falou. O meu guia porque até então eu não tinha envolvimento muito com o candomblé... Ai eu falei pra todo mundo, olha eu tive um sonho e o meu sonho disse que tinha que ser o nome Zimba. E aí? Ai, Zimba. E o que quer dizer? Disse: eu não sei. Só sei que veio o nome Zimba, eu acho que foi meu guia espiritual que me disse. Ai um olhou pro outro assim, é se o seu guia espiritual falou então tem que ser esse ai mesmo. Ai fui pro Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais, fiquei uma manhã lá lendo os livros lá e eu queria saber o que era o Zimba, porque um nome só veio na cabeça e eu não sabia o que é, eu vou botar uma coisa sem saber. Ai olhei lá os livros, tinha vários conceitos, tinha conceitos que eu não queria. Ai o último tinha dito assim: Deus supremos dos cultos bantos, das divindades: Olorum. Era um Deus que lutava pela igualdade social. Olorum [9].

As the above response indicates, the mark of candomblé was present from the very beginning of the group, from the very first stages of finding a name for the group. That name Zimba, was a manifestation in Boca's dream which he claimed had been told by his orixá. This is when that clear *vinculo* (link) with candomblé was born for Mestre Boca do Rio. When asked about when

was it that his capoeira began to be marked by spirituality, to have an evident linkage with candomblé, Mestre Boca do Rio replied that “se a capoeira angola vem de uma vertente Africana e o candomblé vem dessa vertente Africana, ambos tem um pé lá na África. Vem de uma coisa trazida de lá...”<sup>[10]</sup>. The circle of candomblé dance is the space where human bodies incorporate divine energy. In capoeira, the roda contains bodies all too aware of their earthy nature. Capoeira is not contrary to the spiritual realm, however. Many capoeiristas feel a profound link to the orixá principles, and particularly to the idea of ancestor spirits being with present in the rodas. As Boca do Rio reminisced “o ser hoje, em Salvador, angoleiro, é sinônimo de dizer que o cara faz também parte do candomblé. Porque você não vê um angoleiro sem um patuá, sem um colar lhe protegendo.”<sup>[11]</sup>. For Mestre Boca do Rio the linkage that exists between capoeira and candomblé is so strong that he continued sharing sharing with me,

“Eu sempre estou comparando o candomblé e a capoeira...algo sobrenatural acontece nas rodas...isso existe em ambas as rodas...varias matérias que já foram embora estão ai...Nos não estamos sozinhos. Pastinha está vivo, seu espírito da forca a todos nos para preservar os movimentos, tocar os instrumentos, cantar as cantigas. Esses espíritos estão todos ai conosco. Assim como nas rodas de candomblé...E essa energia circula na roda e permite que continue. Na roda os elementos espirituais e corporais trabalham juntos...o espírito e corpo não estão separados...”<sup>[12]</sup>

These lines nicely capture the need of maintaining a connection with the past. Again it is evident here how, like Oliveira claims, “a capoeira, como o candomblé, é prioritariamente coletiva...ela é um ritual coletivo”<sup>[13]</sup> (Oliveira 2005: 186). References were repeatedly made to the fact that it is a must in capoeira angola to keep firm in memory those who had made the transition from the physical universe to the spiritual. This is due to the fact that the experience of capoeira angola is an ancestral experience (183). “E efetivamente, a tradição e a experiência dos ancestrais jogam um papel fundamental no jogo da capoeira”<sup>[14]</sup> (188). In this fashion, within an Afro-centric worldview, one cannot separate the spirit from everyday life. As the latter case implies, African arts and music are indicative that body, mind, and soul of a peoples are not separated. Moreover,

it is important to understand and think of how it is the African peoples demonstrate an African worldview. An African worldview encompasses an understanding of a powerful unifying life force. It is also believed that the spirits and the supernatural are integral in African peoples lives. The dance, the rhythm, the spirituality, the musicality arise from the influence of such energy that the ancestors and the spirits create. Essentially, within the African culture and belief system, everything has a place, a location, and an explanation, just like in the roda.

Based on my observations and my interactions with Mestre Boca do Rio, I would dare to argue that the Mestre takes on the role of what is known as a griot in African society, but in the context of capoeira angola. A griot is a historian, entertainer, storyteller, and a counselor responsible for the preservation and continuation of the West African culture. In other words, griots are guardians of the African culture. A griot's social location is at the core of the African society's overall identity, as a Mestre is in capoeira angola. Such an influential and essential position in African society is hereditary—it is passed down from generation to generation, from father to son—and in capoeira from Mestre to Mestre and Mestre to disciples. A Mestre, in the same way as a griot, exemplifies the fundamental value, centrality, and role that oral tradition plays in African culture. Along these lines, Lima (2002) explains the significance of orality in capoeira angola; she writes:

“A disposição dos elementos componentes da capoeira assim como a configuração de seu aprendizado passado de geração a geração de mestres de capoeira, são permeadas por uma concepção africana de repasse e cultivo de conhecimento. O autor observa que nas sociedades orais a função da memória e, a ligação, entre o homem e a palavra, é mais forte. Fatores religiosos, mágicos e sociais concorrem para preservar a fidelidade da transmissão oral. A oralidade aqui se apresenta como fator primordial, sua existência enquanto fio unificador de todo *corpus* apresentado pela capoeira integra o ensino da religião, conhecimento histórico e divertimento sem dezoar em nenhum momento. Tudo ocupa, seu devido lugar na grande roda que é a capoeira” (73) <sup>[15]</sup>.

As it is reflected in these lines, memory is power. We cannot remake history, but we cannot erase African culture and heritage. Moreover, centuries of history kept in memory essentially allow



and approve for the identity of the African peoples to be maintained and carried on. Capoeira angola embodies those characteristics. As Niane (1982) demonstrates, Africa's momentous oral tradition has transcended time, cultural, social, economic, and political conditions as well as space and geographic barriers. Through the Mestre, orality, and in this case also musical language, becomes a sign of Africanness. As Oliveira (2005) claims, capoeira Angola is "um microcosmo brasileiro que reproduz o macrocosmo africano..." (194) <sup>[16]</sup>. In this fashion, capoeira becomes a manifestation of ancestry, of identity, and of Africanness.

## Conclusion

Since the 1960s tourism and commercialism has modified Bahian, and much greater Brazilian, society, specifically in the basic structure of its culture, contributing to the decharacterization of many of the Afro-cultural manifestations, in this way disturbing the natural course and the normal historical evolution of capoeira angola. A linear history of capoeira, however, is far from satisfactory. Therefore, with this research I attempted to go beyond historical facts and techniques to reflect the spirit of capoeira, the roda, and its music. I hope the readers find themselves in the magical and religious universe of capoeira because, as Black art, it appeals to human emotions. It can arouse aesthetic or moral feelings, and can be understood as a way of communicating these feelings. Capoeira angola, within this black aesthetics, communicates emotion and pushes forward the boundaries of *collective* human ability.

Capoeira proposes a new vision, a new worldview through which the history of the ancestors is brought out to the surface. To play capoeira is to play hand on hand with those that preserved the tradition as a form of resistance to this world that keeps speeding up more and more every day. In this fashion, a concern that this brings up is about the new generation of Mestres and capoeiristas and how they will be able to keep preserving this rhythm of resistance, its history, and its traditions in the face of the modern world antagonisms. Will they ever face the same obstacles and struggles that Mestre Pastinha and Bimba, among many others, experienced during their lifetime? Are they going to live up to the legacies of their ancestors? It is important to emphasize the importance of those who initiated everything, of knowing their names and their histories and struggles and to pass it on. What is truly being done with the traditions that have been preserved? Capoeira revolves around its traditions and rituals, and then, in this world of continuous modernity where traditions are for the most part looked down upon, what would

happen to capoeira Angola 50 years from now? Will the traditions be the same? Or will they change? These are questions that are bombarding Mestres, capoeiristas, angoleiros, and researchers like myself.

Despite the marginalization of capoeira from being criminalized to being banned, and then its incorporation into mainstream culture, capoeira continued to be an African cultural manifestation and expression. Its Africanisms have been successfully preserved. The objective of this research is precisely to preserve the tradition of capoeira angola. Efforts have been made to create a collective consciousness and racial/cultural pride with a declared aim of “resurrecting” the spiritual, mental, and physical conditions of the Afro-descendants. Capoeira is an entity whose aim falls within those parameters of resurrecting and re-enacting African culture and traditions. To play capoeira is a way to reaffirm the Africanisms that are existent here in Brazil and throughout the diaspora. Capoeira angola creates a space where mind, body, and spirit are intertwined and where you cannot have one without the other without balance. Along these lines, capoeira takes on the form of African traditions and legacy that was passed down to the people of African descent. It forms part of a peoples’ identities, of who they are as Afro-Brazilians and as Black peoples throughout the diaspora.

## UMA VEZ PERGUNTARAM A SEU PASTINHA

(ladainha)

Ie!

Certo dia

Perguntaram a seu Pastinha

O que era a capoeira

E ele mestre velho e respeitado

Ficou um tempo calado

Revirando e sua alma

Depois, Ele respondeu com calma

Em forma de ladainha

A capoeira

É um jogo é um brinquedo

É se respeitar o medo

É dosar bem a coragem

É luta , é manha de mandingueiro

É um vento no veleiro

Um lamento na senzala

É um berimbau bem tocado

E um corpo arrepiado

O sorriso do menininho

A capoeira

É um vôo de um passarinho

O bote da cobra coral

Sentir na boca ,Todo gosto do perigo

É sorrir pra o inimigo

Apertar a sua mão

A capoeira

É um grito de Zumbi

Ecoando no quilombo

É se levantar do tombo

Antes de chegar ao chão

É o ódio

A esperança que renasce

A tapa explode na face

Vai arder no coração

Em fim

É aceitar o desafio

Com vontade de lutar

A capoeira

É um barco pequenino

Solto nas ondas do mar

É um peixe é um peixinho

Só pelas ondas do mar

Iê maior é deus

-ie maior é deus camará !

## End Notes

1. “This function of the berimbau in capoeira remits to the function of the drums in the African culture that is constituted as an instrument of communication with it own language. In this way, knowing how to listen to the berimbau is to be in consonance with all the context of the game and a way to prevent surprises” (Lima, 69).
2. “One of the instruments of the liturgy nago of Cuba, existing even specific pandeiros for the orixás, like that in the case of Exú” (Rego, 80).
3. “is an musical instrument of iron percussion, brought to Brazil by the Africans...its greatest use is in the afro-brazilian religious ceremonies, especially to greet the orixás” (Rego, 87-88)
4. “Are not the same, but the reference is the same. It is the same ritual.” Taken from Angela’s interview with Boca.
5. Field journal entry on Nov. 25, 2006
6. “Ladainha is a prayer.” “You have people kneeling down at the foot of the berimbau praying, asking for protection to their orixás or to their spiritual guides” Interview #2, 11/21/2006.
7. “A greater external spiritual energy—that ancestrality—the ancestors are present there too.” Note registered in field journal on 11/19/2006.
8. “In the roda, we invoke many of the ancestors...the roda is a sacred space. In this moment, we are not alone. The ancestors are with us” Interview #2, 11/21/2006.
9. This excerpt along with other quotes was taken from an interview that Angela Ribeiro conducted with Boca do Rio. Angela wrote a “Relato etnográfico” (2005) as a requisite for the Programa de Pós Graduação em Artes Cênicas, in the Escola de Teatro and Escola de Dança of the Universidade Federal de Bahia. I took those portions of the interview that were relevant to my research. I’d like to thank her for providing me with this information because without it I would have not been able to complete my project.
10. “If capoeira angola came from an African root and candomblé came from that same root, then both have a foot over there in Africa. They come from something brought from there” Taken from Angela’s interview with Boca in 2005.
11. “Today, in Salvador, angoleiro, is synonymous with someone who practices candomblé. Because you do not see an angoleiro without a patua, without a necklace protecting him.” Taken from Angela’s interview with Boca in 2005.
12. “I am always comparing candomblé with capoeira...something supernatural happens in the rodas...this exists in both rodas...several matters that passed away are there...we are not alone. Pastinha is alive, his spirit gives strength to all of us and enables us to preserve the movements, play the instruments, and sing the songs. Those spirits are all there with us. And that energy circulates in the roda and allows us to continue it. In the roda the spiritual and corporal elements work together...the spirit and the body are not separated...” Taken from my interview with Boca on the 11/30/2006.
13. “Capoeira, like candomblé is primarily a collective...it is a collective ritual” (Oliveira 2005: 186).
14. “Effectively, the tradition and experience of the ancestors play a fundamental role in the jogo da capoeira” (Oliveira 2005: 188).
15. “The disposition of the elements of capoeira like the configuration of its learning passed down from generation to generation of Mestres of capoeira, are permeated by an African

conception of passing on and cultivating knowledge. The author observes that in oral societies the role of memory and, a linkage, between man and word, is stronger. Religious, magical, and societal factor contribute to the preservation of a loyalty to the oral transmission tradition. Here the orality presents itself like an essential factor, its existence as the unifying string of all corpus presented by capoeira integrates the teaching of religion, historical knowledge and amusement without clashing at any time. Everything occupies its place in the big circle that capoeira is” (Lima, 76).

16. “A brazilian microcosm that reproduces the African macrocosm” (Oliveira 2005: 194).

## Glossary

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**Africanisms:** refers to characteristics of African culture and people that can be traced through cultural and societal practices and institutions of the African diaspora.

**Agogo:** double gong bell.

**Atabaque:** Narrow conical drum.

**Bateria:** this is the musical ensemble where the instruments are played in a row. The circle revolves around this assembly. The bateria is composed of eight instruments: three berimbaus (gunga, medio, and viola), two pandeiros, one atabaque, one reco-reco, and one agogo.

**Berimbau:** the one string bow-shaped instrument.

**Candomblé:** The African or Afro-Brazilian religion.

**Capoeira:** The Afro-Brazilian dance, martial art, and game.

**Capoeira Angola:** The traditional form of capoeira of Angolan origin that emphasizes close ties to its African origins and roots.

**Capoeirista:** A participant/practitioner of capoeira.

**Exú:** Male orixá associated with virility and being the guardian of temples and persons.

**Jôgo da capoeira:** the game of capoeira. Played in a roda (circle) with partners exchanging movements of attack and defense and engaging in a mental as well as corporal dialogue, asking and answering questions with their movements in the process.

**Mestre:** Master of capoeira.

**Orixás:** The Yoruba word for divinities in general. Used in candomblé to designate the African deities. Each orixá has a name that may be followed by a second name to denote his or her particular qualities. Each orixá has unique images, personal characteristics, and ways of relating to people.

**Ogum:** Male orixá associated with iron and warfare.

**Pandeiro:** Tambourine.

**Reco-Reco:** Scraper/rasp.

**Roda (da capoeira):** literally means circle, and it is in fact the circle through which capoeira is performed.

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### **Indication for Further Research**

It would be interesting to see someone research about gender in capoeira because something that has been a constant theme in many of the books is that “capoeira é pobre e masculina” (capoeira is poor and masculine). In response to this it would be provocative to research what is the role of (black) women in capoeira? Have their numbers increased or have they remained the same? Also what percentage of women is (Afro) Brazilian v. foreigners? And what do these numbers mean? Does capoeira promote gender equality? How does capoeira advance gender equality in relation not only to individuals but also to society?

Also another suggestion would be to do a biographical study on one or a few individuals to study the influence and impact of capoeira in their lives and how it served as a catalyst for them to become active and part of the Movimento Negro or any other social movement. How has capoeira influenced the identity development of a person as “militante negro”? In this context, how is it that this person perceives these two movements and to what extent? How do they perceive capoeira and the Black Movement, if at all, advance/inform each other?

## APPENDIX 1

1. *Could you have done this project in the USA? What data or sources were unique to the culture in which you did the project?*

I think that I could have conducted my research in the USA but it would have been dependent on the state where it would have been done because, on the one hand, FICA (Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola) or ICAF in English (International Capoeira Angola Foundation) is located in Washington, D.C. with a strong connection with the Mestres of Brazil, especially its founder Mestre Cobra Mansa. On the other hand, the school of Mestre João Grande is located in New York, with the same strong connection to Brazil. I definitely believe that it would have been much more based on secondary sources than on primary sources or qualitative methods such as interviews and ethnography.

2. *Could you have done any part of it in the USA? Would the results have been different? How?*

I strongly believe that the results would have been different because the context of the research directly influences the research development and implementation. The city of Salvador is considered to be the spiritual home of capoeira. Its history and its significance began here in this city. That legacy is still alive. Here people live, eat, and breathe capoeira Angola. This cannot be compared with the way it is practiced in the States. Over there it is more institutionalized and it is in academies and schools. It completely takes away from what I was trying to explore.

3. *Did the process of doing the ISP modify your learning style? How was this different from your previous style and approaches to learning?*

Until this semester, my learning had mostly taken place in an academic setting, in the classrooms and from lectures. The ISP period, however, allowed me to gain those research skills that I was lacking: making sense of what we see, having a critical eye for what we generally would just take for granted, and learning from the experience more than from books.

4. *How much of the final monograph is primary data? How much is from secondary sources?*

I think that about 70 percent is from primary sources and the remaining 30 percent derives from secondary sources.

5. *What criteria did you use to evaluate your data for inclusion in the final monograph? Or how did you decide to exclude certain data?*

Most of the materials/sources I read during the preparation period were not very helpful with the exception of two books. I reevaluated my research questions and did an

elimination process of that which was irrelevant to my research questions. There were also observations that did not reveal much to me and that is how I excluded them. I excluded certain data based on irrelevancy and unimportance.

6. *How did the “drop-offs” or field exercises contribute to the process and completion of the ISP?*

I think that the drop-offs pushed me to be more confident and to not be afraid to rely on people. That is one of the biggest lessons of the drop-offs for me. Of course during the ISP period, one is doing independent research but that research cannot be completed without participants and without people. It helped me a lot to have courage to ask for directions, to ask for help and for information whenever I was in need.

7. *What part of the FSS most significantly influenced the ISP process?*

For me, Eduardo’s lectures were the most helpful because they were specifically about “pesquisa de campo,” its elements, ethics, methodology and everything else that it was asked for in the completion of this text, of this research, and of this experience in the field.

8. *What were the principal problems you encountered while doing the ISP? Were you able to resolve these and how?*

For me the major problems were time, access to interviews, and to some extent transportation. My problem with time was that I felt I was not going to have enough time to complete my research on time but with much effort, help, and support I was able to kind of complete it. The access to interviews was not resolved. Transportation was bad at time because of the distance of my site but I worked it out and spent those nights that were not possible for me to get home at a friend’s house.

9. *Did you experience any time constraints? How could these have been resolved?*

I think that this, time, was my major problem/obstacle throughout the ISP period. I felt it was just too short after the first week or so. That kind of frustrated me a bit because I was disillusioned that I would not be able to complete my research and to dig deeper, because I was still scratching the surface. Also my practice, my classes, and my training were extremely short. I only had 8 classes. I do not think they could have been resolved, perhaps only if the ISP period was to be modified to be more than a month.

10. *Did your original topic change and evolved as you discovered or did not discover new and different sources? Did the resources available modify or determine the topic?*

My topic evolved without a doubt as I practiced and read more relevant sources. The sources guided me and to an extent in fact determined my research topic.

11. *How did you go about finding sources: institutions, interviewees, publications, etc.?*

Most of my sources came from the program's library. Other sources came from my advisor and from Angela who was also my co-advisor in the process and introduced me to materials that I had not otherwise obtained on my own. She was also the person that introduced to Grupo Zimba and my intermediary for the whole time.

12. *What method(s) did you use? How did you decide to use such method(s)?*

Participant observation, interviews, reading, interactions, conversations, practicing capoeira, and cultural immersion were the methods I used for my research. My decision was based on whether or not these were the most effective methods/ways that I could employ to be able to complete my research on time.

13. *Comment on your relation with your advisor: indispensable? Occasionally helpful? Not very helpful? At what point was he most helpful? Were there cultural differences, which influenced your relationship? A different understanding of educational processes and goals? Was working with the advisor instructional?*

My advisor, Prof. Eduardo Oliveira (A.K.A. Duda), was extremely helpful. From our first meetings to our last he always encouraged me and gave me new materials, perspectives, and ideas to work with. He also provided me with materials from his personal library, such materials that are of collection status and I would seriously not have been able to find them otherwise. There were no language barriers and no cultural differences. He was available when I needed him and he would take initiative to also pass along information and meet with me when felt it necessary. I truly do not think I would have completed my research without his guidance, input, and his support.

14. *Did you reach any dead ends? Hypotheses which turned out to be not useful? Interviews or visits that had no application?*

I believe that all my conversations, observations, classes, training sessions, rodas, and events all were significant for my research and for my proper understanding of capoeira angola.

15. *What insights did you gain into the culture as a result of doing the ISP, which you might not otherwise have gained?*

Being around Brazilians, talking to them, listening to the songs of capoeira and responding, as well as conducting interviews definitely helped me improve my language proficiency. I also learned more about Afro-brazilian culture and struggles.

16. *Did the ISP process assist your adjustment to the culture? Integration?*

Like I stated in the previous answer, the way it helped was in better understanding the culture, improve my language skills, and enjoying Salvador and its history. Many people thought I was Baiano, and even after I informed them that I was from the Caribbean they

still embraced like I was Baiano. Again, this period also made me feel like I belong here. It helped me gain a stronger sense of belonging.

*17. What were the principal lessons you learned from the ISP process?*

Academically, I gained skills that will definitely serve me well in my future endeavors. I developed cross-cultural communication skills, critical investigation skills, reasoning and critical thinking. I conducted interviews, I took field notes, and I was able to answer a research question that I myself came up with. Learning to be organized, to have a plan. I learned not to trust my memory because it can betray me. Always have pen and paper with you while in the field or when attending an event in case anything it is said or something comes up in your mind—an idea, a new concept, etc.—this might sound like simple tasks but I think that from them depended the success of my research.

Personally, this period helped me explore a side of me that I had been neglecting for a long time, my spirituality and my black identity. As capoeira and the African religiosity demonstrate, spirituality served as a driving force for Black peoples' struggles and survival. In my struggles, I draw from those parts of my upbringing which have been necessary to my physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Spirituality—which draws from the deep-seated place of our greatest longings for freedom—gives meaning to our lives. It inspires and empowers. I understand now that capoeira, its rituals and traditions are reflective of a story of overcoming, empowerment, movements, liberation, and the ultimate search for freedom—the freedom of the spirit and the soul. I truly feel transformed by capoeira.

*18. If you met a future student who wanted to do this same project, what would be your recommendations to him/her?*

Plan, plan ahead. Be prepared so that they can be able to start their research as soon as the period starts. Also, to have patience. This is key when practicing and learning about capoeira. Everything takes time, and one needs to have patience and to take it slow. Step by step one can achieve a lot. Respect the space, the group, and more importantly the Mestre and his work, wherever they will be conducting their research. Value their work and their time because this is how many of the Mestres are able to make a living, because this is their life. Attend every class, every roda, and any other event related to capoeira. One needs to eat, breathe, and live capoeira in order to truly study it and understand it. It is from the personal experience that comes the greatest knowledge, not from the books.

*19. Given what you know now, would you undertake this or a similar project again?*

Absolutely, positively, definitely yes. I consider this to only be the beginning, stage one, of many other projects and endeavors that will required me to use the research and analytical skills I gained through this project during this period. The richness of ethnography, advocacy, and activism and the effect of that on a person, the way the person is transformed and transforms others in the process is priceless.

## APPENDIX 2

# GRUPO DE CAPOEIRA ANGOLA ZIMBA

O Grupo de Capoeira Angola Zimba surgiu no dia 20 de janeiro de 1998, sediado em uma escola pública no bairro de Pituaçu, Salvador – BA, sobre a coordenação do Contra-Mestre Boca do Rio, atual mestre do grupo.

Desde então, algumas pessoas reúnem-se para cantar e desenvolver expressões de caráter físico, psíquico e lúdico; acreditando e praticando a cultura afro-brasileira.

A capoeira angola, assim como grande parte da cultura afro-brasileira, sofreu várias influências. É possível se identificar originalmente seus movimentos em um ritual africano denominado N'golo, ou dança das zebras. Nesse, dois homens disputavam uma jovem através de um jogo onde procuravam demonstrar destreza corporal baseando-se nos movimentos dos animais.

No Brasil, durante a escravidão, a capoeira tornou-se um instrumento de luta pela liberdade.

O Grupo de Capoeira Angola Zimba resgata as formações do capoeirista angoleiro integrado nas tradições da secular capoeira angola (Mestre Pastinha), seja no âmbito da movimentação corporal ou na manutenção dos rituais.

Sendo assim, não reduzimos a capoeira apenas ao seu aspecto marcial. A luta se expressa também na capacidade de agrupar pessoas em torno de um projeto de transformação mais amplo; a capoeira luta, a capoeira dança, a capoeira filosofia, a capoeira jogo...

**Site do grupo:** [capoeirazimbasalvador.com](http://capoeirazimbasalvador.com)

**E-mail do grupo:** [Grupo\\_zimba@grupos.com.br](mailto:Grupo_zimba@grupos.com.br)

**Espaço do Grupo Zimba:** Rua Carimbamba, no 7, 1º andar loja 3, Orla Marítima de Salvador sentido centro, ao lado do restaurante Sal e Brasa, Pituaçu.