

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE SNAKE:
A LIFE HISTORY OF COBRA MANSA
“COBRINHA” MESTRE OF CAPOEIRA

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This dissertation is a cultural biography of Mestre Cobra Mansa, a mestre of the Afro-Brazilian martial art of capoeira angola. The intention of this work is to track Mestre Cobrinha’s life history and accomplishments from his beginning as an impoverished child in Rio to becoming a mestre of the tradition—its movements, music, history, ritual and philosophy. A highly skilled performer and researcher, he has become a cultural ambassador of the tradition in Brazil and abroad.

Following the Trail of the Snake is an interdisciplinary work that integrates the research methods of ethnomusicology (oral history, interview, participant observation, musical and performance analysis and transcription) with a revised life history methodology to uncover the multiple cultures that inform the life of a mestre of capoeira. A reflexive auto-ethnography of the author opens a dialog between the experiences and developmental steps of both research partners’ lives. Written in the intersection of

ethnomusicology, studies of capoeira, social studies and music education, the academic dissertation format is performed as a roda of capoeira aiming to be respectful of the original context of performance. The result is a provocative ethnographic narrative that includes visual texts from the performative aspects of the tradition (music and movement), aural transcriptions of Mestre Cobra Mansa's storytelling and a myriad of writing techniques to accompany the reader in a multi-dimensional journey of multicultural understanding.

The study follows Cinézio Feliciano Peçanha in his childhood struggle for survival as a street performer in Rio de Janeiro. Several key moves provided him with the opportunity to rebuild his life and to grow into a recognized mestre of the capoeira angola martial art as Mestre Cobra Mansa ("Tame Snake" in Portuguese). His dedicated work enabled him to contribute to the revival of the capoeira angola tradition during the 1980's in Bahia. After his move to the United States in the early 1990's, Mestre Cobrinha founded the International Capoeira Angola Foundation, which today has expanded to 28 groups around the world. Mestre Cobra returned home to Brazil to initiate projects that seek to develop a new sense of community from all that he has learned and been able to accomplish in his life through the performance and study of capoeira angola.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE SNAKE: A LIFE HISTORY OF
COBRA MANSA “COBRINHA” MESTRE OF CAPOEIRA.

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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2008

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Dedication

To

Mestre Cobra Mansa,

o mestre quem me ensinou

and

my family of light,

the true hands of God in my life

Acknowledgements

In capoeira one cannot start a roda without the invocation to the ancestors. I open the round to thank my all my *mestres*. Both my co-chairs John Coughey and Jonathan Dueck have done the best job of nurturing my creativity with their wisdom and encouragement. When I was soaring high, I knew somebody was watching and I found guidance and respect for my work. Rob Provine and Chris Vadala kept me in my musical toes, expanding my perspective; one never can have enough of that. Francine Hultgren has been a true mentor during my time of discovery through writing, opening the doors to new dimensions of expression I never thought I had. To all my committee members go my most sincere acknowledgment and credit for their contribution to this dissertation.

Two women would have been part of my committee if I had not been such a slow bloomer: Carolina Robertson opened the university small door of the SOL program to let me in, somehow, she knew I would be leaving through the big one. Mary McCarthy, my mentor in music education has been an example of dedication and scholarship and a constant reminder of who I am and what was I doing here.

The privilege to work with additional visiting faculty such as Daniel Sheehy and Adrienne Kaepler was an unexpected treat that widened the field for me and brought support and enhancement of my professional experiences. I hope that our paths will cross again as I embrace the development of my applied ethnomusicologist career.

I believe education is the back door for the entrée of the ethnomusicology discipline to greatness in Spain. My colleagues of the Society of Ethnomusicology (SibE) and the Institut de Ciénces de l'Educació (ICE) education groups were my first source of inspiration to work actively in a community of educators with ethnomusicology. I offer

my special acknowledgment to Ramón Pelinski, being the first ethnomusicologist I ever met, who dismissed my first attempt to write a life history. I agree with him: it needed some additional thought, if it took me more than a decade to accomplish, it is only my fault.

My students over more than three decades were my teachers and as I often tell their stories, I have to thank them for being such a formative part of my professional and personal life. My ethnomusicological colleagues in Spain and abroad have been very patient while I was working in my thesis, now we can start the debate and conversations that will make it worth. Gisèle Mills, for sharing her vast knowledge, culture and family, deserves my eternal gratitude.

My love of music and live performance was nourished while in the DC area by the late Baba Djimo Kouyate. I thank him for my best memory, ever, in a stage, his luminous smile still sustains me. Amadou Kouyate and family continued his father's vision and added a fierce bet on experimentation and collaboration that was an enjoyment to share. The University of Maryland African Drumming Ensemble made me proud of be part of a powerful all female dounum players for years; what a treat! The women's energy that derived of the precious collective improvisations with Sharon, Joyce, Gisèle and Lisa and the Emergence Community Arts Collective Jam sessions gave me a dwell of creative juices and reassured me communication is possible even when one does not speak the same language, just hold your instrument and listen. I am thankful because they were listening to me and made my musical ideas rise to be conversational music pieces. The late Dr. Rose Bello brought my singing voice back from far, far away and Dr. Ysaye

Maria Barnwell gave me the power of using it to build a community through song. It will stay with me forever.

I could not maintain such long effort without the economic support of many financial angels. My deepest gratitude to the PEO sisterhood who honored me by awarding me twice the International Peace Scholarship Fund. The money sustained me, but the letters, emails, postcards, gifts, phone calls and invitations to luncheons lifted me to thrive. The Driskell Center awarded me with a traveling grant to Bahia, which moved forward my research and understanding of capoeira's culture in context. The Office of Undergraduate Studies also supported my research and traveling needs with enormous generosity and thoughtfulness. My special thanks to my supervisor and friend Dr. Lisa Kiely who gave me freedom to express myself creatively during my years of assistance to the First Year Book Program, sending me home to write, or study, or to do my fieldwork with impressive support and care. There are times when you plant the seed of something very big in a very casual manner. My very dear riojano friends Carlos Ruiz-Alberti and Pilar Ortega came to my life disguised as piano student and wife, becoming over many years of practice two solid references of friendship and uninterested support. Your generosity still makes my heart flutter; thank you for listening with your open hands.

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Prologue



They [the first *capoeiristas*¹] formed circles in the slave house where the fighters exercised to the sound of the *berimbaus*² and palms. The overseer would pass, appreciate the blacks “playing Angola”, find it pretty, also beat palms while the players continued their pantomimes, playing on the dirt, looking at each other standing on their hands, laughing a lot and dancing a quaint dance of waddles, jiggles and pulls, or rolling in the dirt like snakes. (Carybé 1969, 27)³

The Sinuous Ways of a Tame Snake

My work follows the life history of Mestre Cobra Mansa⁴ (“tame snake” in Portuguese) “*Cobrinha*,”⁵ in his dedication to mastering the elements of *capoeira* (pronounced “ka-pooH-AIR-ah”) which enabled him to rise from a poor child in the streets of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil to become an internationally respected performer, teacher, scholar, and representative of *capoeira angola* worldwide and a dedicated cultural activist involved in improving, through capoeira, the conditions of communities and individuals as a way to induce social change. I compare Mestre Cobra Mansa’s⁵ thirty-five-year journey of mastering, performing and transmitting the art of capoeira as the sinuous ways of a snake as his name suggests for the many obstacles that he had to overcome during his life.

¹ Capoeira players

² String bow with a gourd resonator, the main instrument used in *capoeira*

³ All ink drawings of capoeira players are from painter Carybé’s book *As Sete Portas da Bahia* (The Seven Doors of Bahia) where he includes a collection of sketches dedicated to capoeira.

⁴ Out of respect for the oral tradition, I will use his full given name in capoeira: Mestre Cobra Mansa, Mestre Cobra, Mestre Cobrinha or just Mestre, for I consider him to be my mestre. Sometimes, out of familiarity, I use the affective diminutive “Cobrinha” as his family and friends do. The use of his birth name or his capoeira names is also a narrative device in the written ethnography to convey the passage of time and the different states of expertise and mastery in the performance of capoeira that he achieved throughout his life.

⁵ Diminutive of the word *cobra*

This “snake trailing” work aims to produce a cultural biography of a *mestre*⁶ of the Afro-Brazilian martial arts tradition of capoeira angola, a complex art form that includes musical, physical and spiritual elements in its practice. My work, through ethnographic and interview-based research, explores the significance of different socio-cultural traditions that influence the lifelong commitment of a mestre of capoeira to the transmission of this tradition, particularly in different cultural contexts outside his region/country of origin. Mestre Cobrinha’s diasporic journey highlights the ways in which capoeira’s socio-historical and cultural parameters have to be re-contextualized, translated, and negotiated with people not naturally immersed in them. This mediation relates not only to capoeira angola’s performance features, but also to cultural resistance and social responsibility, that must also be taught. The ability of the mestre to communicate effectively these aspects of the capoeira tradition to people in different regions of the world directly affects the interest and commitment of capoeira students.

Capoeira angola is a unique expression of African culture in the Americas that transmits its forms of multidisciplinary performance (dance, music, ritual) through oral tradition (Dossar 1994; Taylor 2005). A mestre of capoeira must be proficient in all aspects of the performance—singing, playing instruments, strategic movement—as well as being able to transmit the cultural values and context of capoeira—its history (Tigges 1990; Líbano Soares 1999), language and philosophy (Pastinha 1988; Lewis 1992; Downey 2005), even embodying a national identity (Million 2005).

Originally developed by enslaved Africans and lower-class marginalized populations, the outlawed tradition was learned in some regions of Brazil by direct

⁶ Literally, the word means “teacher” and also “master,” the highest level of expertise in a practise. This disertation will show how complex the meaning of this title is in the capoeira angola tradition.

apprenticeship in the backyards of the mestres (D'Aquino 1983; Almeida 1986; Capoeira 2002; Abreu 2003) and contemporarily is still used as a tool for struggle against violence and inequality, and vehicle for creative transformation (Wesolowsky 2007). Due to its origins, capoeira has a multicultural appeal, of a unique quality and symbolic meaning for people of African descent because it retains embodied characteristics that connect with other cultures of the African Diaspora (Tavares 1990; Dossar 1994).

Nevertheless, over the last twenty years, the capoeira tradition has extended its contexts of transmission outside Brazil to new students of capoeira of both genders and all ages, from diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds who learn and perform capoeira angola in countries and continents far away from capoeira's origins in Brazil (Stanyek 2004; Joseph 2006). Schools, study groups and international encounters are regularly organized in Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, Southeast Asia and Australia, creating a global flow of cross-cultural teaching and learning opportunities (Campos 2001; Assunção 2005) and bridging transnational communities (Shimshon-Santo 2003).

This investigation begins with an overview of pertinent cross-disciplinary literature, building upon more than seven years of my continuous participant observation in the Washington DC based group of the Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola-International Capoeira Angola Foundation (FICA/ICAF). My research project has been significantly enriched by in-depth interviews with Mestre Cobra Mansa, founder of the organization, my research partner and principal collaborator in this endeavor, and selected students and colleagues from different times along his thirty-five-year involvement with capoeira. Mestre Cobrinha is not only an important figure in the

contemporary capoeira arena as a highly skilled player, “an exceptionally talented capoeira player and exceptional human being” (Capoeira 2005, 53), but he has also transcended the limits of the traditional role of a mestre by reason of his unprecedented success in the transmission of capoeira world wide. He is considered a mythic hero of the contemporary capoeira angola by a fellow mestre⁷ because of his journey from the harsh conditions of extreme poverty in the streets of Rio de Janeiro to become a brilliant capoeirista, world traveled and educated, committed to the advancement of studies of capoeira and its use as a tool for social transformation. Mestre Cobra created a unique life path—worthy of exploration through its resoluteness as well as its supple curves and meanders—overcoming adversity and discrimination, and successfully negotiating, as a skilled *bricoleur* (Levi-Strauss 1966), the multiple cultures he encountered in creative and unorthodox ways.

A scholar in the field, Kenneth Dossar, compared Cobrinha to a Jesuit, because of his personification of the “warrior priest and intellectual”⁸ and Dossar praised him to be the one who rescued one of the elders, Mestre João Grande, from retirement and oblivion and facilitated the renaissance of capoeira angola in the “*escola pastiniana*”⁹ (Costa Araújo 2004) during the early 1980s¹⁰. Cobrinha is probably the most traveled mestre of capoeira, teaching it in many different countries and continents every year.¹¹ Mestre Cobra’s willingness to travel several months a year far away from his residence and projects in Brazil, across physical and cultural borders in the transmission of capoeira and

⁷ M. Jurandir personal communication March 9, 2008.

⁸ Ken Dossar, personal communication August 20, 2005.

⁹ Methodological style of capoeira developed by Mestre Pastinha.

¹⁰ Isabel Green, interview March 8, 2008.

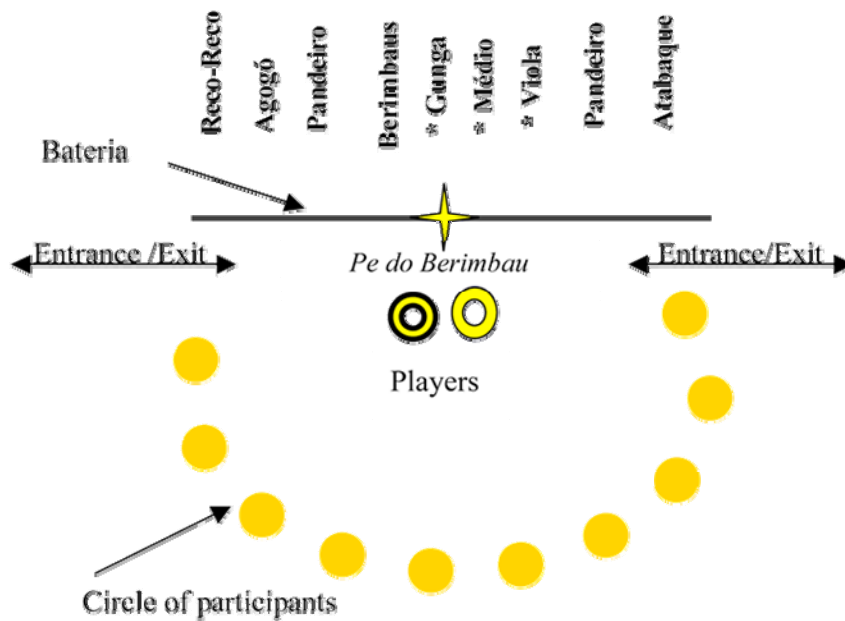
¹¹ In the spring of 2008 during a three-month period, Mestre Cobrinha taught in the USA (Washington DC, Baltimore, New Orleans, Boston, New York), Europe (Montpellier, Paris, Greece, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, London), Japan, Russia (Moscow), and the Ukraine.

his distinct methods of facilitating the apprenticeship of the tradition, has made him particularly valuable as the subject and research partner of this investigation.

I use a life history methodology building upon materials gathered from the interviews and from self-ethnographic texts along with field notes from my participant observation of the Mestre's activities during his visits to the DC area or my trips to Brazil. My study develops through further analysis of transcripts, photographs, audio and video recordings and other materials collected from these interactions. My interpretation compares both Cobrinha's and my own cultural traditions and our relationships and roles within these traditions. It produces a "side by side" narrative (Behar 1990, 224) of this double life history. The overall architectural design of the narrative and my writing technique is detailed later in this prologue. This methodology results in a unique creation that brings the academic ethnographic writing closer to the original performance content—and context—more than traditional anthropological ethnographic narratives. An overview of the main context of performance in capoeira angola, the *roda* (circle, pronounced "HOE-dah") offers the reader some "road signs" to follow its development.

What Is a Roda?

A *roda* is a public event, primarily considered to be the total hours that the participants—players and community—invest in the activity of capoeira, engaging in pairs as indicated by the mestre accompanied by musical instruments and song. The *roda* is also the physical space, the circle, the ring in which the capoeiristas perform, sing, dance and play.



Roda's general performative space

Looking at the graphic, a snapshot of the action in a given moment of the performance, we observe that the players within the circle are inserted not just in a physical space but also in an acoustical space. The game occurs within what Truax Barry describes as an “acoustical community”¹² where instructions and feedback will come from song and music in a surrounding protected, safe, space.

The participants, no matter the degree of their involvement (as musicians, players, singers, or bystanders), have to develop a “soundscape competence” to understand the narratives, clues and actions derived from the interplay of sound and movement during the game (Barry 2001, 57). A schematic description of the main events that occur in the roda will provide the readers with a timeline reference of the game development.

¹² Defined by the idea of environments in which sound plays a formative role. Barry discusses that a “positively functioning acoustic community environment [is] one that binds the community together in contrast to forces that weakens the community ties” (Barry 2001, xxi).

1. Beginning of the Roda: The Participants Assemble:

The participants, seated on the floor, form an open circle in front of the line of instruments in the *bateria* (orchestra). From left to right: *reco-reco*, *agogô*, *pandeiro* #1, *berimbaus* (*gunga*, *médio* and *viola*), *pandeiro* #2, and *atabaque*.¹³ The extremes of the circle closer to the *bateria* line are open. Two players are waiting, one on each side.

2. The Gunga Enters:

The *berimbau gunga* initiates the slow *toque* (rhythm) of *angola* in *ostinato* with occasional ornamentation.

3. The Médio Enters:

The *berimbau médio*, inverting *gunga*'s sounds, initiates the *toque* of São Bento Pequeno (or "Inverso de Angola"),¹⁴ in *ostinato* with occasional ornamentation over the *gunga* rhythm.

4. The Viola Enters:

The *berimbau viola* initiates the *toque* of *angola* following the *gunga*'s melodic line with improvisational ornamentation over the *gunga* or *médio* rhythm.

5. The Rest of Bateria Instruments Enter:

After the *berimbaus*, the rest of the instruments enter in a specific order to complete the *bateria*: *pandeiros*, *agogô*, *reco-reco* and *atabaque*, with the rhythm of *angola* in *ostinato*.

6. The Players Enter the Roda:

Once all the instruments have established the rhythm, the lead singer shouts "Iê" to call for attention before initiating the *ladainha* (a solo song). The two players enter the circle from opposite sides and crouch at the feet of the *berimbaus*.

7. Singing Lead: The *Ladainha*:

The lead singer starts singing a solo, the *ladainha*. It could be a traditional narration of historical or legendary facts, or an improvised commentary giving

¹³ The reader will find detailed description of each instrument in the following chapters, but for immediate representation of the capoeira orchestra more familiar names the composition from left to right is: scraper, double bell, tambourine #1, three musical bows of different sizes, tambourine #2, and drum.

¹⁴ The *berimbau médio* inverts the order of the sounds of whatever the *berimbau gunga* plays, as the *toques* are named for the *gunga*, whenever the *gunga* "calls" for a *toque*, like in this case the *toque* of *angola*, the *berimbau médio* player knows what is the appropriate *toque* to accompany.

advice to the players. The players reflect on the lyrics and ask for protection in different ways—which could include drawing symbols on the floor—while collecting themselves in preparation for the game ahead.

8. Singing Call and Response: The *Chula*:

After the last line of the *ladainha*, when the leader sings the line “*Iê viva...*” all participants sing the chorus response “*Iê viva..., camará.*” Following the call and response structure, the leader sings similar lines about different elements (meu Deus, meu mestre, meu..., etc.) as an invocation. The audience responds mirroring the mentioned element in their response with the antecedent “*Iê*” and the consequent “*camará.*” Players may mimic with gestures the invocations made—i.e. raising their arms to the air at the mention of heaven or God, or signaling their mestre if he/she is present, along with other invocation signs.

9. Singing Call and Response: The *Corrido*:

After the *chula*, the lead singer initiates the *corrido*, a call and response where the verses called are fixed or improvised chronicling the game and the response line is always the same. The players then shake hands and signal to the center of the circle inviting each other to initiate the *jogo* (game).

10. First *Jogo*:

With the orchestra and singers fully engaged, the players move towards the center of the *roda* with lower movements alternating between attack and defense movements, or better, like a dance simulating a combat, where the head and legs are the principal weapons while the hands are used to distract the opponent and support the body’s weight. The players’ defense is to avoid the impact using maneuvers of evasion: “using an extraordinary repertoire of dodges, cartwheels, and other acrobatic movements, some of them inverted, the body turned upside down on the arms or head” (Downey 2005, 7). There is no body contact except for a head butt, sweep, trip, or kick to make the other player to lose stability and knock her or him to the floor. During the game there are moments of great drama, intensity and aesthetic sensitivity can bring the players to an impasse with ritualized movements—“the games within the game” (Lewis 1992)—or the *ginga*, the first movement of interplay nor attack or defense but the interstitial movement that can lead to any other movement all full of *malícia* (cunning).

11. Change of *Jogos* and Players:

At the call of the *berimbau*, the *dupla* (two players) return to the foot of the *berimbau* to crouch and start another bout or to the mestre’s invitation leave the space for other players.

The roda is a continuous event. The music will be a constant accompaniment to the movement during the entire performance, starting from a slow tempo to accelerate progressively over time while interchanging musicians in the bateria as needed to refresh them and keep the energy high for the game. There are interruptions on occasions that cause a restart from the beginning to complete the engagement process. As the capoeiristas believe that the malícia they learn in the game (the small roda), extrapolated to their everyday life (the big roda) “affects their emotional lives, social interactions and perceptions” (Downey 2005, 7), there is ground to experiment with the representation of a life dedicated to capoeira such as Mestre Cobra Mansa using the roda as narrative device. An outcome of the multi-dimensional characteristics of the capoeira angola performance is that needs to be studied through an inter-disciplinary approach.

At the Crossroad: The Intersection of Disciplines and Areas of Study

It is rare to find an individual as a major object of study in the ethnomusicological literature. More often, generalizations about cultural groups derive from relationships established in the field with individuals, but these individuals become invisible in, or at least are only a part of, narratives about their culture as a group.

In the only monograph dedicated to the subject of individual ethnomusicological studies, Jonathan Stock underlines the importance of looking closely at individuals and offers the challenge that biography “can be equally reflexive and [...] can communicate a strong sense of musical experience” (Stock 2001, 16). None of the five selected individual studies presented in Stock’s survey use the life history methodology even though it is a well established and highly developed form in anthropology from which ethnomusicology derives most of its methodological procedures. In a conventional

ethnography, the research is generalized to a broader group, a collective of individuals, with the objective of understanding their shared perspectives in their community and melding their individual worldviews to construct a cultural generalization. In a life history approach, the focus on the study of an individual allows us to pay close attention to cultural differences without “obscuring the enormous complexities of any given individual particular beliefs and values” (Caughey 2006, 8).

Despite the widely acknowledged theoretical importance of life histories within ethnomusicology, individual artists have been customarily relegated to one or two chapters in longer works or have been merely the subjects of articles. Some examples of these works included a collection of musical thinking in women (Koskoff 1988); essays on the use of life history, biographies and personal repertoire (Nettl 1983, 1984); arguments for the importance of individuals (Blacking 1989); investigation of the interaction of individuals with larger social perspectives (Slobin 1992); an analytic emphasis in individual practices (Turino 1993; Lord 2000); and pleas for the use of individual musicians as informants for the oral musical traditions (Shelemay & Jeffrey 1997).

Of special interest is a study by Juha Pentikäinen published in the late 70s about the life history—and world view—of an illiterate Kalerian singer, Marina Takalo. The author who intensively collected material during twelve years of fieldwork already was aware of issues of individual enculturation which he treated through the analysis of Marina’s musical repertoire. Pentikäinen offers a sharp critique of prior folklore studies when the research interest focused on the treatment of traditional texts, “primarily interested in the ‘lore’, whereas ‘folk’ has been more or less neglected or even ignored”

(Pentikäinen 1978, 13), illustrating the eagerness of folklorists to mend this research problem.

In a recent revision of Blacking's work for the twenty-first century there appeared a chapter entitled "Black Background: Life History and Migrant Women's Music in South Africa," which one could only hope was an example of the use of life history to study migrant women's music repertoires (James 2006). Disappointingly, the text never offers a hint of the methodology used in the process of creating the women's musical life histories. It assumes not only that life history is a technique widely known, but that it is often applied to studies of performance and does not need additional methodological disclosure.

However, several full-length studies of world music figures have recently emerged that focus on the interaction of an individual in their social context and provide a scholarly model for the present study of Mestre Cobra Mansa (Kartchner 1990; Vélez 2000; Danielson 1997; Veal 2000; Berkman 2003; Keister 2004). From these studies, we learn of the multiple cultural spaces that individual world music musicians occupy, and the intersections of local, national and global forces. We also learn how individual musicians creatively select, re-create, and renovate cultural practices from their heritage to construct complex mosaics that are personal and unique. As we follow them through history, a history of their making, we see their fragmented identities which cannot be described by generalities: a drummer, a singer, a member of a minority group, a spiritual leader, a legend, or a master in a musical tradition.

What can a life history approach tell us about a musician and performer relationship to his musical and performance tradition? Moreover, what can a life history

approach of this particular mestre tell us about his relationship with capoeira, his attraction—the calling—and dedication to its practice, the meaning that this practice has to him, how he develops the art form and transmits it in ways that relate to his life and experience with cultural traditions outside of capoeira?

This dissertation presents an in-depth study of Mestre Cobra Mansa’s life and explores the cultural dimensions that have influenced it, resulting in an analysis of his multicultural teaching skills and the integral role they play in his mastery. I follow the model proposed by Caughey (2006), which modifies several characteristics of traditional life history, specifically the assumption that the individual has one single culture. This modification is particularly helpful for ethnomusicology, thus, it helps in understanding individual musicians—tradition transmitters—in complex, multicultural societies. It does this through the analysis of their personal narratives and self-interpretations, exploring also how the cultural profile of an individual changes during his life span following “processes of inner cultural reconfiguration” (Kubik 1994, 21). As Nettl notes, “The literature of ethnomusicology overstresses the homogeneity of the world’s musics. But of course, even seemingly homogeneous societies are comprised of individuals, each contributing something essential to the whole” (Nettl 1984, 179). By showing that individuals are not homogeneous in their complexity, I seek to find a more textured close-up view of these societies. In the case of a mestre of capoeira, how do other kinds of cultural traditions Mestre Cobra Mansa engages with affect his life, and especially his commitment to capoeira and the specific ways he develops it?

From his early acculturation in the streets Mestre Cobra has a deep sense of scrapping, of using what is available to improvise—in Levi-Strauss (1966)

bricolage/bricoleur sense—not just his reality, but also his relationships. Conville (1997) applies this perspective to research on personal relationships, where the *bricoleur* actively works with what he finds, improvising creatively most of the time, and often making mistakes. But in Cobrinha’s life we see him grow in his leadership roles from *bricoleur* to a kind of social “engineer,” more appropriately an engaged activist for social change, a critical voice, who is able to create and develop from abstract—if intuitive—guidelines and is not “hesitant to use the power” that has come to him.¹⁵ “The process of improvisation that goes into composing a life [...] through memory as well as through everyday choices [...] seems to me the most essential to creative living” states Mary Catherine Bateson in her compound biographical account of five women’s lives “Composing a Life” (Bateson 1989). As we can see that improvisation operating in our lives for the events for which we do not have manual of instructions, it is necessary to reimagine that future for we do not know “which fragments of the past will prove to be relevant in the future” (Bateson 1989, 29), and so does Mestre Cobra Mansa in the process of self-inventing his survival and growth.

Being such an individual immersed in the world—from streets to universities—how do other kinds of social relationships outside capoeira affect the way Cobrinha plays his mestre’s role within capoeira, and how does his full time engagement with capoeira affect his other relationships? As Mestre Cobra crosses cultures inside and outside of his native Brazil, how do his personal (spiritual, moral, political and ethical) values move him to act in the world inside and outside of the capoeira tradition?

¹⁵ I am echoing early progressive curriculum theorist George S. Counts about the responsibility teachers have “under heavy social obligation” to protect and further the “common and abiding interests of the people” not “the interest of the moment or any special class” (Counts 1932, 29).

Secondly, Caughey advocates an interpretive methodology that results in not only a life history, but also two-person cultural ethnography. Beyond the classic model of ethnography, he proposes analysis in an introspective mode, not only to bring awareness to the ethnographer's own culture "in order to avoid blunders and misinterpretations" (Caughey 2006, 30), but also to shed light on the assumptions and patterns of his/her own cultural conditioning. Following Caughey, overlapping the study of mestre Cobrinha, I enter often into the conversation with a self-ethnography using my own musical experience as a site of investigation and situating the different cultures of influence in mutual perspective. Through this exercise, I hope to gain some mutual understanding across cultural boundaries and to examine how identities and social relationships are influenced by multiple situated cultural values.

An individual-centered ethnography clashes with a tendency to generalize in anthropology and by inheritance, in ethnomusicology, that has been the broad view of the societies or groups one studies as if they were homogeneously monocultural, even though the process of knowing these groups necessarily had to go through an ethnographic process of individual interaction with the researcher. In the final written rendition of these studies the disappearance of individuality gives as a result what Stock calls "cultural-average accounts" (Stock 2001, 7). Whereas, it is reasonable to see how an individual cannot be showcased as being representative of the culture as a whole, the contrary has been determined to be the norm of ethnographies. The accounts of cultural practices pretend to represent all individuals in the group without speaking about "the personal, the idiosyncratic, [...] the exceptional" (Nettl 1983, 9).

Life history methodology, widely used in folklore (and in musicology through musical biographies and autobiographies), has received yet another critique from the literary point of view. Aiming for objectivity, the mediator in the narratives of individuals often times departs from the text, a “ghost like” voice (Titon 1980, 286), even though it is by his or her intervention that the stories from the oral accounts are transcribed and edited. Given that these accounts do not include an analysis of the ethnographer, technically they cannot be considered complete ethnographies. In this sense, the location of the ethnographer with respect to the study and the subject, the self-ethnographic element, constitutes not only a valuable technique, but also should be a fundamental part of ethnographic methodology, a “genre requirement” (Caughey 2006, 88). In this case, as the study also gets closer to the performance that marks the direction and purpose of Mestre Cobrinha’s life, the representation in the written narrative also becomes more *performative* (the performance of capoeira in the form and structure of the roda). This facilitates developing a new technology that explores writing life histories in their cultural contexts with multiple texts (i.e. creating a text with different voices, images and sounds in continuous dialogue with each other as the jogos of capoeira).

In the following section I review some of the scholarly and popular works published about capoeira and discuss their scope and focus and how the application of this particular life history methodology to the study of performance is a model for new avenues of qualitative inquiry of the individual in ethnomusicology. I contend that my approach makes an innovative contribution to the field of studies of capoeira.

Capoeira in the Academic and Popular Literature

Although there have been some scholarly works and community produced studies published about capoeira in the last twenty years in Brazil and abroad, which have been increasing in number for the last five years, most of these works are related to generic descriptive aspects of this complex art form. The academic space dedicated to the discussion of its transmission—a central focus in my life history of Cobrinha—is very small (D’Aquino 1983, 85-90 and 144-7; Tigges 1990, 42-70). The two leaders of the principal styles of capoeira practiced today are briefly mentioned (Vidor de Sousa 2000; Downey 2005), and some attempts have been made to make their contributions (teaching materials, drawings, writings, etc.) more widely known to practitioners (Coutinho ND; Pastinha ND). Until 2005, none of the studies that discuss capoeira leadership provided more than an outline of facts and a brief summary of events that happened during their lifetimes (Itapuan 2006). With the publication of the most detailed historiographical study yet about capoeira, separate chapters are dedicated to each of the leaders, Bimba and Pastinha (Assunção 2005, 128-169).¹⁶ In my project, I am considering the central figure of a mestre as the principal agent of capoeira transmission. What are the roles of the mestre in the capoeira angola tradition, how do they change in contemporary settings? How do they relate with other recognized roles within the tradition? Furthermore, how does the mestre’s individuality affect change in the art form, both historically and in contemporary settings? In the following chapters, our truly trail markers as I name them, I share a discussion of how the life of a mestre of capoeira influenced his particular revisions of the art form.

¹⁶ Documentaries about Mestre Pastinha, *Pastinha Uma Vida pela Capoeira* (Muricy 1999) and more recently *Mestre Bimba: A Capoeira Iluminada*. Biscoito Fino (2008), are dedicated to the memory of the creators of the main contemporary styles of capoeira.

There has been made greater effort in the academic and community produced literature to describe the physical aspects of the game (Downey 2005). Sometimes written (in Portuguese) by a mestre (Oliveira Cruz 2003), the focus is on its meaning (Lewis 1992; Wilson 2001), the origins of the tradition in the controversial Brazilian dispute (Almeida 1986) versus African origins (Thompson 1987; Dossar 1994), its history (Head 2004; Assunção 2005; Taylor 2005), power and identity symbolism (D'Aquino 1983) and struggles of cultural resistance (Head 2004). The berimbau uses in and outside of the performance of capoeira (Galm 1997, 2004) also have been the focus, as well as the stylistic differences between the capoeira regional (Capoeira 2002, 2003) and capoeira angola genres (Rego 1968; Frigerio 1989). But in the research about the continuous practice necessary to master the art form, little attention has been devoted to studying how the mestres effectively preserve the tradition, attract new students, create opportunities of learning the art-form, and transmit its history, philosophy, social, cultural and community values (beyond music and movements). The lack of literature dedicated to the transmission aspects of capoeira makes my study relevant not only to the study of music and performance in general, but of specific importance to the community. As added value, opening the academic space for a mestre to tell his story in his own terms (as the ethnographer tells hers), seems of importance for the capoeira community—as several capoeiristas have stressed, and it gives an opportunity to “give voice” to other mestres¹⁷ who did not have the access and visibility that Mestre Cobrinha has enjoyed.

In the following section, I discuss an additional contribution to the field of capoeira studies and ethnomusicology: a mestre of capoeira as the expert teacher of all

¹⁷ Interview April 4, 2008

aspects of the performance in context of a special interest in the discipline of multicultural music education.

Beyond Knowing Music: Knowing People Making Music

Studies on transmission of traditional art forms in contemporary contexts need to discuss and reflect on the evolution of teaching and learning (Downey 2005, 58). As the context of transmission changes, so do the methodologies and strategies used by the nomadic masters of the tradition to reach out to new audiences. Because of my interest and commitment not only to ethnomusicology, but also to music education, and because I have been a music teacher for more than 30 years—a *mestre* in my own musical tradition—I believe that applying such an integrative approach to the study of the transmission of a musical culture like capoeira angola can provide models for other music teachers and ethnomusicologists alike. Such studies can be instructive for those seeking to expand their ability to provide multicultural and multidisciplinary artistic experiences for themselves and their students, especially as communities become increasingly diverse ethnically and culturally. Since the earlier efforts of music educators, like the Tanglewood Symposium in 1967, which advocated that “the music of other cultures” be included in the curriculum, several studies have asserted the need for multicultural models and curriculum content calling for the inclusion of transmission models used by insiders (Campbell 1991; Anderson 1991; Szego 2002; Reimer 2002). These studies insisted on the inclusion of experts from the tradition—as guest artists—in the classroom (Edwards 1994; Damm 2000).

Mestre Cobrinha epitomizes new models of teaching and organizing a contemporary community of music learners. As a visiting specialist or “mestre in

residence,” Cobrinha, using alternative English or Portuguese as vehicular languages, alternates his stays for long periods in different FICA groups with short periods of workshops in the Americas (US, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua and Costa Rica) and abroad (UK, France, Italy, Finland, Sweden, Russia and Japan),¹⁸ or he accepts invitations to participate in events of sister organizations. Their extended conviviality with the mestre opens the hosting space for wider discussion of historical, musical and physical aspects of the capoeira practice and for further involvement with the everyday aspects of the culture of origin such as conversational language. Food, storytelling and chronicles of other events that happen in the international scene also accompany the traveling mestre like the lute of a contemporary bard, even though in order to reach such widely separate audiences, many airplane flights and hours of commuting are required. While the geographical space may de facto change, the sensorial space has a continuity—the language, the food, the music, the training drills, the spaces of performance, the aesthetics of capoeira dwelling—all of which ease jetlag and any other minor inconveniences.¹⁹ When Mestre Cobrinha travels, he finds the space he creates from his vision for capoeira wherever he visits; a vision product “of growth and adaptation, not fixed but emergent” (Bateson 1989, 232).

The presence of the mestre increases a hosting group’s visibility, so that it becomes a more prominent venue for community events, fundraising efforts, performance

¹⁸ The degree of involvement with the umbrella organization FICA has diverse possibilities and legal implications like chapters, affiliates or study groups. See Marker 4 for a more detailed overview. Even when the workshops are hosted by other organizations not related with FICA, the support of Mestre Cobrinha opens new possibilities of collaboration for him and also other mestres and treinels from the organization.

¹⁹ This continuum of spaces applies also to the streets of any city and the “corporal” understanding of the *malícia* (cunning) in capoeira for people of low-income class and minorities (M. Cobra Mansa April 4, 2008).

opportunities, motivation and showcasing of improvement since prior visits, augmenting participation from neighboring groups and stimulating what I call “pulses of encounter” for the practitioners. As a model of collaboration, this practice of community building, of seeking to stimulate students with teachings from different mestres, shows a precocious business sense. Capoeira becomes an economic and cultural stimulant, not only through local networking, but also by weaving international connections. A traveling mestre such as Cobrinha keeps local students and seasoned practitioners involved in global educational and social justice projects.

In Brazil, Mestre Cobrinha has been developing the Kilombo Tenondé, a contemporary version of the independent communities of runaway slaves and indigenous people. Local schools participate in the activities at the capoeira center after school and in specific instructional programs (bamboo construction, permaculture, capoeira, visual arts, literacy, nutrition, health and language courses). This Brazilian activity has set an example for the local groups in the District of Columbia and Baltimore area, which were both created by Mestre Cobrinha. These local groups have organized fundraisers and outreach activities to youth programs such as “Mentoring Works 2,” a community organization formed to respond to the recent shootings of young people in the neighborhoods. Capoeira groups are moving into areas of social responsibility by holding regular classes at the FICA school, and providing programs to promote higher academic achievement (KIMA Charter School), on campuses (George Washington University). These local groups are also producing conferences (X International Women’s Conference in 2008) and workshops (Mestra Paulinha in June 2008) just as the capoeiristas who came

to the United States did capoeira angola demonstrations in 1990's as I will discuss in Markers Two and Three.

Precisely due to the complexity of capoeira and the multiple areas requiring mastery, as well as the many new contexts opened for its performance, I intend to explore the roles of the mestre in transmitting different sub-traditions within the multi-art form of capoeira. I cover how they change, adapt or translate in a globalized society.

My study not only contributes new knowledge concerning transmission practices in contemporary capoeira settings (including the implications for educators), but it also explores fieldwork as a participative encounter (Berliner 1978; Chernoff 1981; Rice 1994). I am learning as a musician while I observe as an ethnographer, paying attention to the methodologies of another music educator that has become a model for me in a multifaceted encounter space. When I observed Mestre Cobra Mansa teaching a group of teenaged students rhythms of *bloco-afro*, he disqualified his expertise and authority to teach music with an “I don't know music, because I'm not a musician, but I *know* [and he hit his chest with his open hand to emphasize], when the music is not right.” I explore what Mestre Cobrinha does not know about music, and how in spite of that he can teach capoeira and other Afro-Brazilian traditions like *maculelé* (a warrior dance) and *samba de roda*. There are some aspects, elements, and conceptual definitions of music he does feel competent to transmit, and others he does not. How can a mestre of capoeira *know* music in his body without being a musician? How we can understand Mestre Cobrinha's mastery through his musical/performative and instructional being—in other words, how can we access his epistemology of musicality?

Cobrinha's wide range of life experiences are important sources to analyze in order to understand his construction of what being musical is. My contribution consists of facilitating a dialog between our divergent musical cultures, languages and standpoints by putting my own understanding of musicality in perspective with respect to Mestre Cobrinha's teaching style. Learning to play the berimbau becomes a common space to negotiate our different ways of knowing music. In this foreign territory, I am a challenged novice; I experience not just how to perform, but what it means, the relationship of the new object with my performance body, the aural score, how that knowledge is going to be retained by my poor memory without scribbling visual clues, mnemotecnic devices that feel like cheating.

In instances where I cannot provide the reader with my personal experience of training in the capoeira movements, I intend to facilitate a dialog between scholars-practitioners of the art or capoeiristas' narratives, and images of selected movements so the reader can get as much of a first hand experience as possible. Since ethnomusicology has made little use of life history, and never of Caughey's modified life history methodology, for the first time in a close performative ethnographic style, my dialogic research represents an important methodological experiment in ethnomusicology.

Our knowledge of music needs to be situated within our knowledge of human beings, not just because music is a human act (Blacking 1973), but because understanding music happens through knowing particular people making music, and knowing music as a lived experience (Titon 1997). I propose that the reader accompany me as I track the winding trail of the snake; I suggest following the path that led Mestre Cobra to become an acknowledged cultural ambassador within the global capoeira angola

community. As a naturally curious and self-taught researcher, Cobrinha takes advantage of his travels and encounters along the way to pursue his own learning interests. I hope to shed some light on how he negotiates the transnationalism on his continuous teaching and learning trips, how the constant crossing of social and cultural borders adds to his teaching skills, and what all this means to the individual capoeirista/mestre's way of being in the world (Glick Schiller 1992; Clifford 1997; Garcia Canclini 2002). The same way Mestre Cobra Mansa travels to other cultures and the author travels to a life in capoeira and the learning of the berimbau, the readers can participate through the use of my phenomenological writing and create their own experience as I detail in the next section.

Applied Phenomeno-Ethnomusicology

My work is inspired on one hand by the research and writings in professional domains increasingly aware of the importance of “interpretive models that place human situatedness central and are based on the belief that we can best understand human beings from the experiential reality of their lifeworlds”²⁰ (van Manen 1990, xi). Although this is not a hermeneutic phenomenological study, I bring a phenomenological sensitivity (a lived account) to the interpretation of the experience of knowing capoeira by learning to play the berimbau and other instruments in the *bateria* (capoeira orchestra), which is one of my many vehicles for participating in the tradition. Sharing music as a way of understanding completes the many aspects of sharing that evolved in Mestre Cobrinha's collaboration with me over time. The mestre strengthened his relationship with academics and researchers as a capoeira consultant, but he also strengthened my learning through

²⁰ Husserl's *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) or “the world of the immediate experience” (Husserl 1970, 103-186).

our exchange of books, movies, stories, musical experiences, and expertise that contributed to the evolution of our relationship and to our mutual study and understanding of capoeira. This collaboration has deepened the scope of what an applied ethnomusicologist brings to the culture she studies.

Phenomenology on the other hand, has served to deepen my experience-sensitive understanding of Mestre Cobrinha's life as well as my own. Max van Manen identifies four existential life-world themes as a way to guide the reflection on the world lived and experienced in everyday relations and situations (van Manen 1990). I found in the study of a life in capoeira a parallel structure of meanings around these suggested life world topics²¹ of spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), temporality (lived time), and relationality (lived human relation) that van Manen names as "existentials" (ibid, 101). These themes helped to move forward my exploration of Mestre Cobra Mansa's life adding dimensions that could be identified and differentiated consistently, but not separated from each other, forming "the intricate unity which we call the lifeworld—our lived world" (ibid, 105). We see Cobrinha's lived world emerge through the narrative of his life experiences at the same time that it appears drawn in the performance of the roda, where all four existentials become essential threads to unravel its meaning. These four themes are indeed familiar dimensions, at the same time vehicle and avenues, for the readers' personal exploration of sameness and otherness.

Within the field of qualitative research, auto-ethnography has become widely known as a useful resource for the analysis of the self through lived experiences in context (Lave & Wenger 1991; Ellis & Bochner 2000). According to social theories of

²¹ Recognized as the fundamental structure of our lived worlds in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962).

learning (Wenger 1998), an individual's understanding of his worlds, knowledge, and skills continually changes as a result of their interaction. By allowing others' experiences to inspire critical self-reflection it is possible to learn the general from the particular as well as help readers understand how concrete details of a specific life convey meaning for a general way of life (Sparkes 2002). Autoethnographer Stacy Holman Jones in the introduction of her seminal text *Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political* asks the reader, "Please do not read it alone" and then adds "It does not act alone":

[...] A personal text can move writers and readers, subjects and objects, tellers and listeners into this space of dialogue, debate and change. It does not speak alone.

[...] It is meant for more than one voice, for more than personal release and discovery and for more than the pleasures of the text. It is not a text alone.

[...] It is an ensemble piece. It asks that you read it with other texts. It asks for a performance, one in which we might discover that our autoethnographic texts are not alone. It is a performance that asks how our personal accounts count. (Holman Jones 2005, 763-4)

This multi-dialogical intention, also a characteristic of capoeira—not meant to be played alone—becomes an essential aspect of the qualitative methodology. Individuals enter into contact and affect each other's lives, without knowing who else might be participating of this performative dialogue in the future and creating with their individual existential improvisations what Bateson calls "models of possibility" (Bateson 1989, 232).

Six years ago, in the first sessions where I showed Mestre Cobra my initial observations about his way of passing on the capoeira tradition, I questioned myself about what I could possibly add to the understanding of capoeira. At the time, he thought that my work "was good for capoeira" and we kept going. In the summer of 2007,

Cobrinha asked me to accompany him to the shooting of a documentary film. I was there to help the filmmaker ask pertinent questions of Cobrinha and also to enhance my research as a witness to outside interviews. In our conversation last fall, he suddenly realized I was a musician, and that I could help transcribe and analyze field recordings from a research trip to Angola. He proposed that we co-author an article comparing the berimbau rhythms in Africa and in Brazil for an academic publication and popular magazine. More recently, he has invited me to participate in a project accompanying him to a recording studio to help with the remix of a capoeira recording. The acknowledgment of our mutual expertise is not only a fruitful consequence of our friendship and growing trust over time, but also an indication of how we count on each other to form part of our mutual socio-cultural capital.

Belonging to the capoeira community, playing capoeira as he understands it, also opens the space for collaboration with other members of the community in diverse projects. My experiences varied from collaborating in a documentary to celebrate Mestre Cobra's 50th anniversary (and also my own) to the creation of an electronic archive of the women's representation in capoeira to the video documentation of classes and workshops, to passing on the tradition of weaving *caxixís* that I learned from Mestre Valmir, to training the DC group to re-design and maintain their website. My particular skills and expertise are sought to maintain the community's life and growth as other members have done in the past.

I understand ethnography as both a research methodology and as a writing strategy. I subtitle the next section on my methodology as "Weaving of Bits and Pieces" because the phenomenological experience spans the wide variety of my subject material.

The voices involved in my research methodology are made up of many elements, each contributing with a unique ability to focus on and present an aspect of the capoeira experience.

Methodology: The Weaving of Bits and Pieces

My research is built on a methodology of showing and telling, of internal reflection and questioning, of dialogical participant observation in the field defined as a “broad conceptual zone united by a chain of inquiry” (Kisliuk 1997), where different identities—student, researcher, musician, technologist—overlap (Chou Chiener 2002). I have not only had plenty of interaction during workshops, music classes, and in performance spaces like *rodas*, but also during other community activities like cleaning, cooking, workshops and holiday celebrations, participating in the spontaneity of the capoeira gatherings and as we have seen even becoming an asset as a translator, editor, graphic designer, multimedia developer and web designer—although my emphasis is in empowering the community by teaching its members to do the things I can do. I believe I belong to the capoeira family in a systemic way, as Serge Tisseron understands it (Maillard 2005), as defined by two complementary horizontal and vertical axes. The horizontal is populated by all the people that in a given moment may be in physical or virtual contact like the internet. Even in virtual contact, the human character defines the relationship. The vertical axis is represented by the ancestors and the genealogy integrating every human being in a relationship, like the mestre-student relationship in capoeira.

In these relationships “nobody can define herself only by her contemporaries or their ancestry. All of us need both” (Maillard 2005, 123). Connected already with their

ancestry in every roda as the capoeiristas initiate their performance with an invocation to the ancestors and *Orixás*, the new electronic communication technologies facilitate new ways of interaction and play to the extended capoeira family all over the globe. Not all of the relationships with my subject of study happen in close proximity. There has been a virtual roda²² played over the internet for several years now between capoeiristas who maintain contact though email. In their messages the members address each other or invite others into discussion by using capoeira terms. I also keep a mediated distance by exploring the capoeira community through the net, literature, electronic mailing lists, chats, instant messengers, etc., with little or no active interaction from me in their virtual space. This detached observation allows me to collect pieces of information from the public interactions Mestre Cobra has in these forums, and also to reflect on the interactions the community develops amongst its members. The multi-dialogical experimentation as this dissertation calls forth suggests another research questioning: how might the academic writing of a dissertation as the performance of a roda serve as model of ethnographic writing that supports the representation of a life history narrative in its cultural context in a manner respectful of the performative aspects of the tradition?

Through ethnographic writing I hope to “convey immediately experienced meaning” (Cooley 1997, 14) in a text that also includes Mestre Cobrinha’s story as one of the two main voices heard in this project, although as in capoeira, many voices are needed to interact with ours to hold up the energy of our play.

²² Open discussion group where threads often include references to the game to “invite to play” other participants and the debates take a roda like performative form in writing. Group hosted in <http://www.grupos.com.br/grupos/capoeira-cbc>. See also the bilingual collection of early postings in *Capoeir@ Internet*, published by the first moderator of the group Mestre Jerônimo Capoeira. 1999. Australia, Author’s edition.

Ethnography to me is a writing strategy not just a research methodology. What Cobrinha wants to write about himself comes from his telling. What I write about myself comes from my reflection on his narrative or the echoes that resonate with my own experiences. My presentation in this thesis in terms of layout design, includes his voice in the writing to showcase this collaborative effort and to let the reader experience first hand as much as possible our dialogic experiment. I am attempting to include Cobrinha's own narrative without destroying the spontaneity inherent in our original conversations during the transcription and editing process. Since we are having most of our oral communications in English, an alien language that we both learned in our adult lives, I feel the need to respect our creative use of that language. Therefore, I share the unique ways in which Cobrinha speaks and tells his stories without "translating" its words to standard, grammatically correct, English.

The vast majority of the conversations to produce this dissertation came from my one-on-one conversations with Mestre Cobrinha. The themes we talked about that populate the segments of the ethnography—the "trail markers"—emerged from his spontaneous participation in Caughey's methodological exercises (Caughey 2006) which were open-ended questions.²³ I let the flow of his memories and stories guide the conversations. We would only arrive at concrete details like names and dates over time. On occasion, the Mestre invited me to interview him along with other capoeiristas, or suggested other people to talk with like when he introduced me to Isabel Green. In the sections I have developed highlighting the community participation such as the GCAP²⁴

²³ Caughey proposes an exercise to approach the initial questioning of the life history research partner called *The Chapters of a Life* (Caughey 2007, 29). The staging of his life shown in this dissertation has been based on that early exercise along with the themes and stories that illustrated his remembrances.

²⁴ Grupo Capoeira Angola Pelourinho

involvement (Marker Three), the creation of the FICA national organization (Marker Four), or the transformation of an architecture curriculum through capoeira (Marker Five), I have invited other select people to enter in this roda. For each chapter, there is a special guest interviewee—to whom I had access—who provided insights on the timeframe in Cobra's life that the segment covers. My intention was to glean from the guest some personal memories about the time they met or interacted with Cobrinha in the past. I was rewarded with a deeper understanding of how capoeira had also affected and changed their lives.

My dialogical experiment occurs in a negotiated, foreign space where the English language occasionally brushes into traces of Portuguese, the language of capoeira, and Spanish, the language of my early musical apprenticeship. Some conversations occurred with my guests speaking only Portuguese and me trying to squeeze out my brightest *Portuñol*.²⁵ The reader will notice how, once poured into this writing dimension, we all suddenly become grammatically correct English speakers—seeming much more articulate than in our original oral interchanges, but sadly without all the noisy bursts of laughing and histrionic voice imitations—just an echo of what I hear in my audio recordings. Early on, during the first stages of designing my research methodology, I renounced the standard practice of transcribing all of my interviews and working from the transcriptions. I did an intense careful transcription of my first video interview with Cobrinha in January 2001 in Bahia. The audio was terrible and I saw how difficult it was to capture what Cobrinha meant from an exact transcription of what he said. The transcript did not capture how he was saying it and what his body language did when he

²⁵ An informal term for the mixture of Portuguese and Español

said it. When I read his words in transcription, I felt I missed him, so I inserted screenshots of his face to bring meaning to the paragraph. It was probably my first attempt to include visual imagery as a narrative device. Looking for a solution, I explored the computer analysis content programs in search of a tool to support my qualitative research respecting the idiosyncrasy of the culture. After some experimentation, I decided to use software²⁶ to archive, index and annotate our conversations in audio files without losing the orality/aurality of our interchanges. Since the capoeira tradition had been orally transmitted (“I carry it through my breath” as Mestre Cobrinha says) I thought it was a pertinent measure. The technology allowed me to keep track of all the interview material and at the same time replay the conversations, whenever I needed to “hear” him talking about something. I could also relive my experience at the time of the telling. When listening to his voice, I could be at two places and times at once and I discovered I only needed to “freeze in text” the parts I needed to quote, or to be more precise, to let the readers “hear” the mestre’s telling for themselves.

As “every culture must be seen in its own terms” (Hall in Collier 1986, xvii) I believe it also needs to be heard in its own terms as well. I resolved the need to convey the orality of our conversations by including excerpts of our dialogs, editing when necessary for clarity, but respecting our lively interchange as much as possible. To give the readers a chance to “hear” Cobrinha’s voice, in the first instance that he appears in the text (page 65), I have transcribed the sound of Mestre’s accented second language. Going against his initial political decision not to learn English, he learned to speak it over time. He did it where he does most of his learning: in the streets and by talking to people, conquering his resistance to speaking English out of a need to communicate and to talk

²⁶ *Annotape* v. 2.0.8 ©Rosehill Software Ltd 1999-2003, designed by Chris O’Brien and Stephen Jackson.

about capoeira. In this first instance, I have included the revised version of a quote to give the readers a more accurate sense of how Cobrinha sounds and what kind of editing criteria I am using to help them follow his interventions. The quotes, in the same size as the principal text, differentiated by their indentation and spacing, are an integral part of the ethnographical narrative. These quotes, unless otherwise noted, are all from Mestre Cobra Mansa.

I use an array of writing strategies to convey cultural meanings in the content as in the form. Using literary devices such as poetry, dialogs, scenes, interstitial quotes, song lyrics and what I call *real time performance texts*,²⁷ I intend to break expected flows of thought and narration by adding in my presentation on the page performative and symbolic elements of capoeira and of the process of inquiry itself. If there is a predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form, as Jerome Bruner believes, participation in the symbolic systems of the culture of the persons going through these experiences is a requirement to comprehend them. “The very shape of our lives—the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds—is understandable to ourselves and to others only by virtue of those cultural systems of interpretation” (Bruner 1990, 33).

There are subtle ways to convey the non-linear aspects of the narrative when some time jumps are necessary. For example, I walk the reader through the growth of

²⁷ A real time performance text is a narrative where the musical elements of the performance appear among others in real time, in a hoquetus—both medieval and African—style, in between the phenomenological description of the event where the performance occurs. The two pieces—*Ludic Interlude* about my first African drumming experience and the *Coda Roda* about my initiation to movement in a roda of capoeira—that open and close this dissertation, are examples of this genre. As much as I would like to claim the originality of this writing technique, and probably it is original, I would never have attempt something similar without having witnessed the work of Bobby McFerrin in El Palau de la Musica in Barcelona in the fall of 1984. His rendition of the Beatles’ *Blackbird* or Pachelbel’s *Cannon in D Major* that night lies at the foundation of my attempts to convey in a solo textual performance the polyrhythm voices of African drumming or the capoeira angola jogo.

Cobrinha from his childhood as Cinézio to his maturity as Mestre Cobra Mansa. I use his different names as a device to convey this diachronic journey through different stages of his identity construction. In the present, particularly in these simultaneous readings of different points in time, I use the prefix “Mestre” before any variation of his name.

Whereas when I refer to his early years before he started to be fluent in capoeira and hence acquired a new identity marker, I identify him as Cinézio or in later years, as Cobra Mansa or Cobrinha, his early names in capoeira. There is a forward movement dimension in the naming, based on his developing expertise, that also exists in time. This particular technique helps me to imbue a name, a “nickname” as Mestre Cobra says, with a well of meaning, more evident through the different chapters/stages of Cobrinha’s life history narrative(s). For the reader, there is a chance to become somehow familiar with Mestre Cobra Mansa through the process:

The job of ethnography, or one of them anyway, is indeed to provide, like arts and history, narratives and scenario to refocus our attention; not however, ones that render us acceptable to ourselves by representing others as gathered into worlds we don’t want and can’t arrive at, but ones which make us visible to ourselves by representing us and everyone else as cast into the midst of a world full of irremovable strangenesses we can’t keep clear of. (Geertz 1986, 120)

Even though there is an “irremovable strangeness” in capoeira, several usages of unfamiliar language may also seem strange to the readers, without the privilege of getting familiar with Cobrinha’s culture(s) over seven years. In my own process, I have had many chances to notice the differences between our respective experiences as well as sparkling threads of similarity. By giving the readers a chance to “imagine” their differences from Cobra’s experiences, not by making them up, but by making them evident, the “science of which we all have need” (Geertz 1986, 120), I intend to stress the

importance of advancing the technology of writing for future life history narratives and studies of performance *in* culture. To this end I am structuring the main elements of this dissertation thesis as if it were part of a capoeira angola roda.

The Dissertation as a Roda of Capoeira

Several issues of representation have been of concern early on in the process of writing a Mestre of Capoeira life history. I wanted not just to respect the oral tradition where the transmission of the art form occurs, but I also wanted to maximize the opportunities to relate text to person, to culture, and to the performative aspects of capoeira. In order to give the reader as much as possible the experience of being immersed in a roda, the main capoeira performance, I have structured this dissertation as a roda. Following the parameters and conventional distribution of materials and investigation results that academia expects of such a research exercise, I have recognized some parallels between what a scholar should include in her doctoral thesis and the elements of a roda of capoeira.

In the dissertation form, there is an introductory space for an abstract with the main ideas of the subject, a list of organized materials like a map, an expression of gratitude for the support, funding and guidance received by the candidate that can be found in the index and acknowledgments sections. Similarly, in the roda there is preparation of the space, gathering of the participants, changing clothes, assembling the instruments, warming up the bodies, setting up benches for the bateria members and the circle of participants sitting cross-legged in the floor in front of the capoeira orchestra.

After this introduction, one expects to find a section with the review of pertinent literature locating the researcher, the study, preceding studies, pertinence or advancement

that the study brings to the field of expertise and presenting the methodology. Likewise, in the roda, once the berimbau *gunga* strikes the first call in the angola rhythm, and the first pair of players crouch at the feet of the berimbau in respectful and concentrated manner, the first solo chant, the *ladainha*, invokes the ancestors, paying homage to the elder mestres or capoeira heroes, and asking the protection of the Orixás before entering the game. With the *chula* (call and response) the exhortation to capoeira and to “my mestre who taught me,” opens the space for the players to start the first *jogo* (game). As accompaniment, the *corridos* (call and response) will be maintained during the whole roda, being often improvised to chronicle the game, give advice or mock the players.

Following the dissertation structure, the next section is dedicated to exposing the findings of the research project through different chapters/trail markers. Correspondingly, during the roda, especially when a mestre is playing, he is expected to invite different players to play in a series of jogos, sometimes with experienced players or visiting mestres, or with beginners. “If the music is good, I can go for two hours” says Mestre Cobra²⁸ motivating his students to play any instrument in the roda with full energy. Similarly, I invite other capoeiristas to our jogos, where the capoeiristas can narrate their experiences with the movements (Marker One) or the guests before mentioned are invited to participate in each segment. The identity of these players are dutifully noted in the direct quotes from our conversations. After all, one cannot play capoeira by oneself and the real dimension of our skill only appears when playing it with—not against—another’s. To avoid the decline in the energy of the roda (music and singing) the bateria players alternate turns at playing different instruments. Accordingly, the readers will have

²⁸ Teaching discussion on March 9, 2008 after a special 7am class during the 10th International Women’s Conference in Washington DC.

the experience of going through all the bateria instruments, one in each chapter, following its order of appearance in the roda. In these small organological episodes, the readers will have the chance to explore details of their role, characteristics and hierarchical symbolism in the bateria.

Finally, the last chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the conclusions of the study and to open the subject to suggest future research. In the same way, even though every jogo has its own conclusion with the players shaking hands or hugging each other, the end of the roda, specially on specific significant events, marks the transition to another finale in a further festive manner with more percussive accompaniment at the rhythm of *samba de roda* and everybody getting up and dancing collectively.

Adhering to this parallel structure, the reader can consider this prologue as an introduction to the theoretical framework and methods that include life history, ethnomusicology, capoeira studies and education resources related to the ethnographic process I propose. As in the roda, I pay homage to the scholars before me who guide my methodology and analysis of Mestre Cobra's life history. Markers One to Five are segments relating significant periods in his life until the present day, and like the jogos, show the progress of how he played the game of life over time.

The epilogue closes the performance by reflecting on the conclusions of the study and outlining the new avenues for further research and experimentation that my research exercise opens up. The capoeiristas finish a performance by opening new possibilities of celebration, never ending a training session without sitting in the circle for further discussion and questioning.

Completing the blueprint of the architectural design, my two real time performance texts sandwiching the thesis-roda are the starting and closing points of a circle, since no other shape could be a better container for anything to do with capoeira. The journey between the initial *Ludic*²⁹ *Prelude* to the *Coda Roda* symbolize the personal, intentional walk of the Ph.D. candidate, and the heroic journey of the capoeirista, towards and away from their performative spaces—the dissertation, the roda—and their journeys of transformation through this performance. A music teacher becoming a seasoned ethnomusicologist, then a Doctor, receives the maximum honor and recognition in her scholarly career. A capoeira player being recognized as a Mestre of the tradition, then takes the tradition to the next level, returning home “to help transform the kingdom”—the quilombo—with his gift (Pearson 1991, 1). Likewise, in an intentional invitation to the participation of the readers in this experiment, I hope a similar transformative process will compel them to reflect on their personal life-excursion through the reading.

A three dimensional image of Mestre Cobrinha, always in movement, forms along axes of time, place and circumstances. The five divisions of his life story as I tell it here come from existential turning points where some kind of crisis would compel Mestre Cobrinha to move forward, change spaces, start new projects. I discovered early on that five different cities, home places were “we can be who we are” (van Manen 1997, 102) were also central points where significant learning and vital processes that shaped and delimited these periods occurred. Consequently, each jogo occurs in a different city. However, as two additional (or more) axis are needed to adequately portray a life in

²⁹ Derived from the Latin *ludus* (play) and means literally playful, referring to any philosophy where play is the prime purpose of life.

capoeira—adding two (or more) dimensions to this cultural holo-bio-graphy³⁰—at the same time, each chapter includes sound and movement (both occurring and experienced in the body) pertinent to Mestre Cobrinha’s life. Once I decided to insert these elements as a way to add layers of capoeira meaning to the narrative, I presented the idea to Mestre Cobrinha. It did not surprise me that he would embrace the challenge of looking at things “my way,” at the end, it was a correct representation after understanding the culture’s terms, but I was ecstatic to see his immediate response. The readers will have a chance to read how Mestre Cobra Mansa inserts himself in the research partnership mindset in Marker Three (pages 151-180).

Entering into my theoretical framework and changing the capoeira moves and rhythms from one chapter to another, Cobrinha talked very comfortably about the adequacy of one movement over another for each timeframe because of that movement’s symbolic meaning. For instance, when I suggested the movement *Armada* (armed) for his time in Belo Horizonte, the subject of my Marker Two where he enrolled in the “army”, he quickly dismissed the movement as inappropriate: “For me it is going to be *negativa*, because that is a movement more useful in any kind of situation. Armada is attacking too much and at this time in my life I was attacking nobody. If *we are going to do it this way*, it would be even better to use *rolê* (roll), because I was just rolling away from here to there, from all these situations in my life.” As we were progressing through the different chapters, the rhythms and the appropriate movements would fall organically into place and I got immense relief when he confirmed, “I never thought about these analogies, but they fit very nicely and the way you divide it, reflects my life very much.”

³⁰ A biography—written life—in the holistic sense (holo, from the Greek *holos*) by including elements of the capoeira performance

I deeply regret that no award is granted to my research partner in this doctoral study, because the intellectual growth and openness, patience even, that Mestre Cobra Mansa has shown during his participation in this research process has been exemplary. To me, it has been a stimulus to further engage in a respectful way in the writing of the capoeira angola tradition.

Taking into account that reading a text is a linear process, I have intersected the corresponding *toque* (the rhythmical organization of the berimbau in the bateria), presented as an accompaniment of each jogo. As there is an increase in expertise, energy and speed required to perform in the circle with each particular rhythm, I intend to convey the accumulative sum of experiences and socio-cultural influences over time in a crescendo of understanding. With the same spirit, the instruments of the bateria appear in each chapter following the same hierarchical order of insertion in the roda as the micro-organological episodes mentioned above, to help the readers understand their role in the ensemble and the playing technique. In the same fashion, augmenting the chances of different narrative techniques in each segment, I present a signature movement that is an emblematic representation of what the relevant period meant in Cobrinha's life, in a symbolic interaction *à la capoeira*. In order to do so, specific methods of using visual ethnography will be required as I detail in the following section.

The Visual Text: Reading the Sound and Movement of Capoeira

I am integrating in the text the songs of capoeira in their original language providing also their English translation. In some cases, I also include a transcription of the melody, although neither the melody nor the lyrics are fixed but can change every time the song is performed in context. Mestre Cobrinha has begun to compose original

songs only in recent years.³¹ Even though renditions of the songs he has improvised in recording sessions have been fixed by way of CDs and are available for other people to be learned and memorized, only the acceptance of the songs, by “being sung” in the *roda* would eventually place them in the category of proper capoeira repertoire. Reading the lyrics of the *ladainha* (soloist introductory song) “*Velha Companheira*” (“Old Companion”) dedicated to capoeira, fragmented here and there, the reader will have the chance to see how Cobrinha’s lyricism depicts his own relationship with the tradition over a lifetime of intense dedication to the art. In this fashion, as road sign quotes, I include only songs produced by Mestre Cobra.

Lyrics are improvised³² during the *jogo* because they carry contextual messages about the game as special berimbau “calls” also convey information or signals addressed to the players. Cobrinha teaches his students how to improvise, to prepare them for trips to Brazil to participate in the international encounters—“to be prepared in case they see themselves in a situation.”³³ I use the lyrics of these songs, as well as pieces of emails, fragments of our recorded conversations, or notes from my field journal, as contextual quotes for the ethnographic text.

There are rare occasions when the capoeira school is quiet. When students are training, there is always capoeira music on the boom box. If they are not training, or when they get to their class early, the capoeiristas may be sitting in the media corner,

³¹ In the spring of 2003 he told me he was “testing with the group” his first composed song, *Mamãe Me Mandou Dizer* (My Mother Told Me), a corrido included in the companion DVD.

³² I am using improvisation as “compositional versatility” (Qureshi 2007, 2) since the comments to the game often are quotes from traditional songs with hidden meaning; i.e. *a bananeira caiu* (the banana tree fell) when a player fell and touches the ground, hence “loosing” the game.

³³ IX Annual International Capoeira Angola Encounter “Actions and Reflections in Education”. July 17-20, 2003. Sarzedo, Minas Gerais, Brazil. In this seminal encounter, US and Brazilian advanced students were promoted to Treinel and Contra-Mestre Valmir was recognized as a Mestre.

watching videos of old games and workshops from the archives. I wanted to make capoeira music omnipresent for the reader also. The children of capoeira, the babies born from students, hang out in everybody's arms when their parents are training, their first words are "tum tum tum"³⁴ the atabaque rhythm, or instead of saying "mum" or "dad" they utter a capoeira corrido.³⁵ The additional tracks on the companion DVD will illustrate more efficiently the aural and visual aspects of the performance, but I could not conceive the idea of talking about a life dedicated to capoeira, lived in capoeira, without representing it *in* capoeira.

In my search for meaningful ways to introduce (to the community and to myself) the representation of sound in an oral/aural tradition, and sometimes its embodiment, I opt to do it onomatopoeically and graphically, looking for a descriptive form of representation. The first strategy is a transcription of the rhythms as they are taught in the oral tradition. I transcribe them using syllables the mestre sings to differentiate between one rhythm and another, or to illustrate a polyrhythmic combination; the second one is a graphic notation that I needed to develop in order to understand and represent not just the sound, but the necessary technique to produce the sound in the instrument. The first one can be "heard" and understood by any outsider, without music notation knowledge, given that one can intuitively follow the capitalization, emphasis and spaces to make a rhythmic sounding phrase. Mestre Cobra repeatedly states his lack of musical knowledge, and as much as he insists, I manage ways to find his knowledge embedded in his body³⁶, as

³⁴ Treinel Andrea talking about her son Adrian in *Caxixi* num 5, p17.

³⁵ Isabel de Sousa Green talking about her son Makindé (second of M. Cobra Mansa's children), singing in *Caxixi* num 3, p 5. The corrido I learn later, was *Sim Sim, Sim, Não Não Não* (Yes Yes Yes, No No No).

³⁶ For a different discussion of embedding history and lineage in the capoeira body along with African-ness and mastery see Stephens & Delamont article on capoeira—regional—bodies as signs (Stephens & Delamont 2006, 109-22).

when he touches his chest to stress what he knows. The readers will find images of how he plays an invisible berimbau when singing the rhythm without the instrument. I have tried to figure out the movement of his feet follow an internal beat that does not necessarily fall into a steady beat mark and perceived how he must *know* music that follows different beat patterns, other signals of continuity. He has confessed deafness from the right ear from a repeated infection years ago, but if “anything in the bateria is out” he hears it, “I don’t know how, but I get it as clear as if I was hearing.” What I aim to represent here is the myriad of ways of knowing music I have observed during my fieldwork in capoeira.

The representation of music through narrative needs to come alive in the sound of the text itself as Ursula Le Guin proposes:

Telling the story is a matter of getting the beat –of becoming the rhythm, as the dancer becomes the dance. And reading is the same process, only far easier, not jading: because instead of having to discover the rhythm beat by beat, you can let yourself follow it, be taken over by it, you can let the dance dance you. [...] What the writer has to do is listen for that beat, hear it, keep to it, not let anything interfere with it. Then the reader will hear it too, and be carried by it. (Le Guin, 2004, p. 180-183, emphasis in the original)

As a writer who has heard the beat of capoeira, I wanted to facilitate the experience of the reader carried by the rhythm and movement in the roda without interference. I intend to let the ethnographic text become the context for the intersection of texts (visual, written, sung, told, thought, journaled, emailed, blogged, and chatted), as the roda is the context for the performance of capoeira and both, text and roda, vessels of expression of Mestre Cobrinha’s life history. The collage that includes additional written sources as quotes, scenes, stories, anecdotes, dialogs, emails, journal entries, poems, capoeira lyrics, etc. would be incomplete without images and sound. Mestre Cobra is a

natural storyteller; he speaks with his body, imitates voices and personifies characters while explaining a story. He moves, sings and plays in the roda and he travels the world. As most of his life occurs in the context of capoeira, it would not be accurate to present him without bringing the movement and sound of capoeira alive in the narrative. Some sort of visual dialogue is not just desirable, but necessary to tell Cobra's story, because much of his persona relates to his passion for photography. Luckily for researchers, his vast archived collection of images and his generosity to share them, makes it possible to connect the past that he has witnessed with the present he has created. His identity as a photographer is tied up with images and visual documentation of the contemporary history of capoeira Angola. As I write, I re-live the experience of our conversations. I want to offer the reader the opportunity to try the same exercise of engagement by selecting sounds and movements from the tradition that can also depict another dimension of who Mestre Cobra Mansa is in his own cultural context.

Finding the right levels of involvement eases the possibility for participation:

Engagement must never overwhelm disengagement, and disengagement must never undercut engagement. Critical involvement requires de-cultivation of both the distance the insider can never maintain and the closeness the outsider can never enjoy. Never inside nor outside, the imagologist remains forever marginal. (Taylor & Saarinen 1994, Telepolitics 11)

The reader, following the leadership of the innovative philosophers and media interventionists Taylor and Saarinen, occupies the in-between space, not a total outsider for he assists in the unveiling of Cobra's life in the context of sounds and dynamic images of capoeira, but also not an insider, who has shared many games and milestones with him in conversation as the author has. I use the "energetics of image" (Taylor & Saarinen 1994, Philosophy 6) to sort the difficulties of rendering a multidimensional

portrait of a performer with the constraints of printed text in a linear sequential mode. In addition to the use of photographs, I explore the possibilities of “visual and spoken knowledge of video to become part of ethnographic representation” (Pink 2001, 151). In this case, video has been a tool to document specific events or interviews, and at the same time, it has been a key methodology to understand how the production of knowledge occurred. In this way, I use still frames “to introduce critical representations that express ideas and experiences in ways written words cannot” (Pink 2001, 135).

Rejecting the traditional dualistic way of thinking about photographs and text as in the image/caption model, I deliberately have not written captions for the photographs, but when an image is a map of tuning possibilities that looks like a chart, or a performance ritual map, it will be identified by its title. The readers can find out details of authors and artists, context and circumstances by consulting the “Capoeira Moments” section in the annexes section. Further, the text that contextualizes the image is not intended to function as the valued term, subordinating the image to the role of illustration. I wanted to engage the reader in further participation by avoiding the elimination of “all the potential narrative frames but one, the depicted content” that would have occurred by including any kind of captioning (Barnhurst 1996, 91). Instead, I wanted the visual and written text to perform together as a system of cultural representation, a *jogo* inside a *jogo*. Sometimes, there is a powerful message even in the absence of pictures. For instance, there is not a picture of Cinézio before he was fourteen; looking at a picture of Cobrinha playing capoeira with his three-year-old son Makindé in the dirt is all I have left to imagine a little boy in the *favelas* (shantytowns) of Rio de Janeiro. The very small—I thought—handful of shots of my early years makes me aware of my privileged

childhood, the preservation of a baby picture taken for granted. Similarly, I anticipate the readers engaging with the text to make their own connections.

The serial still frames extracted from the video promote a particular sense of movement. In some cases, in an anticipated learning experience for the reader unfamiliar with the performance of capoeira, they have been laid out as movement sequences, like the *ginga* movement in Marker One, to give an opportunity to imagine the spatial activity in slow motion—as the game is at this stage. I hope that as the readers advance in their understanding through the periods of Mestre Cobra’s life, so will their visual literacy of the game, as I am inviting their participation in the dialogue by inserting the images in unexpected sequences, textures and metaphors, textually and culturally spilling into one another, constituting elements of surprise as they are in the capoeira game. In the jogo, I am playing with the readers; I want to “get them,” to surprise them, so they can also experience some of the readiness that is expected of a good capoeirista to be attentive to the details, never taking their glance off the movements of their partner. By Chapter Three, moves are conveyed in a single frame, the movement coming out the background still anchored in its original performative context, but reaching to stand out. The manipulated images draw attention to the clear lines of the structured movement system³⁷ so the reader can also recognize the forms, the names, the meanings in a quick snapshot and still “see” and recognize the action, the full range motion, conveying in the visual texts the kinetic aspects of the game.

³⁷ Professor Adrienne Kaeppler’s concept of a structured movement system to analyze physical movements instead of *dance* fits much better with the kinetics aspect of the capoeira game. An assignment in one of her seminars gave me the chance to test the analysis technique and to evaluate the methodology with Mestre Cobrinha. (Kaepler 1985)

In addition to the photographs, I include graphic representations of sound, also visual texts, when opportune in the narrative and several audiovisual materials in a companion DVD as a multimedia annex to the written part of my dissertation. The insertion of the music and movement has been designed to be respectful of how capoeira operates in the sonic and kinetic worlds. While the music is expected to appear following a linear sequence, a drone that occupies the background soundtrack of the reading, the movements seek to catch the opponent unprepared. Even though the moves are often learned in sequences of attack and defense series “like speaking sentences” (Perlman & Greenblatt 1981, 169 in Berliner 1994, 794), they are improvised in the real jogo, similarly to mastering a language and having a conversation. Here, I try to convey these linear/non-linear characteristics of sound and movement by trying to surprise the reader with the different representations of the movement I explained above, whereas the rhythms come predictably and orderly sequenced. My dream would be to develop a veritable electronic text, in which hypertext and contextual multimedia would serve as a vehicle for such a multi-sensorial appreciation of Mestre Cobra’s life in/for capoeira by the reader. Even more, following Cobrinha’ desire for me to “talk with the others do a journalistic investigation, ok?” to get both sides of a story of conflict, I would open the multimedia roda to the participation of other people wanting to contribute with stories, anecdotes, comments on our narratives, being a truly participatory-performative text. None of the sharing would have been possible without the development of trust between the research partners, as I explain next.

Fruits of the Fieldwork Experience: A New Family Sense

Over the course of my seven years of fieldwork, I have mentioned how I developed an excellent rapport with the local capoeira angola community and with Mestre Cobrinha in particular, both in Washington DC and in his home of Coutos neighborhood (state of Bahia, Brazil). The relationship has evolved precisely due to the fieldwork involvement in a progressive manner. I first met Cobrinha in Brazil in 2000 while researching Afro-Brazilian musical traditions for an independent project in Spain. At the time, for him, I was a music teacher. From the beginning, our relationship has been defined by a supportive collaboration through diverse coursework projects on his part, but also through several community projects of mine. Besides being involved as an apprentice of Mestre Cobrinha in learning to play the berimbau, a central percussion instrument in the performance of Capoeira, I have also worked with group members to write a grant to preserve the video documentation of their media archives. From the documentation of performances and events over the years, I edited digital video excerpts so Mestre Cobra could use them in his classes and lectures. The readers will find other examples of engagement with the capoeira community and Mestre Cobrinha in the following chapters, but as a scholar, my joy is to continue to contribute to the interchange of experiences and personal connections. I have received much from the generosity of the FICA-DC group, and the climax for me was my first opportunity to participate in an encounter of angoleiras. The 10th Capoeira Angola Women's Conference has opened the doors to what is just the beginning of a much stronger connection over time and commitment, full of possibilities and personal enrichment and growth. Seeing first hand the relationships that strengthened during days of shared sweat and laughter, song and

movement, I have come to understand something anew. By belonging to the capoeira family, one could be traveling all around the world from one capoeira group to the next and only would need one passport: “I am a student of Mestre Cobra Mansa” and one would feel like arriving home. There are limitations to the belonging, sometimes internalized as otherness. My experience with gender discrimination brings an area of reflection on diversity and inclusion that created empathy with Cobrinha’s personal struggle at the intersection of race, gender, and class.

Personal Journey on Race, Class, and Gender Discrimination

In an unexpected turn of events, last March during the 10th FICA International Women’s Conference hosted by the DC group, Mestre Cobrinha surprised me with the invaluable gift of inviting me to play a jogo with him in the roda for my birthday, accompanied by the “Parabéns pra você” (happy birthday) sung... À la capoeira style! Even though I participate in the bateria playing instruments or in the circle singing the songs, I have never trained in the movement and physical aspects of the performance, which I have always considered beyond my capability. However, Mestre Cobra Mansa used a public forum like the roda in an international event, to include me in the performance and to acknowledge and praise the many ways one can participate and support capoeira. I felt honored beyond words, and in the *Coda Roda* piece that closes this dissertation, the reader can follow some of my journal thoughts about that landmark experience.

That day of my initiation inside the roda, I realized how much I had overcome my hesitation and insecurities in selecting an Afro-centric genre to do my fieldwork. Being from Spain, historically a place of both tolerance (Al-Andalus culture) and despicable

fanaticism (i.e. the Inquisition, expulsion of Jews and Muslims) limited my experience in many different ways. Growing up in a reactionary dictatorship that repressed differences (prohibiting the use of vernacular languages in the peripheral regions) and decided what was appropriate to learn from our common past (manipulating our history books by adding the myth of the re-conquest) and about the external world, I did not have much chance to be exposed to cultural differences. I started the struggle to claim the spaces where I found my “missing pieces” in music, my first literate language. When I was seventeen, I claimed jazz—considered “negro music” by my professors—risking ostracism by the conservatory establishment by performing publicly, side by side, a Chopin waltz and a Scott Joplin concert waltz, *Bethena*. My piano professor let me know in an icy remark which one was music, and which one was not and was not sanctioned to be played while I was her student. Luckily for me, I decided to save her further grievances and shame by changing piano professors.

Similarly, I challenged gender limitations and class prejudices when I joined a Mariachi band and cross-dressed as a man to avoid discrimination from the all male band members. I left behind a future as a Conservatory professor by going on tour by bus and living in close proximity with twelve men, which was not considered “appropriate” for a middle class young woman. When I moved to Barcelona, I thought that I would find acceptance and freedom of expression by leaving behind the western—so called—”classical music” world, to embrace the jazz and modern music genres. I found myself being the only woman among the professional instrumentalists on stage, having to prove myself constantly worthy of their approval. I could read and write music, and was pretty good at it while I had to struggle to re-connect with my creativity and develop my ability

to improvise. I was banned from having any further contracts or opportunities to work in TV stations because I was a woman and “the camera loved me” as the producer explained to me after my first contract. Because I could be recognized by the audience as I was the only woman performer, I could not work anymore, while my fellow male band members who were less noticeable could get contracts to play week after week. There were no gigs for musicians to perform, but there were for actors parodying background musicians of lip synching stars. Six months after I moved to Catalonia, I was already speaking Catalan, which to me was showing a sign of respect and appreciation for their native culture. To my family in the north it was a sign of how I was losing my identity, and I was criticized for having a Catalan accent when I spoke Castilian.

Through the djembé, in the very first experience narrated in the Ludic Prelude piece, I thought I was just opening myself to access another culture through its music, until I arrived in the United States and learned I could be accused of cultural appropriation for doing so. In my first trip to Brazil, I had for the first time in my life, *a tête a tête* with racial discrimination and privilege in my very first social interaction in streets and stores. Despite my inability to speak a word of Portuguese, the people—including those of African descent—answered the questions of my African-American friend in perfect Portuguese, but completely ignored her and directed their answers to me. Once I moved to the States I had my immersion experience in a warm and welcoming family of African-American and Haitian background, which educated me immensely in the dynamics of race relations in the United States. Living in the Washington DC area, I was making close friends among black people without realizing how provocative that decision was considered to be by my family and some friends in Spain. It was very

difficult for me to return to Spain during the holidays to face racially charged names and prejudices.

Still, during my fieldwork in capoeira, I was attracted to another culture, once again, through the berimbau instrument. I had to fend off critiques of entitlement to study an Afro-centric art form being white, and my right to do it without participating completely in all aspects of the performance. As Cobrinha explains his US experience with race issues in Chapter Four, my experiences clashed with my cultural expectations of having freedom to choose an instrument. I had to work out my skin color awareness and my privileged status where I was not conscious before. Receiving the public support and acknowledgement by Mestre Cobrinha in that special roda, gave me an essential and existential nod of approval by the person and community that mattered the most to me. Today, I can appreciate how much my personal life journey of struggle and awareness has contributed to make me very sensitive to cultural, gender, sexual orientation, racial and class discrimination. But now we are left with the larger question, so what do these experiences mean in the larger context, and why would it be a worthy subject for a dissertation?

The Ultimate Question: So What?

Cobrinha's invaluable collaboration has provided me with confidence to produce a dissertation that can be helpful not only to the academic community, but also precious to the capoeira angola community. The re-contextualization of capoeira angola in globalized contemporary settings—the “rearticulation of tradition” (Yudice 1992, 18)—calls for reflection and analysis of how this mediated transmission occurs and how the tradition itself may change or evolve as a result. Capoeira angola rodas as cultural

performances “are important dramatizations that enable participants to understand, criticize, and even change the worlds in which they live” (Guss 2000, 9). This reflexive quality is evident and sought after in the performance and transmission contexts of capoeira angola, and the embracing of diversity among its performers does not preclude the multiple questioning of realities to be changed, from social justice to gender equality or racial prejudices. My examination of Mestre Cobrinha’s life offers new insight into how he communicates not only the musical and physical features of capoeira, but also its socio-historical and cultural aspects in cross-cultural contexts overlooked in previous studies. By using the specific life history methodology in my study, which includes not only Mestre Cobrinha’s own account of his life experiences, but also the researcher’s own as a *punctus-contrapunctum* voice—a double telling, I hope to bring to the field of ethnomusicology a unique view and account of human-ness through music and performance. As an echo of Mestre Cobra Mansa’s work on social justice, I look forward to show how his sensitivity, based on his life experience, brings a projection of change to the new community paradigm he envisions for his international organization and the new Permangola projects in Brazil.

In the process of writing the ethnographic piece of my research project I have come to understand how capoeira was “*tudo que a boca come*” (all that the mouth eats), a force operating beyond my limited means of control. When I thought of representing in each chapter the jogos of Mestre Cobra Mansa with the cultures operating in his world, in his life, I had to enter in the game of playing my own jogos and being prepared to engage again with Mestre Cobrinha’s. Then I realized that in my effort to follow the capoeira rules of the game, its rituals, its context, I had entered into another game, this time with

the tradition itself. Moreover, in the exercise of writing, I found myself starting yet another jogo, this time with the readers: enticing them to *buy my game*,³⁸ sometimes leaving the circle, sitting aside to let Cobrinha be the player using his mandinga to “get” the readers. I would enter back to play another jogo and my comrade this time would be the world, the life of Mestre Cobra throwing a *rasteira*³⁹ on me, on my cultural assumptions. Following the same dynamic, I believe the readers are going to buy Cobrinha’s game and from their own jogos with their worlds, with their lives, will find themselves playing directly with Cobrinha, with his life and world.

As I develop my conclusions, I often see Mestre Cobra responding to my new ways of looking at things and making sense of our worlds. It is a natural conversation that goes on beyond our interactions. I hope the readers can appreciate the beauty of this engagement, this game, and shake hands with the players that allowed each other’s learning growth. As that closure comes to the roda, we must close the loop on following the trail of the snake in Cobrinha’s life and his contribution to Life.

The Snake Trail Map

The opening piece, a real time performance text entitled *Ludic Prelude*, takes the reader to accompany the author to her drumming initiation during her first participation in an African drumming workshop.

Conveniently introduced by a map of the ritual performance space and scripted description, in Marker One, *The Survival of the Fittest*, the reader will find road signs to follow the order of events at the beginning of the roda. This chapter explores Cinézio’s

³⁸ “Buy the game” is an expression of acceptance to engage in the play with another capoeirista.

³⁹ Sweeping movement

childhood, his premature entry into the workforce to help support his family and the relationships with the father and mother figures of authority. The street culture and survival, the first steps in capoeira in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, and his discovery of capoeira angola determine the transition from adolescence until the birth of his first son at nineteen. This chapter initiates the dissertation-roda introducing the toque of angola and the ginga movement as a metaphor of young Cinézio's engagement with life. As the berimbau players have been performing since the beginning of the roda, there is a chance to relieve them and get to know the instrument—Mestre Cobra Mansa's research interest and the author's vehicle of participation—more in depth. The reader will have a chance to see what it is like to hold a berimbau through a scene of participant observation at the conclusion of the chapter.

Marker Two, *Moving On: Time to Rebuild, Time to Grow*, follows Cobra Mansa to Belo Horizonte where he investigates new cultures that influence his political, social and religious consciousness. His enrollment in the military police for six months ends traumatically with a brief incarceration due to the possession of politically banned literature. Also in this chapter, as the roda progresses, the toque of the bateria changes to São Bento Pequeno while the rolê movement serves as a conductor thread of Cobra Mansa's symbolic defenses. Before the segment ends we have the opportunity to relieve another musician in the bateria, the pandeiro player.

Marker Three, *Becoming a Mestre: The Revival of Capoeira Angola*, investigates the decade Cobrinha spent in Salvador, Bahia. He starts by discovering his life mission and purpose—even if intuitively—and applying it to the revival of the tradition of Capoeira Angola. He establishes in Bahia the Grupo Capoeira Angola Pelourinho GCAP

with Mestre Moraes. From this collective, and his persistence in luring out of retirement Mestre João Grande, the community of angoleiros establish the art form as an efficient fight, culturally grounded in its Afro-Brazilian identity, politically committed to raise social awareness and justice. A faster pace is set in the roda with the toque of São Bento Grande, whereas the movement of attack *Rabo de Arraia* represents more forward movement in Cobrinha's life. The chapter concludes as we get closer to the atabaque player and its instrument.

In Marker Four, *Going Global: The International Capoeira Angola Foundation (FICA)*, emerges the “going around the world” of Mestre Cobra Mansa since his first trip to the United States. During his ten years of residence, Mestre Cobrinha breaks his ties with the GCAP in Brazil and founds an international organization creating new avenues and methods to preserve and expand capoeira angola worldwide. The toque changes to *Jogo de Dentro*, the fastest rhythm that calls for a more skilled game, in the version of the mestres Traira and Cobrinha Verde, followed by a variation of the same toque in the version of Mestre João Grande. The movement of the *Chamada* (call) appears as a metaphor for the multiple callings Mestre Cobra experienced at this time. With the substitution of the agogô player in the bateria, the segment comes to an end.

Marker Five, *Returning Home: Projects that Search for a New Sense of Community*, looks at the most recent ventures of Mestre Cobra Mansa after moving his residence to Salvador. In Brazil, he develops community-based projects while his worldwide teaching tours seek to strengthen FICA's community as a family of practice. In addition, Mestre Cobrinha's trips to Angola affirm his pursuit of a personal scholarship in the study of capoeira from his berimbau research. The call of the berimbau and the

movement of *A Volta ao Mundo* are an integral part of the narrative of this segment, which ends when the reader has a chance to substitute for the reco-reco player.

The real time performance text *Coda Roda*, where precisely the author is playing the reco-reco in a real roda during an international conference, closes the ethnographic narrative and the circle/cycle opened by the *Ludic Prelude*. The Epilogue summarizes the conclusions of the investigation and presents ideas for future research in the fields of studies of capoeira, ethnomusicology, music education and life history methodology. The bibliography and mediagraphy, along with annex documents and audiovisual media contained in the companion DVD completes the dissertation. The following section covers the grammatical and notation conventions I have used in this paper.

Note on Capitalization and Italicization

I capitalize the word Angola when I am referring to a proper noun like the country or an organization name, but use lower case to denominate the style “angola” of capoeira. I also capitalize the word Mestre when used as a title of respect with the capoeira name as in Mestre Cobra Mansa, but use lower case for the generic use of the noun “mestre” as a category of expertise in capoeira as I also do when I use other status titles like Contra-Mestre or Treinel.

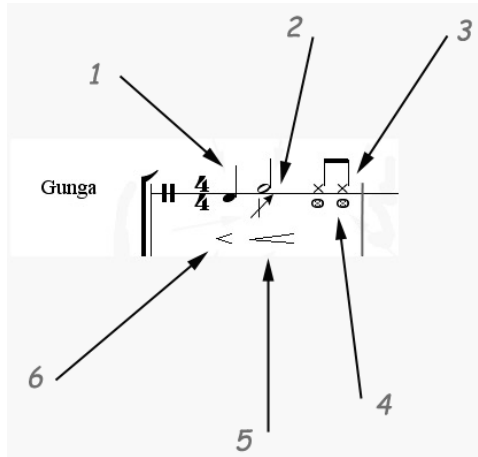
Concerning Portuguese vocabulary, I italicize the first use of the word in the text to signal the foreign origin and explain in parenthesis or in a footnote the definition or translation of the word. After that, I incorporate the words in the text in normal typography to avoid cumbersome reading since the text is obviously full of Portuguese capoeira terms. This is also a deliberate technique. Hopefully, as the readers advance through the text, they will become familiar with the terms and understand them “by

immersion” without the need to stress them as foreign words. As the capoeiristas learn by doing, I anticipate the readers will learn, recognize, and integrate them in the narrative without further visual clues or even minding. I have included a glossary of all the Portuguese terms to ease the navigation in case of confusion.

Although I have found frequent uses and credit to berimbau transcriptions attributed to Kay Shaffer’s monograph on the instrument (Shaffer 1977), the system, based in a previous work by Luiz D’Anunciação that has gone unaccredited (Galm 2004, 249), does not offer the versatility of the original. I follow D’Anunzio’s early convention notating the berimbau in a single line, including his representation of the metric to binary form in 2/2 rather than the 2/4 used after Kay Shaffer’s work—credited or not—(Shaffer 1977, 47; Prof. Colmenero in Pastinha 1988, 43; Lewis 1992, 147-52), but I depart in the location of the accented first beat. I hear and feel the syncopation of the long sound, which brings me to write the *chiado* (buzz) sounds in the last beat. My graphic representation of pressing the coin against the string by using the arrow and the round circle enclosing the x (no sound in the coin), is a very visual representation that brings the kinetic element into the notation. The transcription used my way, is acculturated in the Western notation system, to understand and represent the rhythms. As in the lyric translation, I use the syllables simultaneously in a bi-musical display since Cobrinha uses onomatopoeia to sing the toques.⁴⁰ I spell out all the instruments with the syllables in the first toque of Angola, and after that only the gunga, for this is the instrument that leads the change for the other two berimbaus and the rest of the bateria instruments keep the

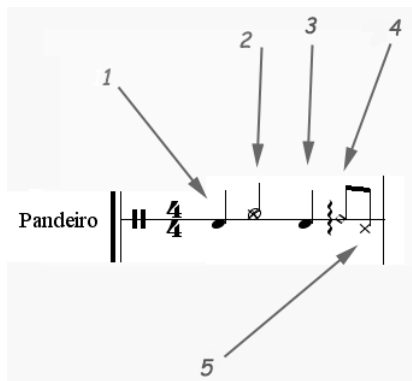
⁴⁰ There are other systems I experimented at the beginning of my transcription efforts like the grid proposed by Pinto de Oliveira (1991), based in the 1962 Harland’s method, the Time Unit Box System (TUBS) further developed by James Koetting (Koetting 1970). At the end Western notation with enhancements proved to be the most useful to me. For a detailed discussion of different renditions of the onomatopoeic system see Díaz Meneses 2007, 173-78.

same accompaniment.⁴¹ The reader can see below the legends of symbols utilized in my musical transcriptions for the berimbau, the pandeiro, and the rest of the bateria instruments as follows:



1. Strike on string *solto* (loose sound)
2. Strike while coin push string *preso* (pressed sound)
3. Caxixí
4. Strike while coin touching string, *chiado* (buzz sound)⁴²
5. Gourd separated from body
6. Gourd close to body

Berimbau transcription symbols legend



1. Thumb in the border
2. Open palm in the middle
3. Thumb in the border
4. Shake the jingles
5. Stop the jingles

Pandeiro transcription symbols legend

⁴¹ As the berimbau médio inverts the sounds of the gunga and the viola makes variations over the gunga and médio, it will be easy for the reader to anticipate on each toque, based on the gunga, the melo-rhythmic line of the other two berimbaus.

⁴² In the toque of angola, the gunga stops the vibration of the string briefly before the chiado. This subtle sound, the *aproximado*, is only perceptible when the gunga plays solo at the beginning of the roda. To simplify the notation I use the same symbol as for the chiado omitting the caxixí.

Agogô

Atabaque

Reco-reco

1

2

Agogô: One line for each bell as tuned
Atabaque: 1. Middle of the head with open palm
Reco-reco: 2. Dragging scrap

Other bateria instruments transcription symbols legend

Now let's enter the circle and start the game...

Note on How to Read the Real Time Performance Texts

I invite the reader to plunge into a phenomenological rendering of my first African drumming workshop experience, my personal threshold to the performance of musics and instruments other than my own. With this workshop, I started my twelve-year journey of preparation for the capoeira angola roda that follows.

As in other performances of the African Diaspora in the Americas, the embodiment of music is an essential element of differentiation with Western classical musical interpretations. It is my hope that after this reading, the exploration of other people's cultures through music and performance will resonate with the reader, bringing to life sound and silence that call upon the essence and magic of lived music.

I also encourage the reader to experiment with the demonstration aloud, so with the following text you can hear my words on your breath, with our heartbeats in it together. Even if it is a solitary expression, you will have a community experience.

“Do not read alone” as Holman Jones advises “it does not act alone” (Holman Jones 2005)

Ludic Prelude (Spring 1994)

As soon as I enter the classroom, I notice that my initial impulse of joining the drumming workshop may not have been a good idea after all. A general glance gives me details of paint stained gowns and smeared overalls, worn-out tennis shoes and bandanas all around me. I become aware of my clean, street clothes and feel slightly out of place. I am a music teacher, a keyboard player; I never played a drum, much less built one before. And that is exactly what we are about to do right now.

The blonde tall instructor walks barefoot the floor to the chattering group with large tinkling strides and occupies the empty space under the large windows, mimicking with wide gestures that he wants us to circle around. We look at his ankle bells wondering, as we wonder about his African clothes and the bare pale chest under the open colorful vest. As soon as we understand his mute wish and we start gathering around, he opens his legs, points out a straight gravity line falling from the ceiling above his head to the floor, and starts to march in his place, ringing the bells with each step. We just try to follow his nowhere-walk until our feet pound the beat. Frap... Frap... Frap... Frap... We are looking nervously at each other a little embarrassed, but there is already playfulness in the air, awoken by the sound of the bells, so we simply flow with the clinking call and add our thumps on the floor. It feels good!

Frap... Frap... Frap... Frap... The sound of our bare soles follows the song of the ankle bells. Frap... Frap... Our bodies sway to the clear sound, a circle of human reeds waving waists... Frap... and hips... Frap... Frap... Our heads balance against the rhythm that flows from the bells and our feet... Frap... Frap... the weight that streams through my knees to the back of my neck... Frap... We are the Frap... TEpe Tepe Dinnn TE Te

Dinnn / TEpe Tepe Dinnn TE Te Dinnn My arms swing launching the shoulders to reach the beat. TEpe Tepe Dinnn TE Te Dinnn I open my eyes and look around me... TEpe Tepe Dinnn the people step on each hit... Frap... Frap... Frap... Frap... I cast a Cheshire-cat smile –other glances around give me wide grins... TEpe DIN, Tepe Din, Tepe DIN, TEpe Din... The light in their eyes, the pink in her cheeks... TEpe Tepe Dinnn TE Te Dinnn The heat that burns in our throats and leaves as we sing: KA... t' Ka... t' Ka (m) Kad' Ka! KA... t' Ka... t' Ka (m) Kad' Ka! All together sounds like a compact textured mass, something like

Frap...	Frap...	Frap...	Frap...	Frap...	Frap...	Frap...	Frap...					
TEpe	Tepe	Dinnn	TE_	Te_	Dinnn	TEpe	Tepe	Dinnn	TE_	Te_	Dinnn	
DIN	Tepe	Din	Tepe	DIN	Tepe	Din	Tepe	DIN	Tepe	Din	Tepe	Din
KA	t' Ka	t' Ka	(m)	Kad	Ka	KA	t' Ka	t' Ka	(m)	Kad	Ka	

Until the final break: KAN kaTA__Ka_ 'kaTAN KuTu KA!!

The rhythm comes out of his mouth like small toys to toss around... TEpe Tepe Dinnn TE Te Dinnn. At the beginning there are some fretful laughs, some stepping out, but he takes us back: Frap... Frap... walking the sound of the heartbeat as if we were just one. Frap... Frap... and TEpe Tepe Dinnn Te TE Dinnn again and of course Tepe Din Tepe DIN Tepe Din. For what I understand, he is building in us different rhythmic lines from traditional African music. He does not speak a word in our language. One thin young man speaks some German; he volunteers the English translation. We look at each other, lost again. Does anyone speak English here? Another bearded man steps in and volunteers a concise re-translation into Spanish or Catalan. In this Babel, while John, the

instructor, tries to make us understand the rhythm in our bodies, I find myself decoding it into the only musical language I know.

I try to notate the onomatopoeic syllables in a mental staff paper, while troubling myself to coordinate my feet with my voice in the rhythm with the other voices and feet and the bells under John's drum lead. I never have played with my feet *and* sung before. In the following days, I will do many things I never had done before: from drilling a twelve inch diameter PVC pipe to shaving a smelly goatskin; from manually sharpening wood tuning pegs to tautening the bald skin with ropes over the open mouth of the wide tube. The whole craft is a slow process, fueled by conversation, shared stories and small shortcuts until we get the knack. We build for half of the sessions and sing our lines with our beating feet during the other half, from plastic, wood and an organic reeking patch to a line of reclined cylindrical objects. Following the first week, after a long weekend of drying slowly under the sun like a lethargic herd of gray lizards, our drums are born.



Hence, during the second week, we drum non-stop Frap... Frap... and Tepe DIN Tepe Din. Conquering our fear to mess it up, breathing the strokes while whispering our mantra TEpe Tepe Dinnn TE Te Dinnn I even hammer sometimes a saucepan with KA... t' Ka... t' Ka . (m) Kad' Ka, given that I am the only one who ever had played a Cuban song before. The *clave*, against the roar of fourteen African drums in polyrhythm, fits sharp and precise. I look around dancing in my seat, the cling of the bell mirroring my chest, my fellow drummers smiling with sparkling eyes and blushed faces at their best.

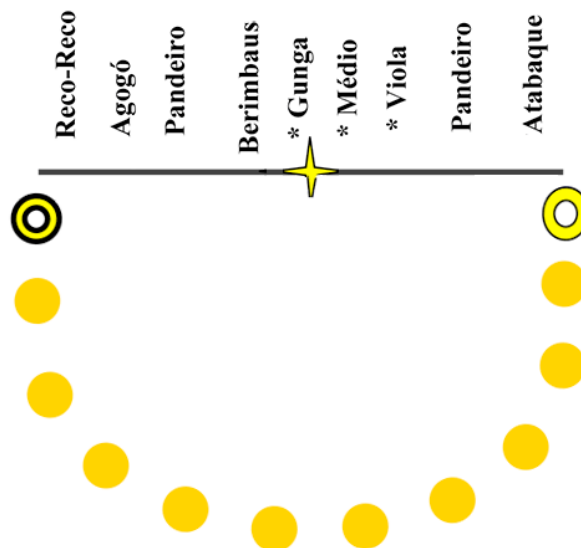
The performance day arrives and we drum as John's background drummers in a wide semicircle under a blazing sun as if we had not done another thing in our lives. Frap... Frap... we thoroughly flow with the bells and our stomping on the floor. The light in their eyes, the pink in her cheeks, the sweat in my lips... We sound good... It feels so cool! John improvises and engages the audience, while other visual artists and sculptors are crafting the final moments of an action-exhibit in an open venue. Curious people gather called by the rumble; Sunday afternoon families are wandering in the park to see the live performance by local artists. While the drums tune up, we melt from excitement and excess of heat. The thunder in our ears pounding faster, our glee escalates our pulse and blood pressure, drying our mouths and giving invisible wings to our arms. My swollen hands are just a stump beating non stop the tight fusty tap... and our souls rejoice together in sound as one: our bones drumming Frap Tepe Din Kad Ka until the final:
KAN kaTA__Ka_ 'kaTAN KuTu KA!!



Marker One, *The Survival of the Fittest*, explores Cinézio's childhood, his premature entry into the workforce to help support his family and the relationships with the father and mother figures of authority. The street culture and survival, the first steps in capoeira in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, and his discovery of capoeira angola determine the transition from adolescence until the birth of his first son at nineteen. This segment introduces the toque of angola and the ginga movement, concluding with a study of the berimbau—subject of cobrinha's research interests—its tuning system and an experiential scene of learning to play the instrument.

Beginning of the roda: the participants assembly

The participants, seated on the floor, form an open circle in front of the line of instruments in the bateria. From left to right: reco-reco, agogô, pandeiro 1, berimbaus gunga, médio and viola, pandeiro 2, and atabaque. The extremes of the circle closer to the bateria line are open. Two players are waiting, one on each side (figure 2).



Performative space at the beginning of the roda:
the players wait at the entrance of the roda

Marker 1: The Survival of the Fittest [1960-1979]

Place: Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)

Rhythm: Angola

Movement: Ginga

Instrument: Berimbau

Beginning of the roda: the gunga enters

The berimbau gunga initiates the toque of angola.



DÃO Dão Dão | DÃO(t) Din_ Tchch



*The gunga calls for angola
It's the beginning of the roda*

Childhood Maps: The Impact of Family

Mestre Cobra Mansa was born Cinézio Feliciano Peçanha on May 19, 1960 in Duque de Caxias, a poor urban “destroyed *quilombo*” in Rio de Janeiro and the eldest of 10 siblings—all males except for a lone sister in the middle. His mother, Lindaura Feliciano “Dona Nenem,” played a strong role raising the children, while the male parent role was met intermittently by four different men. Today Mestre Cobrinha often quotes proverbs and sayings from his mother or his mestre (Moraes), or the mestre of his mestre (João Grande), but I have yet to hear him mention any teaching from any of his male parental figures. Cobrinha and his two younger brothers, Moisés and Pedrinho (Pedro “Di

Mola”), shared the same father, Anézio Souza Peçanha, who eventually left the family, and Cobrinha barely remembers him. The stepfather, José Pereira Ivo, sired the next three children, Paulinho (Paulo Jorge), Eliete and Dino (Ricardo). Cobrinha would have a very conflictual relationship with him during his early teens. The youngest siblings originated from liaisons with two different men after Mestre Cobra left the family house. Clear family lines with dates and names were challenging to get from questioning him when I tried to get his “family picture”:

Don' ask me how the name of everybody, becaus' I don' know (laughs)! Is fun sometime, people “I wan the name of...” I say, “Mira look, I know the nickyname of... sss... my brother--but the real name, I wouldn't not know (laughs)!” [...] My name's only spoke when I am with my real family; ode'wise my name is not spoke at all.

Don't ask me the name of anybody, because I wouldn't know (laughs)! It is funny, sometimes people [ask me] “What is the name of...?” I'd say: “Look, I know the nicknames of my brothers --but their real names, I wouldn't know (laughs)!” [...] My name is only spoken when I am with my real family; otherwise, my name is not spoken at all.

If the memory is somehow blurred at times for names and dates, Cobrinha recalls very well how around the time he was six years old his mother could not support them and took all the children to Nagé, a place in the countryside coast, to stay for a short period of time with a relative. Having an alternative place to stay gave the siblings a sheltered resource, a new space to take refuge when things got ugly or difficult at home, and both Cobrinha and Moisés would run away from home to this harbor city at a very young age. They would find among the fishermen a safe place, food—for they learned to fish—and often, good advice.

The Belt and the Salt: Of Bad Behavior and Discipline

Because his stepfather José left the house whenever the couple fought, which happened frequently, Cobrinha felt like he never really had a father growing up. Although Cobrinha's relationship with José would improve as he became an adult, this dysfunctional model of parenting left a deep mark on his memory and shaped his role as a father for his own offspring. José served only as an occasional authority figure, but often arbitrarily administered punishment. This man would hit Lindaura, and at some point ten year old Cinézio would react fighting back to protect her, to which José uttered a phrase referring to him that is the only quote I have heard Cobrinha say from his stepfather: "*Estou criando cobra pra me morder*" (I am raising a snake to bite me).

Lindaura Feliciano was left alone to the heavy responsibility of raising her family. They lived in a very humble house of just two rooms where one room did double duty as the kitchen.⁴³ By all accounts she did an admirable job, since she kept the children together as a family through good times and bad without putting them up for adoption, something very common in poor Brazilian families at the time. Lindaura was the main authority figure in Cinézio's childhood. She not only provided for them by "working a lot, she was always working washing cloths," but she also imposed the discipline to control the children's behavior. Cobrinha grew afraid of making her angry, because she inflicted very hard corporal punishments on him on many occasions. In spite of that, he remembers her as his defender against family outsiders. She would never allow other people to beat them, including stepfathers and other partners. Cobrinha tells his sons how grateful he is for her beatings for he thinks they help him correct his bad behavior: "I

⁴³ Mestre Cobra would buy a bigger house for his mother and siblings with the first money he could save when he was working in Bahia in the mid 80s.

could have gone to another completely opposite direction if it was not for my mother.” He acknowledges that the beatings were “the only way my mother could control me: I was wild.” It seems he received many beatings. “Anything people can be beaten with, I got beaten with: hand, stick, belt, even the leather treadle belt from the sewing machine... That was the worst!” He often tells these stories laughing during his teachings, leaving the best part for the end “but the worse wasn’t being beaten... the worse was that after the beating she prepared a bath... with salt!”

To Mestre Cobrinha—always the dramatic narrator spicing up the telling—and to little Cinézio, the recipient of the disinfectant salt water cure, I can see how the salt water might seem an additional punishment. However, from the adult point of view, Dona Nenem was just using a homemade antiseptic bath to prevent any possible bacteria from growing in any potential wounds. In my father’s village, San Vicente de la Sonsierra, the wounds from self-flagellation in Easter processions⁴⁴ were healed with a concoction of local healing herbs and alcohol called *Agua de la Virgen* (Virgin Water) that itched and burned the bleeding wounds but cauterized the skin lesions in hours.

Cobrinha recognizes that these beatings were “deserved” on some occasions—he would get in trouble for stealing fruit, a duck or fighting—but on others it was just because “I was the oldest and should set an example for my brothers.” Cobrinha was expected to be a role model for his younger brothers, and was sometimes punished for the pranks his brothers would do, even if he did not participate. It seems as a kid he was very

⁴⁴ *Los picaos*, qualified as barbaric by some is the only display of Catholic penitence which includes flagellation—a very common practice in many places until the 18th century. The penitents, barefeet and covered in white tunics, wipe their bare backs with knotted esparto-grass ropes in an all-too-real Easter pageant. The resultant subcutaneous blood congestion is picked at the hermitage with a wax ball with embedded broken glass pieces. The bleeding relieve the preasure and is healed with the herbal antiseptic avoiding the formation of painful hematomas.

difficult to manage: “Just so you know how bad I was, sometimes, when the family went through difficult times my mother had to distribute us to stay with other families to take care of us... except me! Nobody wanted me, so I had to go to the market with her and just sit there doing nothing all day because nobody would take me.”

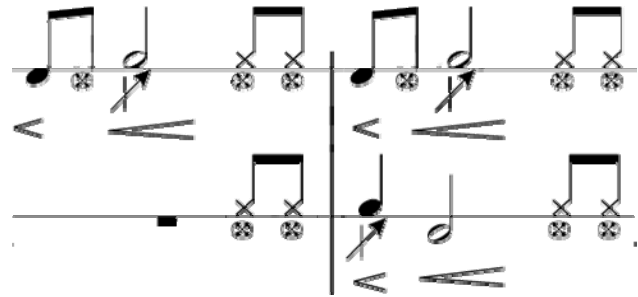
The birth (real) family still constitutes, in spite of all the dysfunctional separations and lack of conviviality, a solid nuclear relationship for Cobrinha—who also speaks of his capoeira family and his candomblé family, to this day. I knew he had bought a house for his mother and brothers and had become a sort of banking resource for the family. Mestre Cobra had the opportunity to work outside Brazil, and he would send money to help support the diverse economical enterprises of his brothers and sister over the years: “all of them except Moisés, owe me money.” After Cobrinha left the family, the responsibility of the eldest brother role was taken by Moisés, who looked out for and provided for the younger siblings. He would eventually marry Cobrinha’s ex-girlfriend, Rosângela, the mother of his older son Marcelo. Moisés would also be the first one to hold a steady job in a bakery. The family ties were strong among the remaining brothers and after Moisés moved off to another job, the rest of the brothers would one by one, in strict order of age, “inherit” the bakery job whenever Moisés, (eventually the owner of his own business) called each of them to work in his commercial enterprise.

Beginning of the roda: the médio enters

The berimbau médio initiates the toque of angola over the gunga.



DÃO(t) Din__Tchtch | DÃO(t) Din__ Tchtch
 Tchtch | DIN DãO__Tchtch



*The médio follows the gunga's slow call
 The rhythm steadies
 Two voices suspended in impossible intervals
 Nasal harmonics bringing the here-now*

I was struck by the harshness of the corporal punishments Mestre Cobra Mansa suffered as a child. Although he talks about it without bitterness, his narrative evoked childhood memories of my own. As a child, I would hide from loud discussions and arguments. As I witnessed my older brother being beaten with a hazel switch or my sisters hit with a slipper, I considered myself lucky that I did not experience any corporal punishment from my parents beyond the occasional slap. I was eager to avoid trouble and often ran away from my older brother who was emotionally challenged and enjoyed abusing me verbally and physically. Cobrinha's memories of his extreme punishments would remind me of the beatings I saw in movies depicting times of slavery, scenes that terrorized me. I never had much strength to tolerate any kind of brutality to animals or people, not in explicit images or even in my imagination from reading crude descriptions in books: they transformed into vivid life-like scenes that would set off nightmares that made me shiver. I still shrink and my heartbeat races in the face of any kind of violence or inexplicable loudness.

While Cobrinha was telling me about his childhood, I experienced intense feelings of empathy and I pondered how these harsh “behavior modification” practices were incorporated into his own parenting skills after being punished so strictly as a child. The image I had constructed of Mestre Cobra from observing his teaching methods was one of a loving and caring person, very easy going and patient, “nice” as he often qualifies this aspect of his personality in front of his students. When I later learned that there was some behavior he would never tolerate in his children and for which he also beat them to correct their conduct, I was struck by the difference in his understanding of the role of teacher versus parent, roles that one may often equate. Cobrinha has two sons and a daughter from three different women. The behavior that inspired his harshest punishment was primarily the lack of honesty. Cobrinha tells me about how he expected his children to show evidence of trust, respect, and sincerity, depicting a relationship with them as more like one between peers, friends or comrades as opposed to what he considered a “boring” father-son relationship, based on power, authority, and over-protective vigilance.

“I got beaten so many times...” remembers Cobrinha.

“Did you beat Makindé?” I ask him, curious. I’ve met his teenage son who lives with him and he seems to me like a very sweet boy. He thinks for a moment.

“Makindé... one or two times, but Marcelo... about five or six times.”

“What was the difference?” I hoped for a more detailed account.

“Marcelo pushed the things at the last limit to test me. The other thing is that he tried to trick me and this is the kind of thing that doesn’t work with me.” After a pause, Cobrinha adds:

“Makindé learned soon how to deal with me.” He tells me then a story about how last Friday Makindé took a day off from school while Cobrinha was traveling to teach in Europe. Makindé told the woman with who he was spending these days that he had gone to school.

“Uh-uh”—I say—“We are in trouble!” Cobrinha nods matter-of-fact, while tells me how Makindé confessed frankly to him he had played hooky.

“He can lie to other people, but when he comes to me he doesn’t even try. He goes straight to the point, independently to the punishment he might deserve.”

Cobrinha tells me how they are going to talk about that incident today. “That’s how you are going to have a good friendship, build on trust” he affirms.

“Marcelo would lie to you to avoid the punishment?” I ask him.

“Yeah” he confirms, “you could show him his picture and ask him ‘Is this you?’ and he would look at it and say ‘Well... I don’t think that I have this T-shirt...’ and you would argue with him ‘Look at the face!’ and he would say ‘Yeah... but where was this?’ And you will push ‘Here is the proof, don’t deny that you did that!’ He would play with you and wait until the very last minute to admit it.”

“So he would get beaten?” I want to know. He bobs.

“Man’... I would tell him, ‘you wished for this, you should be honest with me. You should come and tell me... !’ Makindé instead would come and say ‘My father, I did that and I need help’ etc.” After a pause, Cobrinha adds reflectively: “That is how I learned it from my mother.”

Paradoxically, Lindaura’s iron hand disciplining her children not only forged a strong and complex bond between her and Cobrinha, but instilled in him a sense of values that became the basis of his developing character and the discipline. These attributes and skills enabled his early street survival skills and later important interests and character traits like his trust of older women, spirituality, his faith in alternative healing, and his interest in learning new skills and doing well in school. He was thus able to avoid the temptations and addictions of the street, and even his fierce sense of freedom and independence.

Spiritual and Practical Values: A Window of Infinite Possibilities

At the same time that he was severely disciplined he felt his mother’s support very strongly in the “outside world”: “She was always on my side; until somebody proved to her I was wrong, I was right. Once we stepped inside of the house and closed the door, I was twice wrong!” He openly laughs remembering, “she would beat me once for breaking her trust and the other for the thing I did wrong.”

In addition to being a constant, strong, presence in his early life, Dona Nenem gave her oldest son something that he greatly values and tries to pass along to his children and students equally: freedom and independence. With so many kids to care for, one might think of it more as neglect, but this is not what Cobrinha recalls. For instance, he says his mother was a “very spiritual woman” herself, yet she never forced him to practice any particular religion in which she was involved, which over time included Yoruba’s Umbanda, Allan Kardec’s *Espiritismo*,⁴⁵ and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Instead, she practiced different religions without dragging her children to them. It was not until later in Cobrinha’s life, from another “adoptive mother,” that he was introduced to the spiritual practices of the Afro-Brazilian religion of *Candomblé*.⁴⁶ This proved to be such a fundamental aspect of his future life that Mestre Cobra spoke of it with great detail, explaining how acquiring this religion provided a very important breaking point in his life. And yet, his fascination began early because close to his mother’s house in Duque de Caxias, there was a Candomblé house where little Cinézio would sit for hours in any corner fascinated with watching the rituals, which he “liked a lot” although he did not “understand a thing.”

Candomblé would prove to be not just a spiritual practice but also a medical one. Mestre Cobra recalls that he was very sick when he was six years old with tuberculosis and no medicines or injections the doctors recommended were doing him any good. One early morning, following the advice of a local priestess, his mother took him to the beach and gave him a ritual bath with an offering to the *Orixás*. Besides being very cold,

⁴⁵ Pseudonym of Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804-1869), Kardec is known as the compiler of Spiritism. <<http://www.allankardec.org/>> (Accessed on April 6, 2008).

⁴⁶ The syncretism of African religions and Roman Catholicism practiced by many Brazilians of African descent in the cities and the Northeast of Brazil

Cobrinha remembers how he was healed, and has never had another problem with his lungs thereafter.

While he talked about his illness I refrained from touching my arm where I had a bad reaction to the tuberculosis vaccine which left an open wound that took over a year to heal. The surprising thing I was discovering was that Cobrinha's childhood, in principle very different from my own experiences, sometimes had points of convergence with mine for a variety of reasons. Both of us were born in the same year, only three months apart. I would often find myself comparing my life at the same time that he shared some details of his own. He recalls how his mother, probably because she was surrounded by so many boys, would teach all of the kids how to do all kinds of chores from cooking to embroidery; "You mean sewing?" I would ask incredulous. "No, no... needlework, you know? Stitching your name, make small table cloths and things like that." Sudden memories of my own summers doing needlepoint under the strict vigilance of my mother brought me closer, transcending space and time, to the young Cinézio's needle skills training. "Only the older brothers would learn, she just wanted us to be quiet [...] I remember she didn't have money to buy the white cloth to make my first school shirt so she made it out of one of her own *enaguas* (petticoats)." Out of this complete home schooling program, Cobrinha would learn how to cook, wash his clothes and patch them, but also had extra tutoring sessions for his school work since at this time his mother would get paid to do private tutoring for other kids in the neighborhood. He said, "She would make us to stay for these classes." Even though Dona Nenem had only finished elementary school she had "a beautiful handwriting." As a result, he did well in school: "I know I was good in school because I got prizes. I wasn't the first one [in the class], but

I always got something.” He would receive special awards for his achievements and he tells me how once his stepfather destroyed a colorful ball he had received as a prize. “I don’t recall what I did wrong,” but young Cinézio, at eleven or twelve years old, would get so upset that his reaction was to run away from home.

Running away, even for seemingly “stupid reasons” like defending his right to have a grown up haircut,⁴⁷ was an oppositional response to the threat of his stepfather’s authority to shave his head completely. He would have such a strong discussion that he would go to Nagé, his childhood sanctuary, and stay two months sleeping on the beach and getting so bored that he decided eventually to return home.

His hair also would mark an element of his persona, his own identity reflected in the defense of his hairstyle. Cobrinha would not just defend his hair from his stepfather—“Oh man, I think that traumatized me,”—but also later on would shield it from friends wanting to go out in carnival with shaven heads. He would run away again to avoid his hair cut—“nobody was going to do that to me again,”—and he would only come back after Carnival was over. In spite of this bad relationship with his stepfather during his childhood, and a couple of bad beatings he took from this man, Cobrinha recognizes there are not bad feelings between them now. After his stepfather left the house and years would pass without seeing each other, when they met, they were able to have a normal relationship and talk as if bad things had never happened between them. When Cobrinha was 22 years old, the man would stay at Cobrinha’s house for a while and somehow the bitter memories were completely forgotten.

⁴⁷ In the 60s, kids would get a “Indian haircut” shaving the head leaving only a hair casket in the superior part of the head until they were 11 or 12 years old. This practice is still in use for three-year old kids in rural areas.

I want to remind the reader we are in a roda. The musical clues that appear intermittently support the narrative of this life history in the context of performance and provide a metaphor for unveiling the next phase of the performance. The clues cannot be explained directly, but rather become symbolic of the entry of more challenges and complexity into Cinézio's young life as it extends beyond the shelter of his family into the world.

Beginning of the roda: the viola enters

The berimbau viola initiates the toque of angola over the gunga and médio.



DÃO(t) Din_ Tchth DÃO(t) Din_ Tchth DÃO(t) Din_ Tchth
DIN Dão_ Tchth DIN Dão_ Tchth DIN Dão_ Tchth
DÃOdãodão Dão Tchth DÃO Din_ Tchth

The musical notation consists of three staves. The top staff features a series of rhythmic patterns with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes. The middle staff shows a similar pattern with some notes marked with an accent (>) and a fermata. The bottom staff contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a rest and another note. The notation is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

*The viola sums its voice with a vigorous call
 Filling the Angola rhythm with floreios⁴⁸
 Making the sound of the three berimbaus
 Thick and solid as a wall*

The family often passed through times of hardship when neither parent was able to provide food. Cobrinha had to assume early responsibilities for the family's economy.

⁴⁸ Ornaments, rhythmic variations. The word applies also to variations in the movements.

This premature acquisition of basic survival skills shaped his persona, his philosophy, and his personality as a future capoeirista at a very young age: “I always worked during my childhood, helping my family who were low class, really very poor, so I had to work from five years old on.”

Other belief systems that Cobrinha acquired in his childhood were derived from vicarious experiences. He does not drink alcohol to this day because he saw the effects of drugs and alcohol on the streets and observed how deeply alcoholism affected his mother, changing her personality and decreasing her psychological stability and physical health over time, and even requiring hospitalization several times. Similarly, he has never smoked or used drugs, not even during his adolescent street experiences, because he witnessed so much addiction-related self-destruction around him. As he recognizes, he found older people who mentored him and gave advice to the young boy about taking care of himself and staying out of trouble. His experiences motivated him to incorporate mentorship into his teaching and to create special projects directed toward youth, especially those considered “at risk.” I later learned that he had an episode of drinking “four or five glasses of wine every night for almost three months” when he was in his early twenties, but he also had such strong will power that he decided to stop cold and never touched another drop of alcohol in his life⁴⁹. Cinézio found in the structure of the physical activity of capoeira, a positive reinforcement to reverse the negative aspects of the street culture with its dangers and temptations.

A little story illustrates how this experience shapes his leadership role today.

During one of our early conversations some years ago, two of the older students came to

⁴⁹ Mestre Cobra only drinks Port wine on occasions, not very often. (Treinel Fabio, personal communication)

the office gathering their courage to ask him about bringing alcohol for a fundraising party they were planning for the spring. The students seemed almost embarrassed asking him and were clearly willing to respect his conviction on the matter. Yet, they argued the event would be more successful economically if they sold soft alcoholic drinks like beer and sangria. “Look,” he said, “I respect all the opinions, and you already know that I don’t like it. Alcohol is not in my energy, but if you can control the party and everybody is responsible for their acts, I won’t present an opposition if that is what you want to do. Ask the others and you decide within the group.” The incident was remarkable because the students knew that the initiative would not be popular among other students with responsibilities in the group, and that motivated them to ask for the supportive authority of the mestre. Some weeks later, another student talked to me about the strengths and weakness of the group and described the mestre’s role as a “safety net” for conflict resolution.

Beginning of the roda: the rest of instruments enter

The rest of the instruments enter in a specific order to complete the bateria: pandeiros, agogô, reco-reco and atabaque.



The pandeiros follow with thumbs, palms and jingles

TUM Ba Tum _ TUM Ba Tum _ TUM Ba Tum _ TUM Ba Tum _



Next, the agogô bells in piercing contrast

DON Din Don **DON Din Don**



*Then, the humble reco-reco,
Scraping away space and time*

REC Rec Rec **REC**



Last, the solemn atabaque, paused, holding the bateria from below

DUM Ba Dum da DUM Ba Dum da DUM Ba Dum da



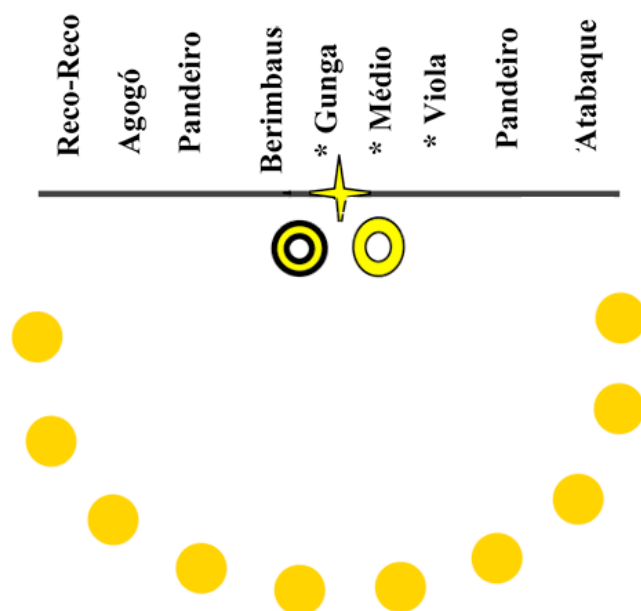
The bateria is now complete

Beginning of the roda: the players enter the circle

Once all the instruments have established the rhythm, the lead singer shouts “Iê!” to call for attention before initiating the first chant.

The two players enter the circle and crouch at the feet of the berimbau.

Iêêêêêêêêêêêê...!
Attention...!



Performative space at the beginning of the roda:
the players enter and crouch at the foot of the berimbau

Beginning of the roda - singing lead: the ladainha

The lead singer starts singing a solo, the ladainha. It could be a traditional narration of historical or legendary facts, or an improvised commentary giving advice to the players.

The players reflect on the lyrics and ask for protection in different ways—which could include drawing symbols on the floor—while collecting themselves in preparation for the game ahead.

Nasci no Mundo

(Ladainha)

M. Cobra Mansa

Nas-ci no mun-do Den-tro de-le eu me cri-ei a-pren-di a
 ca-po-ei-ra ai meus De-us den-tro de-la eu mo-re-rei. Che-go na ro-da Ve-jo a ra-
 pa-zi-a-da Vou jo-gan-do a ca-po-el-ra ai meus De-us do mun-do não que-ro na-da
 Meu be-rim-bau. E-sse ve-lho com-pa-nhei-ro Ja an-da-mos pe-lo mun-do
 ja ro-da-mos o mun-do in-tei-ro Jo-ga pra mim Eu tam-bé que-ro jo-gar.
 Se jo-gar pra mim eu pe-go Vou jo-gar pra tu pe-gar. Sou man-din-guei-ro
 Me-ni-no de Sal-va-dor. Vai jo-gan-do ca-po-el-ra Eu tam-bem lhe dou va-lor.
 A ca-po-el-ra ja ro-dou o mun-do in-tei-ro Me-ni-no eu sou de An-go-la
 Me-ni-no sou man-din-guei-ro ca-ma-ra

I was born in the world / I was raised inside it / I learned capoeira / oh my God, I will die inside her
 I arrive to the roda / I see the young people / I'm playing capoeira / oh my God, I do not want anything from the world
 My berimbau / that old companion / we already walked the world / we went around the world
 Play for me / I also want to play / If you play for me, I'll take it / I'm going to play so you can take it
 I'm mandingueiro / a boy from Salvador / go to play capoeira / I also give you value
 The capoeira / already went around the whole world / Little boy I am of Angola / Little boy I am mandingueiro comrade. (Ladainha: *Nasci no Mundo*. Langlois 2007)

While Mestre Cobra Mansa was “born and raised in the world” experiencing high levels of socialization in the streets as a boy, roaming free with the group of kids who would stay friends and comrades of capoeira for life, his experience—if well one of extreme poverty and material deprivation—was one of conviviality in extreme closeness with his family. In the other extreme of the Atlantic Ocean, in Spain, born and raised “in apartment” as Mestre Cobrinha would say, my life as a girl in a middle class with both my parents working as functionaries of the Department of Agriculture was precisely the opposite.

Arts Education through Segregation: Music Literacy in Spain during the 60s

Until the moment I joined, on a whim, a drumming workshop in May of 1997, accessing the first musical culture alien to my own, I had been a piano player since my first day of school, thirty some years before.

“... *DO... de de-do*” (C from fin-ger), my legs hang too short from the stool, at least ten inches far from the patterned tiled floor. She shows her crooked, veined index of translucent skin and touches delicately my pink fingertips and repeats “*deDO*” with her voiceless murmur. “Don’t you dare to laugh at her, she’s got a temper!” My older sister already warned me that my new piano teacher had lost her voice due to a terrible accidental surgery and talked forever whispering. “... *RE... de re-ga-lo*” (D from gift)—any five year-old already knows the name of the musical notes—but I won’t tell. Her intimate tone fascinates me; I sneak a glance around without moving away from her bowed head. I feel her whispers breathing against my cheek like ghost-words with a faint scent of orange, the strong camphor smell emanating from the piano, the multicolored gothic window, the ethereal black veils around the pale wrinkled face... Our private solitude overwhelms me with the respect of a sanctuary without the smells of melting wax and incense. I can hear the muffled racket noise of a thousand little girls enjoying the playtime outdoors on their first day of school. “... *FA... de fal-da*” (F from skirt) and her pointing on my new uniform carries me to the moment: amid of the smells of pencil leads, clean erasers, new satchels, tight shoes and stiff plaits soaked in eau de cologne, the itchy blouse collar... Today is my first day of school! I scarcely had crossed the threshold of the convent doors, when I was already segregated from the rest and conducted to this room, helped on top of the

stool in front of the wide smile in black&white of the camphor-piano and heard the old nun introduce herself: “*Me llamo Madre Josefina Lauzurica y soy la esposa de Jesucristo* (my name is Mother Josefina Lauzurica and I am the spouse of Jesus Christ). (Isa Angulo, Personal Journal, 2004)

I became literate in music before I learned to read and write in Spanish and my musicality was well tamed by the Western classical tradition during the first ten years of my musical studies: always apart from the pack, no playtime in the grounds but practice time instead, locked in solitary confinement to improve my piano skills. I was powerless deciding my musical repertoire and forbidden to play any music outside the Conservatory program except for Christmas and my mother’s birthday. I only could look at the score, looking at the movement of my hands on the keyboard, was punished, “Do not take your eyes off the score or I would have to cover your hands with the book.” It took me fourteen more years to overcome this extremely rigid mono-cultural mono-instrumental training to open my musical bones to the point of wanting to play a drum. I had been told my hands could be damaged forever.

Music not only had shaped my life in strange ways since early on; by the time I was fifteen, music *was* my life. When my mother died, the emptiness hurt so deep inside that the bones in my wrists barely had strength to hold my hands on the keyboard. Away from the performance, I became a facilitator of musical experiences for others. No whispers, no corporal punishment, no locked practices, no hidden reading of secret repertory, no daily reports in a special tiny notebook that will ground you for the week. I wished for my pupils all the experiences I did not have. I could not say who they would be, but I was playing with wild ideas, unable to break with the tradition I knew. It was important for me to look at where my students needed a creative approach to improve

understanding of their musical-selves. Fleeing from standards, my gaze to their intimate desires was my pedagogical method, my way to care for and heal my inner longing. I wanted to know who they were and who I was. If I knew what was their world—I thought—I would know the limits of mine and how music could be part of their/our lives without the trauma of segregation and the repression of their/our creativity. My search for independence and self expression would take me from the isolation of solo practice to the collective experience of combos and drumming circles.

Whereas my experience of music was a solitary one, the experience of any capoeirista is one of performance in community since the first historical accounts of its development in Brazil.

Ladainha *Velha Companheira* (M. Cobra Mansa)⁵⁰

<i>Chego na roda,</i>	I come to the roda
<i>Vou no pé do berimbau</i>	At the foot of the berimbau
<i>Faço minha oração</i>	I say my prayer
<i>Vou pedir a pái Ogum</i>	I'm asking father Ogum
<i>Para me dar proteção</i>	To protect me

Beginning of the roda – call and response: the chula

When the leader sings the line “Iê viva...” all participants sing the chorus response “Iê viva..., camará.” Following the call and response structure, the leader sings similar lines about different elements (meus Deus, meu mestre, a capoeira, etc.) as an invocation. The audience responds mirroring the mentioned element in their response with the antecedent “Iê” and the consequent “camará.”

Players may mimic with gestures the invocations made— i.e. raising their arms to the air at the mention of heaven or God, or signaling their mestre if he/she is present, along with other invocation signs.

⁵⁰ (FICA 2005)



Chula

Lead

Ma-ior — é Deus

ai ai ai vi-va o

Chorus

I - ê Ma ior — é Deus. ca-ma - rá

6

meu mes - tre

ai ai que me en - si- nhou.

I - ê vi va o — meu mes - tre ca-ma - rá I -

11

ê que me en - si-nhou ca-ma - rá

<i>A malandragem</i>	The cunning
<i>(coro) A malandragem, camará</i>	<i>(chorus) The cunning, comrade</i>
<i>Da capoeira</i>	Of capoeira
<i>(coro) Da capoeira, camará</i>	<i>(chorus) Of capoeira, comrade</i>
<i>Da volta ao mundo</i>	Go around the world
<i>(coro) Da volta ao mundo, camará</i>	<i>(chorus) Go around the world, comrade</i>
<i>Que o mundo dá</i>	The world turns
<i>(coro) Que o mundo dá, camará</i>	<i>(chorus) The world turns, comrade</i>
<i>Vamos embora</i>	Lets go comrade

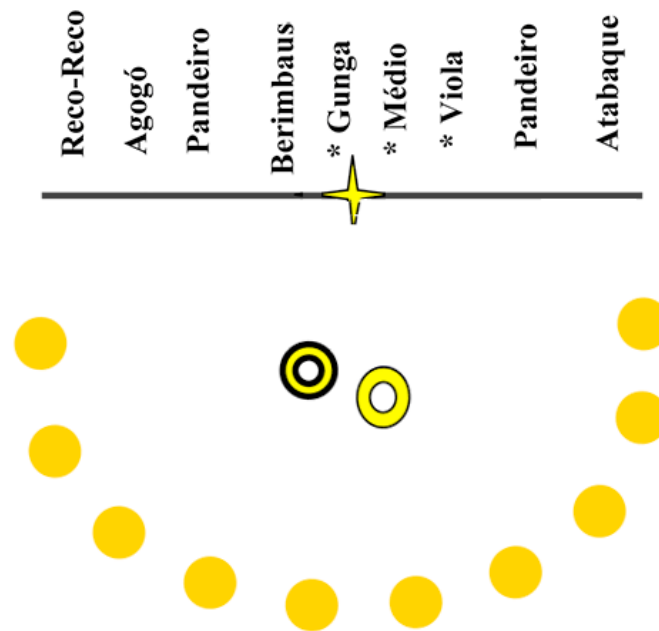
(*coro*) *Vamos embora, camará* (*chorus*) Lets go comrade, comrade
Chegou a hora It's time
(*coro*) *Chegou a hora, camará* (*chorus*) It's time, comrade

(Chula, M. Cobra Mansa, 2007)⁵¹

Beginning of the roda – call and response: the corrido

After the chula, the lead singer initiates the corrido, a call and response where the verses called are fixed or improvised chronicling the game and the response line is always the same.

The players then shake hands and signal to the center of the circle inviting each other to initiate the jogo (figure 4).



Performative space at the beginning of the roda:
the players start the first jogo in the center of the roda

⁵¹ (VVAA 2007)

Corrido *Mamãe me Mandou Dizer* (M. Cobra Mansa)⁵²

<i>Mamãe me mandou dizer</i>	My mother told me
<i>Mamãe me mandou falar</i>	My mother spoke to me
<i>(coro) Mamãe me mandou dizer</i>	<i>(chorus)</i> My mother told me

First jogo: the ginga movement

As an impasse, between the attack and defense series of movements the players engage in ginga (sway).

Background History of Capoeira

<i>Na roda de capoeira</i>	In the roda of capoeira
<i>Menino, sou mandingueiro</i>	Little boy, I am a trickster

Ladainha Velha Companheira (M. Cobra Mansa 2005)⁵³

Capoeiristas are by nature and by choice a different kind of individual who desire freedom at the deepest levels of their being. [...] We want a community that celebrates and encourages individuality and cooperation among its members. We want a world capoeira community that respects different values, beliefs, views, and practices. (M. Cobra Mansa 2002, *Manifesto*)⁵⁴

Cobrinha's strong drive for independence and freedom, instilled early by his mother, also results from his untimely acculturation in the streets, along with his precocious role of provider for his family. They are key principles that Mestre Cobra Mansa learned at a young age and those he values the most. In a sense, to overcome the hardship of his experience, Mestre Cobra gives the impression that he found the way to sublimate independence and freedom as distinctive qualities of his character. The culture

⁵² (FICA 2005)

⁵³ (FICA 2005)

⁵⁴ (Caxixi n° 3 2002)

of capoeira reflects those principles and must have resonated well with Cobrinha when he was a young teenager, captivating him forever. There was a constant movement of engagement with life and circumstances like the *ginga*, the first movement a capoeirista must learn:

The word ginga in capoeira means the perfect coordination of body movements executed by the capoeirista to distract the opponent, turning him vulnerable to the application of his strokes. Its movements are soft and very supple. [...] In the ginga resides the extraordinary cunning of capoeira being also its fundamental characteristic. [The ginga] has the advantage of developing balance in the body, leading to the smoothness and grace proper of a dancer. (Pastinha 1988, 50)



Ginga is not just a noun that indicates the starting point for the rest of the movements in capoeira. Ginga is also a verb that is used in Portuguese to indicate the fluid movements of a soccer player to deceive the adversary, the swing in walking, the groove of the music. I bring it here as a metaphor for the flow of ideas, life experiences, and events that Cobrinha encountered in his early years. The first movement for the initiative experience can be read as the sum of his parts, an ergonomic response to the ginga of the other player, or can be studied like the still frame on a movie as separate events, data to understand how the ginga movements initiated and developed for each player. The dimensions and spaces the movement occupies over time are reactions (or provocations) to external stimuli, and the capoeirista from the ginga can use an array of strategies like “hide, dodge, feint and attack” (Capoeira 2003, 62), but as Mestre Cobrinha stresses often in his classes, always done in a beautiful manner.

As I consider this idea of the metaphoric ginga to describe Cobrinha's childhood, I turn the wheel in the spiral of meanings and take look at another ginga, the capoeira's narrative of survival over a hazardous history in Brazil, seeking some ancestral cultural clues of this exaltation of negative experience that Mestre Cobrinha's attitude toward life seems to exemplify. Capoeira as a "creole art of the diaspora" (Assunção 2005, 3) has excited much discussion and supported diverse myths of creation and survival through the ages since, allegedly, its travel from Africa or in the contrary argument, since its spontaneous development in Brazil. Engravings and chronicles tell the story of a fight-dance practiced by slaves in the *senzala* (slave house). Arguably, it had much in common with what we know today as capoeira. Though the practice of the street-fight, the capoeiragem, was eradicated in Rio at the end of the nineteenth century, in the northeastern state of Bahia, the art survived via the oral transmission from the experts—generally carters, warehousemen and stevedores—to individuals or small groups of practitioners in an informal manner (Líbano Soares 1999; Assunção 2005). Although not generally known about, capoeira was nonetheless brutally repressed in urban lower-class culture. Manoel dos Reis Machado, Mestre Bimba, recalled that one of the punishments the capoeiristas received in the early twenties was to be tied to the tails of two parallel horses by their wrists and dragged to the police station by horses made to gallop (Kraay 1998, 125). It was safer to play close to the police station because the distance to be dragged was shorter.⁵⁵ While the association of capoeira with street violence was the primary published and criminalized manifestation of the fighting game, many capoeiristas continued to practice their art in private helping to keep the art form alive. For example,

⁵⁵ As narrated by Bimba's students in the documentary *Mestre Bimba: A Capoeira Iluminada*. (Goulart 2008)

the urgency to avoid confrontation or arrest from the police influenced the development of special capoeira texts (rhythms and styles), like the *toque cavalaria*⁵⁶ (cavalry rhythm), a call for attention on the berimbau that would signal the imminent arrival of police, which is today in disuse.⁵⁷

What makes the ginga special as compared to other martial art stances is that it puts capoeiristas in constant motion, making them a very frustrating target for an opponent. [...] As a general rule, the ginga in capoeira angola is very free and individualistic. (Capoeira 2003, 62)



The same way that police repression, poverty, alcohol and drugs took their deadly toll on the street culture, and Cobrinha learned how to survive it, capoeira survived also by overcoming stigmatization and persecution in Bahia. There are two major figures associated with what has been called “the Bahian model” (Assunção 2005, 199), who helped capoeira transition from its negative public image as criminal, violent activity to a respectable form of physical training, martial arts and traditional culture: *Mestre Bimba* already mentioned, and Vicente Ferreira Pastinha, *Mestre Pastinha*. Mestre Bimba is credited with opening the first official academy of capoeira in 1937, the Center of Regional Physical Culture, registered with the Office of Education in Bahia. By registering the school using a name that emphasized “regional physical culture,” Mestre Bimba successfully avoided the official prohibition of capoeira and also established the

⁵⁶ According to Mestre Cobra Mansa, the cavalry rhythm has fallen in disuse after the legalization of the practice, moreover after tourism would propitiate its practice on the streets.

⁵⁷ In the capoeiristas imagination it still carries the meaning of escape, for when I suggested the rhythm to Cobrinha as a possible use for the illustration of some chapter in this dissertation, he quickly dismissed it “If I was running away from something, maybe.” (Interview March 11, 2008)

foundation for what became one of the two major forms of capoeira—the so-called “regional” form. Mestre Bimba engaged in well-published challenges to demonstrate the superiority of capoeira over other martial arts and techniques.⁵⁸

This nationalistic approach to Brazilian capoeira as “combat-sport” received unanimous support all over the country in national championships, and “sportsman of the privileged classes advocated the widespread adoption of capoeira in place of ‘foreign’ fighting sports such as boxing, karate, jujitsu and tae-kwondo, in spite of public prejudices against the Brazilian art” (Downey 2002, 4).

The ginga is neither attack nor escape, but it contains both. It is said that the advanced player never uses the ginga, but from another perspective everything he does is ginga. Likewise, the ginga for most players provides continuity between interchanges, a recovery position from which one is not obliged to attack or defend (at least for the moment). (Lewis 1992, 145)



Similar to the way in which the mixing of three dominant races (White, Black and Indigenous) in Brazil created the Brazilian *mestissage*, through a reinterpretation of its playfulness and the myth of racial democracy, capoeira became vindicated as an authentic uniquely Brazilian “gymnastic fighting” art-form.⁵⁹ The alleged racial harmony that Brazilians prided themselves on during most of the twentieth century covered an actual gap in socio-economic status between blacks and the rest of the society.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Stories and memorabilia of these combats also narrated in Goulart (2008)

⁵⁹ In the movie “Mandinga in Manhattan” Mestre Cobrinha states how the three cultures contributed to Capoeira “From the indians the name, from the Africans the fight, and from the Portuguese the repression.” (Faria 2007)

⁶⁰ The collective denial about the prejudice and discrimination in all areas is slowly fading, too slowly for some, after numerous research showing the pervasive racist policies and attitudes still prevalent. President Lula’s political change is bringing some policies to the open social discussion. Unlike the processes of

Nationalists intellectuals, folklorists, military officers and writers, helped appropriate capoeira by denying its specifically African heritage and characterizing it as a national gymnastics, which enabled it to be celebrated as a true physical education of Brazil that, at the time (early 1950's), had to be taught at schools, quarters, and in all the places where instruction was important (Líbano Soares 1999). The elimination of capoeira's weapons and its decriminalization through denying its African traditions and influences, opened the door for the characterization of capoeira as a truly Brazilian creation. In July of 1953 Mestre Bimba was invited to the Presidential Palace, where President Gertúlio Vargas declared capoeira as the “only truly national sport” and fighting system of Brazil. The athletic and patriotic dimensions of capoeira fused once again to serve the interests of the State (Assunção 2005, 141).

The [ginga] step produces constant momentum, like coiling and uncoiling a spring, ideally heightening a player's readiness and concealing a player's intention. [...] The ginga is stable but dynamic, sometimes hesitating momentarily when a player rocks back at the end of each pass. (Downey 2005, 120)



However, the most important change would occur on a socioeconomic level—the restructuring of the capoeira setting brought middle class, white, practitioners who began to establish training classrooms, attract public exhibitions, and opened the participation to new cohorts from higher socioeconomic classes. The surge in popularity for capoeira was

segregation and apartheid that other countries suffered which motivated a collective shift in social and cultural consciousness over time, Brazil has still to work out how to bring sensitivity to society about the inequalities experienced by Brazilians of African descent. The recent Dantas case discussed in the Epilogue, illustrates how perverse the prejudices are and how deeply are embedded in Brazilian privileged classes.

backed up by a new economic power, the Ministry of Tourism. The Ministry was said to be the “negative agent of the decadence process of capoeira” (Rego 1968, 362). Changes in the practice included sale of special sports clothes and a hierarchical structure delineating levels of expertise, first indicated by scarves, then by colored sashes or *cordaos*. Manuals were produced, eradicating the amorphous elements of ritual, music and performance from capoeira, and transformed it in an “amalgamation of distinct violent fighting techniques” (Downey 2002, 7).

More recently another threat hung over the head of the traditional mestres when a law was about to be passed about the professionalization of capoeira. In order to be able to teach in high schools or universities the mestres needed to become “certified.” Besides arguing the point of who certifies the knowledge and experience of a reputed mestre who never had a chance to get properly schooled in the first place, the prospects of “dying from success,” becoming further marginalized, and being banned from their own area of expertise are evident. The rising interest of using capoeira as a commodity risked excluding those who were responsible for its success and its visibility in Brazil and outside. Even though Cobrinha is a certified Physical Education instructor, he was one of the voices that spoke against the certification decision giving voice in meetings and conferences to the concerns of older mestres.

For the sake of our story, the fact that capoeira became popular enough to be performed again in the martial arts academy setting also signaled a chance for it to be performed publicly in a “sanctioned” street performance before the eyes of a thirteen-year old Cinézio Peçanha during a carnival in Rio in 1973.

Street Schooling: Surviving One Day at a Time

Cobrinha does not shy away from acknowledging the difficulties he had while growing up on the streets and how he overcame marginalization due to his “education in capoeira.” During our conversations, he makes frequent references to particular icons of Brazilian culture. We somehow manage to conduct our chats in three different tongues: the American English of our common land, and, in case of tight spots, his Portuguese and my Spanish came to the rescue in a sort of Spanese or Portuñol armistice. In the spur of the moment sometimes my tired brain looks frantically for English or Portuguese words that come out as Catalan. I wonder at these moments what it would look like to read a literal transcription of any of our conversations. Upon reflection days later, I am amazed by how much of our conversations occur through gestures and non-verbal communication in a kind of “everything is allowed” fashion of two people determined to understand one another. In this constantly negotiated way, I discover during our first dialogues that one of his friends is writing a memoir about the particular times of the street roda in Caxías⁶¹ and has sent some chapters to Cobrinha to revise.

You know, we were a group of kids that used to do roda on the streets to get money to survive; after all, it became famous and today is one of the big rodas over there. Today, everybody wants to go there to see it, like a historical place from the seventies. My friend is going to talk about how this group didn’t become marginalized. From all the kids in the neighborhood at the same age –we were about twenty- only the ones that were dedicated to capoeira survived. Everybody else, who was not really dedicated, died or disappeared. We were marginal, nobody believed that we could be somebody today. It’s a big shock for a lot of people to see us doing good.

Despite of the backdrop of his hard experiences, Mestre Cobra shows an enviable sense of humor, peppering his narration with amusing memories and anecdotes. All the

⁶¹ Mestre Russo de Caxías self-published the book *Capoeiragem: Expressões da Roda Livre* in 2005.

members of the children's group he talks about are today Mestres of capoeira living in Brazil or abroad, and are internationally recognized. He laughs when he tells me how his



friend is finding inspiration in a novel of Jorge Amado, *Capitães de Areia*⁶² (Captains of the Sands), “except that we were captains of asphalt!” I laugh with him while I am surprised that I can follow his literary

references, understand the pun, and have a good time while I hear his depiction of what to me looks like a miserable childhood that, by the miracle of capoeira, had a happy ending. The memories of some of the themes of our conversations bring back images of the setting where I conducted my early research.

In the beginning, almost all our recorded conversations happened in the Administration office in the ICAF headquarters in Takoma Park. It is a small room in the back of the building, full of stuff with mismatched, battered office furniture obtained from an intense recycling practice. Decorated berimbaus hang from the wall with pictures, old posters, and numerous trip mementos. Cobrinha dominates the spot as a relentless interlocutor. When sitting in the chair, his body retracts or spreads all over with contortionist possibilities. His gestures are graphic, his laugh frequent, loud and infectious; his voice changes pitch and tone to represent evoked characters and emotions in his stories. He has impeccable storytelling resources and stands up frequently to illustrate the narrative: to mime or parody a situation, or an anecdote, to look for videotapes, a book, a paper, or a bunch of pictures. Sometimes he has to dodge among

⁶² Published in 1937, the novel is a lively portrait of a gang of street children from Salvador from an early and more politically and socially focused period of Jorge Amado's work.

jammed boxes, bags, equipment, instruments, but as a conjuror, he emerges triumphant from the cabinet, the highest shelf, or the junked drawer displaying the desired trophy. Mestre Cobra is a generous sharer, and he shares his crammed treasure chest with liberal spontaneity. He embodies grace in his movements, and is very pleasant and entertaining to observe, while he facilitates my research with overwhelming documentation. I enjoy how he inhabits space and shapes purpose in his personal life in similar ways I have observed in his game of capoeira.

How he survived was part of the street learning process: poor people helping poor people, wise elders giving advice to a child:

This is the other thing: I was a street kid,⁶³ but I didn't live in the streets. We used to sleep in the academy; I just had left home although I would continue working to bring money to my family.

For someone who had to survive in dangerous environments, Cobrinha recognizes that he was both very naïve and lucky, for he always found good people to help him. I think he was a specialist in creating his own opportunities, too. A normal day would start with him looking for food, something to bring to his mother and something to eat himself to endure the day. If he needed money, he would go to the market, (one source of petty cash) and take small quantities of fruit from a vendor and offer them to the passers-by. Then, he would return for more, and if he had earned the trust of the vendor, maybe he could stay at the booth, sell more products, have a greater share of the benefits and be trusted to manage the owner's money. One could make progress because the rule was

⁶³ In 1986 Unicef redefined the street children concept dividing it in two different denominations. One, children *on* the street would be "home based" children who spend much of the day on the street but have some family support and usually return home at night. The second one, children *of* the street would refer to "street based" children who spend most days and nights on the street and are functionally without family support (Lusk 1989).

simple: “Don’t mess up with the people you are going to need.” He also had to be a role model for his brothers that came behind him. If he messed up, he would close the doors for his little brothers to survive in the streets.

While he recognized that the street was a dangerous place to be, Cobrinha also knew where to go the moment that things got complicated and thereby avoid trouble. He was surrounded and befriended by people who drank, smoked pot, injected drugs: “I got traumatized when I saw it for the first time at fifteen,” people being robbed, and living dangerous lives. It was certainly advantageous to be “peripheral” to them, and not get involved.

The stolen stuff was cheaper, you know, but after you see a lot of people in bad shape you don’t feel like doing [drugs]...nobody forbade me to do it, but I didn’t smoke. Although I liked the smell and I liked the taste of the seeds of cannabis! Tigre,⁶⁴ he was ten years older than me, would tell me: “I don’t want you to smoke.” He would tell the others when the joint would go around: “Don’t give it to the kid!” I had to take care because I had to be athletic and also be in shape to do the acrobatic exercises... but I was an expert rolling joints!

Hustling was their primary survival form. From his accounts, they would eat at least once every day, even if it only were a bag of low quality milk and a piece of bread with some fruit—like the famous “boca-banana”⁶⁵—maybe rescued from the scraps of the market. Many times, they would turn to one of their favorite resources: the bakery. They would slip away from the vigilance of the cashier and pick up receipts from the store’s floor. The game would consist in looking quickly at the figures listed (only with the numbers printed, not the items description) and naturally find a combination of items

⁶⁴ Tigre was one of Cinezio’s mentors and co-workers. He would introduce him to the acrobatics and they would have partnership to get the attention to the people for the street show and have a mutual benefit.

⁶⁵ Literally means “banana sandwich,” but also has a pun with the meaning “banana in the mouth.”

and weight that would match with that receipt. This operation required a lot of practice and a great deal of mental skills to avoid mistakes. They would show the shopping bag on the way out to the cashier along with the receipt that conveniently would have the date and numbers correctly matched. The wittiness of the method had its reward: free food. They considered the risks of such illicit operations and developed a net of resources and strategies for survival. The *malandragem* (astuteness) of the game of capoeira is all about staying steps ahead of your opponent to surprise him, “get him” without showing your strategy. Winning the resources to meet their primary needs—food, a bed under a roof, sustained focus—resulted in excellent informal training for the game of capoeira and vice versa.

You forgot to enjoy the jogo! When you enter in competition you need to think: “I want to get you, but I want to get you *in a beautiful way*.”⁶⁶

Indeed the way they managed to fill their hungry bellies was beautifully smart, a practical application of what *malicia* is. Sometimes his sense of humor and the memories he shared from these hard times looked to me as if he was having a great time remembering them. I laughed with him from the heart, but somehow it was an uneasy diversion that left a bitter shadow in my own childhood memories, like the sandwiches that I threw away in secret. In a Catholic and Apostolic Roman country like Spain of the 1960’s and 1970’s it was a sin to throw away food when so many people in the world were hungry I was told. As a child, I was not much of an eater (I was rarely hungry) and my plates were always overwhelmingly full of food that I could not finish, but I was forced to eat everything —sometimes in a very humiliating manner. My family called me

⁶⁶ The emphasis is mine. Cobrinha talks about the main purpose of the capoeira game in a discussion time after a class with the advanced student’s group (Personal field journal notes, 2002).

fideo (noodle) and teased me because I was “thinner than the X-ray picture of a shrimp ankle.” The contemplation of our very different childhood food-related experiences felt now as heavy and cold as a tombstone in my stomach.

After taking care of their nourishment, the group of kids would go off to school; they finished elementary school at fourteen but did not go immediately after to middle school. Instead, they went on to practice capoeira for a couple of years. Eventually, all of them would decide to return to school together at sixteen. Once they had finished with the middle school certificate, their daily plan after breakfast would be to return to the academy until the scheduled time of the training class, three times a week. Cobrinha also discovered a personal fervor for reading in the local library that occupied his days along with the training or subsistence activities. I cannot stop my own memories of arguing heatedly with my sister—we shared a bedroom—who would accuse me of reading too much, and took extreme measures to remedy my nocturnal readings. Many nights my mother would mediate some Solomonic peace between us by extracting the electrical plumbs from the wall socket leaving the room without power and a very frustrated Isa in the dark wanting to be the daughter of any other family. Years later, I would learn that my father also had a “reading vice” growing up. His solution was ingenious: he would read under the sheets hiding from his grandmother, using the spine of a fish as a fluorescent magnification glass to read in the dark.

Beginnings in Capoeira: The Street Children’s Rescue

During these teenager years, a song by Raul Seixas “Maluco Beleza” would become the anthem of the young capoeiristas, a nod of approval for their outcast identity,

“one of these things of rebellion” Cobrinha says, but he identified himself with the song’s message, and a search on internet for the lyrics gives me the key:

*Enquanto você se esforça pra ser
Um sujeito normal e fazer tudo igual*

While you make an effort to be normal
And do everything like always

*Eu do meu lado aprendendo a ser louco
Maluco total a loucura real*

I do my part, learning to be crazy
Beautiful Madman, in real madness

*Controlando a minha maluquez
Misturada com minha lucidez*

Controlling my madness
Mixed with my lucidity

*Vou ficar, ficar com certeza
Maluco beleza (bis)*

I will be with certainty
Beautiful Madman (bis)

*E esse caminho que eu mesmo escolhi
É tão fácil seguir
por não ter onde ir*

The path I chose myself
It’s so easy to follow
Because I did not have where to go

*Controlando a minha maluquez
Misturada com minha lucidez*

Controlling my madness
Mixed with my lucidity

*Vou ficar, ficar com certeza
Maluco beleza (bis)*

I will be with certainty
Beautiful Madman (bis)

Maluco Beleza. Raul Seixas. From the Album *O Dia Em que a Terra Parou*, WEA 1977

Doing capoeira—in spite of the advice against it Cinézio received from Dona Nenem—was also a question of affirming his independence:

My family, my mother, never approved of me training capoeira, she thought capoeira was a thing that would never offer me a future. At that time, capoeira still was very marginalized and there was a lot of prejudice. On the street, when you sat there with a berimbau, the police would stop you and ask what were you doing. Difficult, when you’re a kid of thirteen, fourteen years old. So my mother didn’t want me to get into that stuff. But I continued.

With his persistence, Cobrinha was following instinctively the call of capoeira—“I just kept going”—and resisting the dominant culture by following his own desires, at the risk of being criticized and paradoxically marginalized by other at the margins. This

attitude mirrors the resistance to oppression that Brazilian descendents of the African Diaspora showed through performance and ritual in cultural expressions such as capoeira and candomblé. Cobrinha's maturity was developing slowly but steadily. While he tells me he received innumerable critiques about the way he managed his familial ties and responsibilities toward his girlfriends and children, his students always praise his dedication and commitment to teaching. I talk with one of his first students in the D.C. area who explain to me why people would connect with capoeira through Cobrinha, because of the way he devoted himself to the classes:

Mestre Cobra, as a mestre, incorporated much more than just the basic capoeira. I was in a "satellite program," just two people outside the main program, and he taught us with the same energy he taught his other group. There wasn't any difference with respect to the other class. Some days he came, some others he didn't, but when he was there he was a hundred percent. In the ten years that I have known him, every class and every student received the same kind of attention, like in a private class. Everybody had a private class! He puts all his energy in each student he trains. Even when he just got off a plane, (*laughs*) you know: jet lag for fourteen hours, and he has other issues going on, and things aren't going well... As soon as he starts the class, he is a hundred percent there. That has been consistent all these years. That's amazing to me. That's a symbol of a true master. It's not related with what happened to you that day, or how are you feeling and all of that. It's independent from that, like passing from the universe through you. (Sylvia Robinson, personal communication)

As Sylvia is an experienced practitioner and instructor of other martial arts, I wanted to know more about how she was motivated as a capoeira student:

"Do you feel that Cobrinha's way of teaching gives you more energy to get involved with the practice?" I ask her, curious about Mestre Cobra's teaching techniques.

"Oh, yeah! Having someone with that kind of focus on you makes you feel like someone is paying attention to you, and you want to do it well, because he is going to be happy, when you do it well. It's not like 'Ooh...I'm going to be embarrassed!' But it's like you want to see him smile, this person that has all this energy and is all this excited about capoeira and then when you do it well, he is so excited about it for you...You just want to feed that. You want make him say: 'Oh, you are doing good!' You can tell that he gets something from that, from his teaching...so that helps you. The thing that made me look at

capoeira like something real special was that I saw so many people smiling when they started to train. Even from the beginning, when they just do a *negativa*, it was fun! You could see people smiling—even people that you know that they don't usually smile a lot when they do anything— so there is something special about it. You realized that 'I'm smiling, but wait a minute... there is lots of people having a good time!' And you are not sure why, because you are just doing cartwheels”.

Cobrinha followed his own instincts about capoeira after he saw a group playing it for the first time during Carnival in February of 1973 in Rio de Janeiro. The young teen, eager to learn, did his research well and found someone to train him in his own backyard. A group of friends, the “asphalt captains.” would start training there and when they discovered an academy where they could watch more formalized classes, they moved on. Consistent with capoeira’s history, the academy where Cobrinha arrived was more like a sports center or a martial arts training center. Still today he makes a distinction between what he proposes, the “group,”⁶⁷ and the academy. Invariably, this meant there was a militarized order and discipline, and of course, monthly membership fees that the group of boys could not afford. They did not have money to pay for classes because they scarcely could find enough daily nourishment to meet their physical developmental needs. Therefore, they would sit quietly in a corner and observe the classes closely while practicing the moves they saw at the academy on their own. Eventually the instructor, Mestre Jozias Da Silva, would accept them as students with payment in kind: “cleaning the floor and the whole place.” Cobrinha, his brother Dimola (Pedrinho), and Jurandir would stay overnight to sleep in the academy.

⁶⁷ In a FICA-DC meeting (March 19, 2008) Cobrinha’s explained his views of the group as representing a common effort towards a common goal, something the whole group and every participant owns and cares for, whereas the academy is a commercial setting where once you pay your dues you can expect someone else to take care of everything, from the facilities maintenance to the training organization.

At the same time that they were following the “academy training” they kept participating in street rodas even though that practice was discriminated against—“I don’t know if you heard, but they played in shorts, sandals, there was no *organization*” (Nunes in Mestre Russo de Caxias 2005:61 my emphasis). As I choose carefully the synonym for the translation of the word “nomenclatura” used in the original Portuguese text, I understand how the academically sanctioned and socially accepted capoeira world would fiercely attack the unclassifiable, marginalized street practice. While some capoeiristas like Cobrinha would cross the boundaries of the two worlds easily, and further along the way would champion the inclusion and support of capoeiristas left by the wayside of the mainstream, many would defy and resist the academic system, by lack of means or conviction, vouching for alternative models of capoeira and they often succeeded in their struggle. Today, the Roda de Caxias or Roda Livre, where very dangerous games have been played, is not just a historical landmark, it is a place of pilgrimage, an initiation space, a roda to test your capoeira skills—“In a roda like this one you have to have real confidence in your ability to defend yourself.”⁶⁸

Not accepted easily, being poor kids from the street, young Cinézio and the other boys would compensate for their lack of status with enthusiasm in the practice. They would train with devotion and they found the motivation to resume their studies and finish high school together. Having had good grades in school and loving to learn and read by himself, Cobrinha would take food and spend whole days in the public library. He tells me how he would be reading whatever sources he could find about capoeira and Afro-Brazilian history and culture, linking the references from one book to another and so forth, creating an informal self education and a meticulous research methodology at

⁶⁸ Treinel Gegê, talking about her experience in the Roda Livre in July 2000 (*O Angoleiro*, March 2001, 7)

his own pace. In actuality, his early discoveries about capoeira provided him with a deep knowledge about sources of historical writings published in Brazil that were unknown by many certified scholars. His persistence in following the links to other sources allowed him a perspective on how the writers used their sources. As he recalls his casual but thorough research, Cobrinha jumps from his seat to show me an example of his findings. He retrieves from the bookcase an old paperback in Portuguese, possibly from a flea market, all underlined with all the footnotes checked out. I follow his reasoning and see his point: the writer based his account only in the testimony of a few capoeiristas that indeed were not the main figures at the time.⁶⁹

It was at this time when he started to “get politicized.” An older student Paulo Brassa would bring books by Abdias do Nascimento and other Afro-Brazilian authors. He talked about Bahia all the time, talked about the older mestres and the young teenagers would listen fascinated—Cobrinha was the only one sneaking to read his books. He read whatever he could put his hands on. The curiosity was there, the thirst to learn new things, even when the content would not “make any sense to me. I could not make any connection.” The connection only would come years later in Belo Horizonte through Isabel de Souza. “The interesting thing to me” says the mestre reflexively during our conversation, “it’s the process of how your consciousness awakes.” Connecting the dots of the sociopolitical history in Brazil and the Black Movement struggle would develop slowly over the years.

Young Cinézio also started to write. He began keeping a personal journal where he would write intimate ideas, notes about the players, the capoeira mestres he saw, and

⁶⁹ The book was one of the historic sources of capoeira, *Capoeira Angola: Ensaio Sócio-Etnográfico* (Rego, 1968).

their games. Cobrinha would be very critical in his notes and write about encounters with friends (and girlfriends!), about his feelings and emotions, “Something my sons can read when I die and learn who and what I was.” When I asked him to take a look at them, he showed me a box full of worn out notebooks and scrap papers, filled with a steady and minuscule penmanship and sketches. Poems, thoughts, encounters, experiences, were recorded freely in the intimacy of his journals. This practice also would bring more than one headache when readers discovered what the journal contained, and would create trouble for him with girlfriends and even police investigators in his near future. We talk about a twist of fate with respect to his first mestre of capoeira:

The mestre de capoeira over there [Mestre Jozias] hated us! He was the one who criticized us a lot, he didn't like us, but the only reason he was keeping us over there is because of Rogerio. He was a student there—it was just like here [FICA], with the older students. When the mestre couldn't teach, Rogerio was the guy doing the class. The mestre didn't want to miss too many classes. Rogerio would do the class and everything else to keep the school playing. But at night, all these little brats would stay and sleep over there...*(laughs)*. He would criticize us a lot, a lot, and it's funny, because about last year... Was it last year? I knew he had some difficulties, and he came to one roda and stayed. It may have been more than ten years that we didn't have seen each other and he know all this thing about me today.

As Cobrinha talks, I picture the militarized and authoritarian old man that he impersonated for me a while ago. The man was someone who readily discriminated against indigent kids, yet he had to work with them because they were such excellent students and bestowed prestige upon the academy. It must have been difficult for him to accept that Cobrinha became a mestre de capoeira, a professional like himself with a school in the United States, etc. I recall another story of how Mestre Jozias had to write a letter of transference for Cobrinha to his next mestre, Mestre Moraes. It was not a supportive letter, but also had a disclaimer of responsibility if Cobrinha gave any trouble

to the new mestre. It also was a list of faults, imagined, real and exaggerated about the value of Cobrinha as a student. When Mestre Cobra talked about this pseudo letter of recommendation, it infuriated me, because as a music teacher, much of my happiness was to advance my students with other instructors and resources to allow them to grow as musicians, independent from me. It was very difficult for me to understand how other people might do things differently. Mestre Cobra laughed at my outrage. His new instructor, Mestre Moraes, actually gave him the letter years later, and I understood quite well why he saved it. My comment to Mestre Cobrinha was, “Well, that says something about Moraes, doesn’t it? In spite of the bad reputation Mestre Jozias tried to inflict upon you, he took the risk of accepting you as a student.” He answered back: “That suggests that whatever happens with a student, the responsibility falls on the mestre’s reputation. Mestre Jozias didn’t want to take the smallest risk over us.” Cobrinha then continues the story about the reencounter with Mestre Jozias.

“So, he [Mestre Jozias] came to me after the roda and he was like: (*mimicking a penitent attitude*) ‘Ahhh...’ All nice! He needed help and I gave him 20 dollars... I gave him some help, you know... For him was a lot of money.”

“That was a really nice detail from you considering...—in my mind I had not forgive Mestre Jozias treacherous letter yet.

“Anyway —Cobrinha dismisses my tone waving his hand— after the Mestre came, he went to one of my friends in the roda and said ‘Men...I did not believe it...I thought he wasn’t going to talk to me! I thought he wouldn’t talk to me, but he was so nice...’ My friend knew some bad stuff that this Mestre had said about me from the past.”



“No wonder! I would be more ashamed than surprised...”—I feel like a dog clutching a bone in her jaws. Cobrinha smiles:

“I talked to him, ‘Man... I surpassed it...’ On the opposite... I said, ‘Thank you, because you gave me that possibility, the school, to sleep over there. You made some judgments about us, and that was a bad

thing to do, but look at us now!’”

“What did he answer?”—I am intimately rejoicing for Mestre Jozias more than probable humiliation.

“He was (*imitates again the small voice of someone sorry and humble*) ‘Yeah man, I know... but blah-blah-blah...’” With a shrug of his shoulders Cobrinha dismisses the value of my anger, I now feel sorry for the old man and remember a Spanish proverb: “*Otro vendrá que bueno te hará*” (someone else will come that would make you look good).

Nonetheless, it was in the academy of Mestre Jozias that Cobrinha met Mestre Moraes for the first time in a workshop, and discovered the style of capoeira angola.

“Anyway,”—Cobrinha resumes his comment about how much the Mestre Jozias hated them and mistreat them at the time—“One year later, I met Mestre Moraes that came to visit this academy. When I saw his game I said: ‘Yes! That’s the capoeira I want to learn!’ So, in 1974, I started training capoeira angola⁷⁰ with Moraes.”

I find in the contemporary history of capoeira another contextual hint. During the 1930’s, as other groups appeared and became more numerous following Mestre Bimba’s capoeira Regional initiative, the need for an association of the capoeira “Bahian style” increasingly known as “capoeira de Angola” emerged. Mestre Pastinha, one of the first mestres to dedicate his life to the art, assumed the coordination of the new association, and later officially opened the first school of capoeira Angola in 1952. Mestre Pastinha was known for his commitment to the philosophy of capoeira, emphasizing mastery and self-knowledge as integral aspects of the art form. Considered to be the more traditional form, capoeira angola concentrates on the rituals, strategies and tactics of the encounter, as well as combat simulation through theatrics and movement. On the other hand, the regional form of capoeira created by Mestre Bimba stressed the acrobatics, the discipline

⁷⁰ The form that Moraes played, angola, had moves that appear less combative than the regional form of Mestre Jozias. They were subtler, and as in many African traditions, the players never touch except by chance. In the only movement in Angola’s style that the players touch their hand palms, in the *chamada* (see Chapter 4), it resembles a parody of some European saloon dances, like a waltz. (Downey, 2002).

and the physical aspects of the performance, factors that have been criticized as “whitened” by its detractors. In later years, schools that focus on the Angola style also tended to incorporate an Afro-centric perspective, stressing the art’s link with its African roots. This element grew to be prevalent in the 1980s, with the rise of the *Movimento Negro* (Black Movement), the contemporary Brazilian Black consciousness movement. Capoeira Angola is seen as a symbol of Afro-Brazilian identity, along with candomblé (African syncretic religion), newer musical styles such as *samba-reggae* and *bloco afro*,⁷¹ traditional Afro-Brazilian foods, African hairstyles and other African Diaspora cultural forms.

Mestre Moraes, a disciple of Mestre João Grande who was apprentice of Mestre Pastinha himself, represents the link with the ancestry in the modern era of capoeira Angola while Mestre Cobra Mansa also became a decisive agent of its transmission out of Brazil. Once transferred to study with Mestre Moraes, despite of Mestre Jozias’ letter, Cobrinha learned to play the berimbau and all other aspects of the capoeira Angola tradition.

The berimbau symbolizes the zenith of this segment which narrates the life of Cinézio's childhood, his teen years and his first steps learning the capoeira tradition until the moment he finds his own style and Moraes, his mestre of capoeira. As we are in the roda and we have had the accompaniment of the bateria all along during the first jogos, it is time to relieve any berimbau players, who have been playing music since the beginning of the roda, as we want to keep the energy of the music high for the next segment. I ask the readers to come closer to the bench, to take one instrument and look in detail at it. In

⁷¹ The Afro-centric answer to the folklorized and white exclusive Samba Schools originated in Bahia and made a point to admit only dark colored skin members performing a mix of Samba and Reggae rhythms. (Pinho 2006, p. 277)

the following organological exploration we will learn together some of the characteristics of this exceptional instrument.

The access to the musical aspects of capoeira through the berimbau would be over time one of the objects of interest in Cobra's scholarship, stimulating him to research, collect articles, books and materials and talk with older mestres about it. An instrument that becomes the intimate companion of the capoeirista—object of poems, songs and plenty hours of practice—the berimbau held for Cobrinha a fascination and interest that would grow into a thorough investigation of its history and roots. Over the years, his research became solid expertise, taking him to Africa to study comparative organology in Angolan instruments like the *Hungu* and *M'bulumbumba*.⁷²

The Berimbau: The Capoeirista's Third Arm

One of the elements that distinguishes capoeira from any other martial arts is the use of music to accompany the game, the berimbau being the most characteristic instrument. The capoeira musical bow of African origin is also called *urucungo* in the south or *berimbau de barriga* (belly bow) in the north and north-east regions of Brazil. There are other versions that instead of applying the gourd resonator to the belly to change the sound, use the mouth like in the *berimbau de boca* or a basin as in the *berimbau de bacia* (Fryer 2000, 32). This Brazilian version of the musical bow is the most sophisticated in construction and because of that the sound result in a louder voice, rich in harmonics. The berimbau is a musical instrument and at the same time a weapon

⁷² Names of string bow instruments found in rural regions of Angola (Luís de Câmara Cascudo in Shaffer 1977, 10). See Marker Five for a detailed account of the most recent events related with Mestre Cobra Mansa's research in Africa and his dreams of going back to school to work towards a master's degree.

since the process of assembly is called *armar*⁷³ (Vidor de Sousa 2000, 216). A detailed look at the different elements necessary to make and play a berimbau will illuminate some aspects of its technique and characteristic sound.

The *verga* is a stave from a branch of a beriba tree of 60-68 inches of height and 1 to 1 ¹/₈ inches of diameter. The *arame* is a metal string today salvaged from old tires that braces the bow at the ends. The *cabaça* is a gourd with a small circular opening in the opposite side of the stem, fine sanded in the interior, and varnished to enhance the sound that is tied to the lower extreme of the verga bow acting as a resonator. The player holds the instrument with the little finger of the non-dominant hand hooked round the small rope that ties the gourd to the verga, dividing the metal string in two segments and acting as tuning loop.

With the middle and ring fingers, the player holds steady the verga while with the thumb and index holds a coin called *dobrão* or a flat small stone, that serves as a bridge by pushing the metal string and producing changes in pitch. The other hand holds the *vaqueta* (the striker), a narrow chip of bamboo or beriba of 12-15 inches of length to strike the arame; in addition, suspended from two fingers against the palm, the same hand



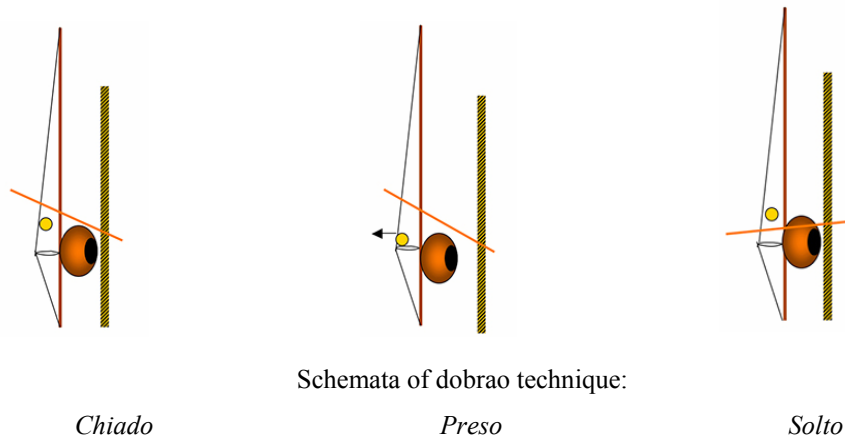
holds a small basket filled with seeds called *caxixí*.

The first two strokes in any rhythm⁷⁴ will be the *chiado* (buzz), made by striking the string upper segment while slightly touching the arame with the *dobrão* (see schemata below) with the gourd mouth

⁷³ In Portuguese, verb derived from *arma* (weapon).

⁷⁴ Although usually the players start with a call, repeatedly striking the solto, when I asked Mestre Cobra to sing or play just the toques, he would always start from the caxixí. However, in case of confusion he will play the call and start from there the rhythm.

against the player belly and mixing it with the sound of the caxixí. There is a second buzz sound that does not use the vaqueta, but with “the coin alone, just brushing it lightly against an already vibrating string” (Lewis 1992, 144). The *aproximado* (approximated), stops the vibration of the wire by touching slightly the string with the dobrão after the *solto* (Schaffer 1977, 43), and is a subtle sound perceptible only when the *gunga* is playing alone in the beginning of the *roda* since is not accompanied by a stroke of *vaqueta*.



When the string is stretched out by pressing the dobrão, it produces a higher pitched sound,⁷⁵ the *preso*, with or without the *vaqueta* that if used, beats at the upper part of the *arame* while the *cabaça* separates from the belly. When producing the lower pitched sound, the *solto*, the *vaqueta* strikes low, just above the string that holds the *cabaça* to the *verga* and the resonator closes up against the belly making a wah-wah effect.

Repeated attempts to measure the tuning of the *chiado* sound using the normal playing technique were unsuccessful, since no vibration of the string occurs the electronic

⁷⁵ Close to a half tone of the tempered system although a more precise measurement is accomplished using Ellis' cents.

tuner does not capture any frequency in the muted attack. By the technique of measuring the buzz with the gourd mouth separated from the belly and facing very close to an electronic tuning device, it gave the chiado's tail the same tuning frequency as the preso sound.

In the bateria of capoeira angola style there are three berimbau sizes working as a symbolic family as other instruments in the sacred Yoruba traditions, and for many angoleiros it has a spiritual meaning (Costa Araújo 2004, 226). The lower pitched berimbau, the *gunga*, has a slightly larger beriba and a bigger cabaça. It is in Cobrinha's own words like the mother⁷⁶ figure "calling the kids and organizing the rhythm" and holds the highest rank in the instruments' hierarchy, being the first one to initiate the rhythm. The medium pitched berimbau, the *médio*, would be the father figure, has a smaller cabaça and plays the steady rhythm initiated by the *gunga* with little variations. Whereas the metrics of the rhythm are the same, the tuning is different because the *médio*'s preso plays against the *gunga*'s solto, opening the harmonics of these two berimbaus sound even more than by the difference in size and timber of the cabaças and the tension of the wires. The berimbau viola, the son, is the teasing high pitch berimbau with a very small size cabaça and usually a thicker verga. It plays constant variations over the rhythm initiated by the *gunga* and *médio* called *variações*.

As the three *berimbaus* are tuned at different pitches and the rhythm pauses generally in the second beat, my ears perceive an intertwining of harmony that I cannot quite understand. I try to focus my attention to hear:

⁷⁶ In addition to match Mestre Cobra Mansa's own life experience, with the strong leadership role assigned to his mother, in the Afro-Brazilian religion of candomblé the women, the Mães de Santo, occupy also the highest religious status (Faria, 2005)

You look but you don't see. You touch, but you do not feel. You listen, but you do not hear. Without sight or touch... one can learn a great deal. But you must learn how to hear or you will learn little about our ways. (Stoller, 1989, p. 115)

Following the shaman's advice to Stoller, I want to learn how to hear the berimbau's harmony. The description of the tuning system, and in general the characteristics of the timber, is a complex science that only experienced capoeiristas know how to hear. For my own understanding, I decide to embark on a small experiment with one FICA-DC *treinel*, Fabio Melo, who dedicated some time on a Saturday morning to talk to me about these sound qualities and characteristics. He agreed to *armar* (mount) a set of berimbau for my tuning measurements⁷⁷ which took a lot of patience, for getting the best match of the three instruments required numerous changes and combinations of *cabaças* and *vergas*.

Very early on in my acoustic lab test, the issue came up of which kind of sound I wanted to measure. Was I interested in "the old school," the kind Mestre Cobrinha would prefer for the *bateria*? Treinel Fabio wants to know. I was thinking already of mounting two sets for comparison sake, but I jumped at the opportunity of comparing two different categorizations of berimbau sound already made by the insiders. The two sounds were qualified as the "loose" versus "tight"⁷⁸ possibilities, and the matching of *vergas* and *cabaças* proved to be a true quest for the perfect match since the age of the *verga* also affects the quality of the sound, a three year old *verga* sound being looser than a new one.

Obligingly, Treinel Fabio mounted two sets, one "loose," old school like that Mestre João Grande and Mestre Cobrinha would favor, and the other "tight", which

⁷⁷ Measured with an electronic chromatic tuner Korg CA-20 calibrated to 440 Hz on April 19, 2008.

⁷⁸ Phenomenologically, it makes sense that the characterization of these tuning systems are defined by the capoeiristas by their material qualities not by abstract sonic concepts. "When a bow needs to be restrung it is not because the pitch is too low; [it is because] the bow has "grown loose," a description of the instrument rather than the sound. (Downey 2005, 94)

Mestre Moraes and himself would prefer for the bateria. One by one, we proceeded to measure the tuning of each sound annotating three renditions of each dobrão technique to see how consistently the tuning was. The results came up fairly regular, with a variation of 5 to 10 percents in some cases. As I “hear” tuned notes (if slightly out of pitch) in the *berimbaus* due to my conditioned perfect pitch, I am very excited to see which frequencies of all harmonics the electronic tuner picks. The close pitch of the three *berimbaus* has been a challenge to assimilate over the years. I think I can understand better what I hear if I can “see” the relationship between the sounds.

“Loose” tuning (old school)																		
Gunga						Médio						Viola						
solto			preso			solto			preso			solto			preso			
Cts	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
	10	20	15	50	50	50	30	20	20	20	10	15	5	5	5	15	20	20
♩	F#			G			Ab			A			Bb			B		
“Tight” tuning																		
Gunga						Médio						Viola						
solto			preso			solto			preso			solto			preso			
Cts	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-
	20	10	10	30	40	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	10	10	10	10	10	10
♩	G#			A			C			D			D			Eb		

Map of berimbau tuning systems

In the tight berimbau set, the tuning of the médio sounded a quarter of a tone (50 cents) up from C and a quarter of a tone down from D, which forms a pitch interval of ½ tone (100 cents) of difference between the solto C and preso D sounds. This tuning is consistent with the other intervals between solto and preso on each berimbau, although the chromatic tuning between all six sounds in the set differs in each case. As I always think of the melodic rhythmic lines of each berimbau in its horizontal, forward motion, I

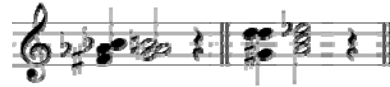
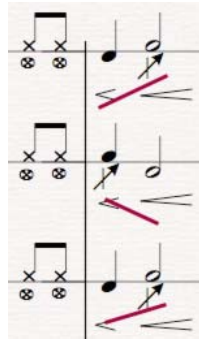
find it fascinating to explore their vertical dimension, at several points in time, where they create not just polyrhythm, but harmony. For each capoeira toque, there is a different vertical interaction, each one resulting in a different “chord,” different also for each tuning system. I searched in the literature and there is no reference about the resulting vertical harmony.⁷⁹ Mestre Cobra assures me: “Nobody has looked at the bateria’s musicality as close as you.” Even though Pastinha⁸⁰ tells us that the instrument’s proper difference of pitch is one whole tone, I find that FICA-DC tunes at $\frac{1}{2}$ tone.

There is not a perfect tuning in the berimbau sounds, but in their complexity, it is interesting to observe that the total interval between the extreme sounds on each set makes a perfect 4th in the loose set and a perfect 5th (its inversion) in the tight one, both complementary and equivalent to my ears, trained in the cannon of a tempered tuning system.

I see this game of inversion mirrored in two dimensions. The sounds change direction horizontally between the two measurable tuned strokes with an intervallic inversion that occurs vertically: the minor third between the gunga and médio becoming major in the second stroke, or the minor 2nd between médio and viola that inverts between gunga and médio.

⁷⁹ Lewis notates how he assumed for some time the distance was a whole tone but discovered an ambiguity between $\frac{1}{2}$ tone and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tone which will result in a minor 2nd or slightly out of pitch Major 2nd. In his opinion, making it easy for the berimbau to play songs in “various modes or scales” (Lewis 1992, 159). While I understand he does not speak as a professional musician equating modes with scales, I believe he means the berimbau will be versatile enough to ambiguously accompany songs in any mode (Major or minor).

⁸⁰ The arrangement of the bateria in the score that appears in page 43 is credited to Prof. Colmenero who instructs “the key of the arrangement is C, and could be another one, higher or lower depending on the singers voices” (Pastinha 1988, 41)



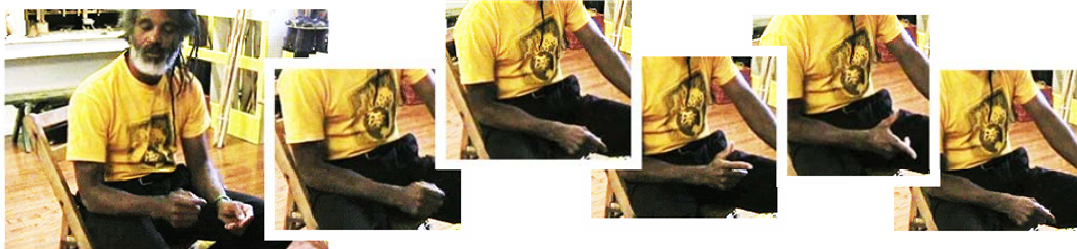
Berimbaus horizontal movement. Vertical movement: “loose” and “tight” tuning

Even risking getting lost in “webs of significance” (Downey 2005, 191), and further removed from the immediate bodily experience of the sound, I cannot avoid thinking about the continuous inversion of the players’ body. Attacking and defending, upside down or standing up, reversing the daily order of oppression and struggle, or related to the life and after-life of its African roots: the interval “schemes of tension and release” happily gingando in the movement of sound as in the body “with a sense of flow” (Berliner 1994, 198).

As in the *walking nowhere* exercise in the African drum workshop recreated in the Ludic Prelude, there is an intense involvement with the body in the use of the *berimbau*, and an emotional identification with the instrument. The gourd resonator applied against the performer's belly modifies the instrument's sound. There is such grace in bringing the *berimbau* close to your body—awkwardness in the beginner—that it becomes a fascinating torso dance in itself. Like in my liberating hip dance playing salsa on the piano while sitting on the stool, the capoeiristas dance with their torsos with / against the *berimbau*. Their feet planted firmly on the floor, they are sitting on the bench like dancing baobab trees, their roots deeply entrenched in the earth, their gravity line precise, their little *caxixi* baskets like hand bells. There is no sound without a price:

The weight of the instrument slowly chokes off circulation in the little finger and cuts the skin until the student forms a well-earned protective callus. A veteran mestre would hold up his left hand to show his students how his body adapted to decades of playing the instrument: he could dangle his crooked little finger down almost perpendicular to his other fingers. (Downey 2003, 150)

The same way we touch, we are touched. In a mock Lamarkian remark,⁸¹ “The function creates the calluses.” The first time I saw the feet of a ballet dancer I was horrified. All the toes were piled up, callused, deformed, with crowded toenails confined on a flat mutilated mirage of a foot. While dancing inside their shoes, they tiptoe stylishly and miraculously enlarge their legs, their body, and their neck. At rest, outside the stuffed *pointée* silky shoes, dancer’s feet seemed to me crippled little soldiers. After seeing that, I could never separate the malformed feet at the bottom of a ballet dancer from any performance. The physical body answers the demands of the performance body in unsuspected ways and becomes a lived in body. My left little finger still hurts and throws from my experimentation with tuning measurements as I test in my *médio* some of the toques at home. I am out of shape. My right middle finger hurts from too much typing. Neither the calluses of the capoeirista nor the writers’ are easy to earn. Cobrinha’s finger is crooked, his fingers play even when he does not have an instrument in his hands. When I ask him to sing all the rhythms and berimbau parts, his hands choreograph a ghost coin, a phantom *vaqueta*, in sync with his onomatopoeic rendition. It is not a line to be sung it is a phrase to leave the body through the hands / berimbau.



⁸¹ Lamark, French evolutionary theorist (Gould 2002, 170-73)

The learning process proved very challenging for a pianist hands—many blisters, no calluses so far. I invite the reader to accompany me in the remembrance of my practical experimentation with the berimbau technique.

Learning to Hold a Berimbau: Fieldwork Notes from Fall 2003

The students chat over the music playing from the stereo that is overly loud. A drone of percussion instruments accompanies the male voice shouting a long verse in Portuguese with a drowsy rhythm. Although the reverberating sound jumbles in the empty room, I still catch some isolated words from the chorus answers. Today, I am not paying much attention to the canned lyrics or the warm-ups. Neither am I taking notes or documenting the event. Today I have a berimbau in my hands and I am trying desperately to hold it straight so I can play softly along with the music. I have been fascinated by the single stringed bow since I heard it for the first time in a jazz recording in the early eighties. One hour ago, my instrument was just a stick with an attached wire, but in the storage space close to the changing-room, it has been magically transformed. One of the advanced students helped me search for a new resonator and tested it with a medium sized gourd. The sound was gorgeous: strong and clean in the high pitch; deep and full in the lower one, dirty and brilliant in the buzzing sound. The old stick became an agile and versatile musical instrument. In his experienced hands, it looked so effortless to move and play! Now, as I am trying to make it sing by myself, nothing seems to work so easily.

As a musician, I have learned to perform a diverse range of musical instruments. From my first one, the classical piano, to the djembé—probably the most popular African drum—through my hands have passed innumerable musical objects: flutes, reeds, drums, and all sorts of homemade “sonic objects.” Each brought me a life of its own, along with

its own technique, history, repertory, people, and culture. Being a music teacher for more than thirty-five years opened my ears to music very different from “my own.” My students, for instance, were a great source of contemporary and popular music that was often considered as *non-music* by my colleagues. But I appreciated everything they brought to class; I liked some and distrusted others, but I was always curious about what kinds of music they liked and why. I had suffered the repression of my creativity through the mainstream music approach of ethnocentric mono-culturality all through my institutionalized education in a European conservatory. Soon enough during what I call my “musical indoctrination” I felt the void—something important missing—that would take me far away from home in search of my musical expression and compelled me to open a space to discuss with my students issues of taste, identity and consumption of music. I committed personal resources and time to learn about those other cultures that are often ignored, if not deprecated, by the dominant culture, and to find out which musical products would “speak” to me. By doing so I struggled through sexism, stereotyping, racism, social inequality, and discrimination while trying to overcome the repression of my musical voice. By doing so, I also crossed paths with ethnomusicology, finding a safe, open space to explore all the areas in which I was interested. That decision brought me to a deeper commitment, made me fearless and so adventurous that I left my native Spain and traveled to the United States to pursue a Ph.D. in the discipline—something impossible to achieve in Spain or difficult to access closer to home.

For the last two years, I have been in and out of the capoeira practice room in Washington, D.C., doing fieldwork as a participant, and observing capoeira training sessions in the headquarters of the International Capoeira Angola Foundation. I have

witnessed movement and music lessons and rodas, celebrations, demonstration and street performances. I have talked with mestres, capoeiristas, instructors and students, visitors and scholars, family and community members and also listened—a fly on the wall—to their conversations, chats, emails, lectures, discussions and list-serve postings. I have also participated in fundraisings, birthdays, seasonal cleanings and many other activities that were hosted in this spacious room. After spending many hours looking at others' performances, it is surprisingly hard to rely on my own hands for a change and I feel so puzzled holding a berimbau, an instrument that resists all my good will!

To an uninitiated person, the instrument might look like a rudimentary hunting bow. It is similar to the ones that I built with my friends in the woods during our childhood, and probably everyone easily could find a similar familiar reference too, but now it feels much bigger and heavier. The whole thing feels very weighty, awkwardly tall and totally out of balance in my neophyte hands. I am not used to instruments taller than me, and I am uncomfortable holding a bunch of tools: the heavy long wooden stick and the oversized coin in my left hand, with its complete weight resting in my left little finger, whilst in my right hand I hold a little basket full of seeds and a thin stick. I keep staring at the unfamiliar artifact; actually, I do not know what exactly I should stare at. While balancing the strange items I find difficult to make any sense of how to use them together to make music! I feel very frustrated and out of place. My head is full of images, sounds, rhythms, and songs that I have heard for almost three years now, which should certainly help me to discover how to play it, but I cannot recall any *physical memory* of how to do it musically. I never played a berimbau before. Luckily for me, Mestre Cobra Mansa is going to teach me. I have the extraordinary opportunity of being a participant in

one of his music classes. He calls it “The Berimbau Band” and it is one of his eclectic creative experiments that opens the door for my inclusion within the group of performers, even though I don’t “do”⁸² capoeira.

When I started my inquiry about the performance of capoeira angola, a strong reminder of the hidden practices of African slaves training themselves to fight and apparently disguising their exercises as a dance, I soon understood that neither my body nor my stamina would allow me ever to participate fully in the physical aspects of this Afro-Brazilian cultural practice. Although I was a fascinated voyeur of the practitioners’ graceful movements during the game of capoeira, my eyes were “deaf” to their body language from the very first time I witnessed it in Brazil. I could not fully understand their unfamiliar gestures. Were these moves from a fight in a local genre of martial arts? If so, why was there so much laughing and joking involved? What was all that theatrical display and additional amusement? Were they instead choreographing a dance? For me, there was too much improvisation and they seemed to be determined to catch the opponent/partner in distress; so much cunning was mixed up in the acrobatics, so much drama and enjoyment. Was it simply a game for the two people moving closely inside the human ring? If so, there was a lot of linking noise surrounding the music, the singing, the chatting... Other spectators/participants were sitting very close to one another on the floor, forming a circle around the players and waiting patiently for their turns. They sang with strong, loud voices, following the lead of a line of percussion instruments. Was this a ritual practice? What were they really doing so uniformly, yet so casually dressed in their white clothes? How come little kids were playing alongside experienced performers,

⁸² Capoeira players always talk about a game. Even though it is a martial art, fighting is rarely involved. People say they are going to play (*jogar*), train, practice, or do capoeira.

older masters with beginners, women with men, all colors of skin and hairstyles present and all mutually engaged as in one unique group? Mestre Cobra Mansa explains:

The *roda* has the function of maintaining the energy. It could be higher, more aggressive... faster, slower, less aggressive. The one controlling the energy mainly is the mestre of capoeira or the person who plays the berimbau with lower pitch called gunga. He conducts if the rhythm is going faster. He can also make the rhythm decrease and make it slower. The truth is that the spirituality is inside the roda because of the energy, and the rhythm makes the energy. It depends on each person, on the connection between the energy in the roda and the energy behind the spirituality that he/she believes in. When all this energy comes together some people talk about the “Capoeira’s trance”. You can feel it. You enter in a state where the rhythm, the movement, and yourself become only one thing. You do not think anymore in doing a movement, because the movement is already inside you, you already know where is it going... This is a totally magic thing. (Mestre Cobrinha, personal communication, 2001)

I do not know what the trance involving the movement would be like, but I understood what he meant by the trance through music and performance. The summer prior to my trip to Brazil I had several very deep experiences of trance while playing different percussion instruments for the performance of a creation myth as a final project for a course in music and ritual. I believe I will never forget how it felt being *within* the music, *being* the music.

Because I am incurably curious, I naturally was attracted to the musical aspects of the Capoeira Angola’s performance. During a memorable performance in January of 2001 in Bahía, when I saw for the first time the bateria, the line of musicians, my eyes



were glued to the hands of those holding the three berimbaus in the orchestra. I remember thinking, “I want to experience one of these instruments in my hands. I have to try that thing. It has such an amazing sound” that I began to imagine it also in the hands of my students. That

was the voice of the educator that is always present in me, the musician, both melded in the persona that—even on vacation—sees the world as a place to be experienced and shared. The elements that over time made this instrument “true” and very valuable to me, and worthy of being included in my curriculum, were its significance, its history, and the fact that many people relived their resistance to enslavement—physically, mentally, spiritually, and culturally—through the performance of capoeira. The berimbau sound harbors the aural history of the African Diaspora which still conveys meaning for many people in our contemporary global society. Since the first time I heard it in its original context, I felt compelled to open my ears to the sound of the berimbau and let it touch me.

Soon I learned of other dangers attached to the instrument. “You could get in trouble for playing the berimbau in the streets, the police would confiscate it” Mestre Cobra tells me of his beginnings in capoeira in Rio. Once a symbol of enslaved Africans, beggars, and marginalized populations, the berimbau today has been “reinterpreted to become an icon of contemporary black expression and a symbol of resistance” (Galm 2004, 2). The angola style of capoeira taught by Mestre Moraes required a new learning area from Cobrinha for he had to pay as much attention to the nuances of the musical and cultural aspects of the tradition, to the tuning of the berimbaus, as he did to the style of movements that fascinated him. Cobrinha would practice often, training with Mestre Moraes for two years. Although he could not finish his training with the other students because he moved 220 miles north of Rio, Cobrinha remained loyal to the practice of capoeira angola, even though it was not a very popular style in his new home, the city of Belo Horizonte.



In Marker Two, *Time to Rebuild, Time to Grow*, and after the comprehensive look at the main instrument of the bateria and as much as the game has progressed, we are ready to move to another rhythm. Increasing the pace with the toque of São Bento Pequeno we accompany Cobra Mansa to Belo Horizonte and to the difficult times where new cultures will raise his political, social and religious consciousness. His brief enrollment in the military police will end dramatically when Cobra Mansa is incarcerated for possession of books banned by the dictatorship. The movement of rolê (roll) symbolically represents his defense strategies during this time and at the end of the jogo we will have the chance to substitute another musician, the pandeiro player, in the bateria.

<i>O berimbau</i>	Oh berimbau
<i>Quando eu canto meu lamento</i>	When I sing my sorrow
<i>Eu canto a ladainha, ai meus Deus</i>	I sing the ladainha, oh my God
<i>Con todo meu sentimento</i>	With all my feeling

Velha Companhia (M. Cobra Mansa, 2005)

Marker 2: Time to Rebuild, Time to Grow [1980-1982]

Place: Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (Brazil)

Rhythm: São Bento Pequeno

Movement: Rolê

Instrument: Pandeiro

The musical score is arranged in seven staves. The top three staves (Gunga, Médio, Viola) are grouped together with a brace on the left. The Gunga staff contains rhythmic patterns with accents and slurs. The Médio staff features triplets and slurs. The Viola staff has a steady triplet rhythm. The Pandeiro staff shows a consistent rhythmic pattern. The Atabaque staff has a simple rhythmic accompaniment. The Agogô staff provides a steady pulse. The Reco-reco staff consists of a series of 'x' marks representing the instrument's sound.



*DIN Dão_Tchtch
DIN Dão_Tchtch
The gunga calls for São Bento Pequeno
With a hug—palms out,⁸³ a farewell
The roda goes on
A new player enters the circle
Crouches, listens
Draws some signs in the floor,
Throws arms up the air, a glance to the
highest above
With a handshake
They go to play, comrade*

⁸³ Since the game is played hands on the floor and the capoeiristas used to wear all white clothes, it was the custom to avoid touching the clothes of the other player with your palms. The best capoeirista would leave the roda as clean as he entered (Abreu, 2003).

Moving on: A Chance of Fate

At the time we are ready to watch another jogo develop, we find young Cinézio, barely 19, on vacation with his girlfriend Rosângela Pires in Leopoldina, a city in the neighbor state of Minas Gerais close to the border with the State of Rio de Janeiro. Their baby son Marcelo, born in 1978, is in Rio left with Rosângela's family since this is a trip they are taking with a group of friends. The night has been extremely long due to a harsh



discussion with Rosângela during the returning train trip, one of the indiscretions that he enters in his diary—which will get him in trouble many times in his life. The misunderstanding does not leave him space to rest or make peace.

As Cinézio travels with the tools of his street trade, he decides to leave first thing in the morning without any sleep. It does not matter where. The first bus would do, whatever its destination. At sunrise, he clutches his main working tool: his knife ring, a bicycle wheel without spokes with incisions in the rim to hold knives he would jump through. He carries little other luggage, just a meager clothing bag when he takes the bus to “change my life.” The first bus in the morning happens to be leaving for Belo Horizonte, capital of the state of Minas Gerais. An unknown future awaits, but as the street life is the same life in any street in any city, Cobra Mansa arrives to a space he already knows. He arrives and observes, holding his stuff tightly, measuring, calculating, feeling the place and blending with it. Just another young, thin, black man with kinky hair, another young life, looking for a place on the street to arm the knife ring and call for customers to be amazed at his acrobatic act.

It was not long before Cobra met a man in the streets of Belo Horizonte that he had worked with in the past. Finding Ramiro Emerik is just what he needed—somebody with a knack for the city—they could work an act together similar to the “medicine shows” of the nineteenth century in the United States, enhancing their possibilities of survival. The cure-all medicine was bogus, but Cobra’s entertaining act would work as a call to gather people. He would set the ring and make the audience check the sharpness of the knives before mounting them in the bicycle rim. After jumping through it, he would revolve in a cartwheel around the spectators with a quadruple somersault to collect the money. The audience, entertained, would be ready to buy the “electric fish oil” or the “bull fish oil.” Later on, Cobra would learn how to prepare the concoction and use it himself as the commercial side of his acrobatics performance.

After the first month away, he would go back to Rio to visit his son and family, returning once every three months as Cobrinha continued to make his living in Belo Horizonte.

Moving Away: The Fierce Defense of Independence

The *rolê*, a sideways roll, is a movement of defense, of escape. Even when you have your back to your playmate⁸⁴ you still can (and must) control his moves from between your legs.

A metaphoric figure named from the fishermen experience, the *rabo de arraia* (stingray’s tail) is an attack that calls for a

movement—such as a *rolê*—in place to avoid contact with the whip-like tail. This first



⁸⁴ The word “opponent” is widely used in the capoeira literature, but as often is stressed in the teachings and songs, the playmate is a comrade, so I will use less combative adjectives to emphasize the relationship between the players learning together.

move of Mestre Cobra Mansa was rolling away from Rosângela and his son Marcelo, which also moved him completely out of his family circle, and brings vivid memories of my early twenties.

A couple of months shy of my eighteenth birthday friends made an apartment available where I could teach private music lessons to complement the modest income from my work as an assistant professor in the conservatory. At the time of my mother's passing, twenty days after dictator Franco's death, my family dispersed. My older sisters had left to study in Madrid, and my older brother was performing his obligatory military service. I was the only one left home to care for my father and my six-year old brother. We moved to a different neighborhood, a smaller apartment, where my father wanted a new start for him as a widower, but that decision proved difficult for me. Our new neighbors upstairs complained that my piano woke up their baby, and I had to move my instrument to my friend's empty apartment. Some months later, after a heated discussion with my father, I too, rolled away from home making the teaching apartment, my living space for a couple of years. It was the first of a series of rental houses and apartments I moved into—always carrying my heavy instrument with me. At the time, I was not close to my father, because I needed to be independent, living on my own and minimizing his control over me. His disapproval of my way of life, my hippie dress code, my dropping out of school, my friends, and my schedules were a burden I needed to be freed from to resolve on my own. Sometimes money was very short. I would create small crafts to sell in the street, just a blanket in the floor playing my recorder, a much less interactive way to engage costumers than Cobrinha. Between paychecks from the conservatory and any of my unconventional jobs—babysitting, demonstrating cooking pans, selling CDs and

pianos in a music store—I would subsist on fried empty *empanadillas*.⁸⁵ It was the only time in my life I can say I was hungry. My lack of “street smarts” would make me dizzy with hunger. I was ill prepared to survive without money, so I would go hungry because it never occurred to me to beg for or steal food, something a “well educated girl” would not do or even think about. In Spain in the 70s, it was all right for middle class teenagers to experiment with drugs, sex or politics, but it would be shameful to confess you could not buy a can of tuna fish for lunch. We were the children of the post-postwar. The stories of hunger and misery we heard from our parents, the children of post-civil war, along with the strong Catholic Apostolic Roman Christian conditioning, limited our spaces of transgression. I had never thought much about it before, but in perspective, the brief episodes of being short on money, a source of stress and anxiety when they happened, cause me now to acknowledge my childhood of privilege. As I often compare existential turning points in Cobra’s life with my own, I cannot imagine in my early twenties not having had a paycheck to wait for, or a socially accepted position such as a piano professor at a conservatory or a store clerk.

Cobra experienced much loneliness in this stage of his Belo Horizonte life, but he continued to create new opportunities by taking advantage of casual encounters. In the street rodas, like Mestre’s Dunga, he began to earn respect for his game and he started training a small group of capoeiristas in the Marlene Silva Dance Company at the Rua Carangola. Even though he had not earned yet his official diploma from Moraes, his game was excellent and as Cobra Mansa, he assumed the role of what today would be a Treinel, an advanced student that acts as an instructor in the absence of the Mestre, or the

⁸⁵ Round patches of thin pastry usually filled with tuna or meat.

leader of a study group, even though his “otherness” became soon a discriminatory element:

“The other thing that was bad in Belo Horizonte was in the capoeira scene... because I came from Rio and I started to establish myself in Belo, but it was so hard! It was always a struggle, a physical fight, to make myself room. People were like ‘You are not from here, you are from Rio, you are not *da terra* (from the land)’ ... ‘*Cobrinha não é da terra*, don’t give attention to him”



“You were branded all the time as an outsider?” I think how hard must have it been. My mind fast forwarded to the movie of my migration to Barcelona when I was twenty three, more or less at the time he moved to Minas, it was a big deal for me. In my case, the language was an additional barrier that I had to overcome in order to feel accepted, and it was not easy to learn. The Catalan people were forbidden to speak their native language during Franco’s dictatorship and were so used to interacting with Castilian with non-Catalan speakers that it did not help the newly arrived to get a natural immersion.

“Yeah, even though I was playing capoeira nicely...not better than anybody, but better than some people... (*imitates*) “Don’t give him much credit because he is not from here, he is not from the land...” What’s their problem? That was my conflict all the time. I used to go to capoeira to enjoy myself and now I was going there to prove myself at the time.”



Rolling away from a *meia lua de frente* (half moon forward), a direct attack to reject someone’s proximity, the capoeirista creates space to find a better position in

relationship with the other player, quite a metaphor for this stage in Cobra Mansa's life. After almost a year of solitude, other capoeiristas from the Roda Livre de Caxias that Cobra had helped to found in Rio de Janeiro, would come to Belo Horizonte as the "Grupo Arte Feitiço" headed by Mestre Russo. Among them, Cinézio's childhood friend and capoeirista Jurandir who would stay with him and would bring a personal project that, once again, would change Cobra's life experience.

Creating Consciousness: Becoming a Political Being

I wasn't born with this political consciousness about the black movement. My family didn't have this tradition, it's something I started learning inside the same capoeira. Capoeira itself was teaching me. I learned some when I went to Belo Horizonte and became a member of the Black movement. (M. Cobra Mansa in Langlois, 2007)

Cobra's education in capoeira continued to make him grow. In his view, capoeira was the reason he would not "become marginalized" during his adolescence in Rio; but as we have seen, he was in fact marginalized, because of capoeira through society's perception of it and by the federated groups of capoeira. When I asked him when his racial consciousness started, he told me he did not know about blackness until he joined the Black Movement meetings in Belo Horizonte: "we weren't black, we just were poor."

As in other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, in spite of the concept of racial democracy and its language permeating society and political discourses, being black or of mixed race was not seen in Brazil as a political identity, but, as Mestre Cobra Mansa's description illustrates, it bore the fruit of living in poverty, marginality and violence. It would take until the 80s before the dictatorship initiated in 1964 started to lose the vicious grip it had on Brazilian society, initiating a process of *abertura* (opening). Similarly, in Spain after the death of Franco in 1975 the period of transition

towards democracy, was called the *transición* (transition) suggesting the processes of change in all strata of society. Black activists groups like the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Unified Black Movement), created in São Paulo in 1978, would slowly start a process in Brazil that promoted an alternative civic dialog about racial issues making “racial democracy a hopelessly inappropriate concept,” which bore fruit in the 90s with implementation of affirmative action programs as a tool for healing racial inequalities (Telles 2004, 53).

In Belo Horizonte, Cobra Mansa met Isabel de Sousa, a key partner in his life



who would become the mother of his second son, Makindé: “She really, really, really knows me from the inside out and can see the differences in me during each phase of my life; she is probably the only person who can, because all the others have been just a little piece, during a bit of time, but she is a constant.” Through Isabel, he was

introduced to a new political consciousness as she was already actively involved in liberation theology, a Christian movement to bring justice to the poor and the oppressed, through the left wing of the church priests, and through her father and family in the *movimento obrero* (labor union) of the socialist party.

When I meet Cobrinha he had a sort of shyness about him, and a way to suppress that by having a hyperactive way, lots of drama, living things very intensely, but at the end he was a solitary in his thoughts and very lonely inside. [...] He didn't have much racial or political consciousness at the time. When he got to Belo he met again a friend from Rio that was involved with the *movimento negro*. He was working the streets and hanging out pretty much at the hard part of Belo Horizonte, in the ghetto, where the prostitutes, tricksters and vagabonds were. Low class people, that's where he hung out at the time. [...] At the beginning,

when we would go out in a date he would say “Meet me at so and so streets” and I was...(*astonished*) like... “What?” I only passed through there when I absolutely had to! It was scary, but I would not say anything because I realized that this was what he was doing and he was friends with the street girls and the guys. (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

Even among the poor, there was still discrimination and class stratification, where Cobra was occupying Belo Horizonte’s social bottom space. Comfortable with befriending the city’s streets’ inhabitants, working on his act, and picking up another layer of education, Cobrinha also managed to fall in love. But his relationship with Isabel was not accepted by her father and he had to suffer the interception of his phone calls, messages and letters to her. Isabel would lend Cobrinha books to feed his natural curiosity and self-learning interest about the new political ideas, and together they would go to meetings and assemblies. While the books were not hardcore Marxist writings, they were very dangerous in the times of the dictatorship. She still recalls one of the books she loaned Cobrinha that would get him in trouble later on; it was one of radical socialist Leo Huberman’s books.⁸⁶

What I saw on him was that he already had naturally in himself an idea that he brings from the streets in Caxias and from his life in capoeira, of looking at life like a warrior, somebody that had a constant struggle to survive. During this struggle, he could identify the oppressors, so he always had that consciousness, knowing where the oppression was coming from although he may have not elaborated that much, but he had it very clear inside. He was not brainwashed or indoctrinated, he learned it by reading life. He already had exercised a socialist way of life by the type of work in the streets and his friends. (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

Cobrinha’s origins and street smarts made of him a *malandro* (tramp, rogue) and capoeira did not contribute to de-marginalizing himself in society’s eyes since the accepted version of capoeira was the competitive sport-like academia style of capoeira

⁸⁶ *Man’s Worldly Goods: The Story of the Wealth of Nations* published in the 30s was “an attempt to explain history by economic theory, and economic theory by history” (Huberman 1936, vii).

Regional. Acquiring the *malandragem*⁸⁷ (cunning) necessary to be a good angoleiro meant that he had internalized the attitudes of the trickster: being extremely aware of his surroundings “he would never leave the backpack with the money unattended; it was just the culture built in himself.” In order to survive the everyday violence his defense had to be mental and physical since “the ability to deceive and to limit one’s trust in others are vital strategies in street’s survival” (Willson 2001, 28). Even though this would be a very different attitude than Isabel was used to, or even knew of, she soon discovered that Cobrinha’s street roughness was never used to exercise violence or abuse against anybody.

He had the street-smart culture on him, but I never seen him using it in a bad way to hurt anybody. This was amazing to me! This tough ambiance did not corrupt him. He had some kind of protection even though he came from the hardest poorest streets of Rio de Janeiro with a horrible childhood with lots of problems. That’s was so extraordinary about him that surprised me. I think that's what I saw on him. (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

Still eager for reading and researching about capoeira, Cobrinha now had access to readings in philosophy, psychology, politics –books that would get him in deep trouble soon enough, and biographical accounts of the struggles of guerilla leaders, heroic legendary figures like Che Guevara, an admiration that still interests him today.

I was totally amazed of how much I was learning! I tried to read everything! The National Geographic magazines⁸⁸ ... I could pass hours reading a filthy, trampled on, old magazine. I loved it!

The role he assumed as an urban warrior through his street survival and through capoeira, the connection and friendship he had with his capoeirista and childhood friend Jurandir, the political ideas of organized struggle against oppression, and the embedded

⁸⁷ Actions of a malandro nature.

⁸⁸ In his apartment, a whole library system made from the National Geographic magazines, the complete collection, that he found in the trash. The magazines worked in blocks as a support for the shelves that support other books.

trickery in his attitudes to access to new opportunities would take him to enroll in the Belo Horizonte police academy, and as a result, a bizarre chain of events.

The Supreme Naiveté: An Angoleiro as a Police Recruit

In 1982, Cobra Mansa experienced the darkest moments in his Minas Gerais epoch. Under strange circumstances, he found himself with his head shaved and enrolled



in the police force. He had tried years before to enroll in the army without success due to his skinny chest and unnourished body. His friend Jurandir learned that the Minas police force paid well and getting accepted was not too difficult. Cobra agreed to help him pass the access exam by taking the writing test for him; Jurandir did not pass the test, but Cobra was accepted instead: “I got in by accident; it was a joke. What was not a joke was how I got out!” His physical abilities had changed over years of athletic practice with capoeira and acrobatics on the street which had been his main source of supporting himself, and now he found himself as a new recruit in the police academy because of his striking fitness.

As an advocate for social justice—full of naïve ideas due to his “youth and romantic inexperience”—Cobra sometimes reminds me of the Spanish literary character *Don Quijote* in his combat with the windmills and other adventures. His success or failure does not matter, but the will to dare to attack and the spiritual endurance to recover do. Cobra thought at the time that he could be an “infiltrator” inside the police force and gather information that would be useful for the leftist group he had befriended or the movimento negro, as a kind of spy! His girlfriend, Isabel, hardly understood that

decision, and it caused him trouble not only with her, but with her family as well who boycotted their incipient relationship. During his stay of eight to twelve weeks at the training phase of his initiation into the police force, he suffered diverse indignities reserved for new recruits and learned what arbitrary power could do to the inferior class in a hierarchy. He would get mad at a particular officer who humiliated not him but other weak recruits. The defender of the oppressed, the internal hero in him boiled over with the many injustices he witnessed. He tried to survive this difficult position because the pay was very good, but there was also a limit to the abuse he would endure. The last straw of the crazy experience arrived when, due to an ill-fated misunderstanding, the P2 “the pichu” (police secret services) searched his personal locker and discovered some “problematic” books.⁸⁹

Cobra Mansa certainly did not have much of a record of submissiveness at the time of his recruitment. He had a hard time dealing with the indiscriminate authority of the instructors, and the mistreatment of students in classes. His “fame” made him a target of the P2. In our conversations, his stories drew a more detailed picture of how he became who he is today; I couldn’t hide my fascination with this “travel in time” through his police recruitment journey:

“There are lots of things that I am interested in about you, but there are specially some that I think ‘shape’ who you are”—I start as a prologue to my next questions. Cobrinha nods and laughs amused with my analysis listening very attentive to my theorization.

“I would like to explore and talk more about ‘conflict resolution’ with you. I don’t know if you feel that you bring the conflict with you or just the solution. For example, this lady instructor story that you told me or that mistreated recruit. You didn’t stay aside... you organized the people, you took responsibility for something that was going on and you had an idea of how to change it. So, I don’t know if you fit in the frame that everybody wants you to be, but you

⁸⁹ At the time, the Communist Party was clandestine. Brazil had a dictatorship, as in Spain, and all the books related with revolutionary ideas were considered propaganda, subversive and illegal.

don't know how just leave it alone! I think that you create your own opportunities to make it different... ” Cobrinha keeps nodding and laughing. “Yes! That's it!” “It's just in opposition to traditional forces or authoritarian figures... You break that to create what you think is true or just, or whatever, you know what I mean?” “Yeah...!” (*laughs*) “You're totally right!”

I have experienced in myself some of this Robin Hood syndrome. My father used to call it “showing my finger,” a very Latino-Mediterranean graphic expression, offensive by United States standards, which I re-define as a quest for self-affirmation. Listening to Mestre Cobrinha's stories, his responses to injustice and violence as a defender of the weakest or his precocious role as a protector and provider since he was a kid, I still wonder how he withstood the police training for six months. The young man who stood in front of his stepfather as a child to defend his mother from abuse, or who ran away from home after suffering what he considered an injustice or a threat to his persona, certainly was not meant to be a policeman in a military dictatorship, even for the greatest paycheck. I was not surprised to hear that he ended up with his bones in a jail cell.



The people that put the pressing on me were the ones that belonged to a clandestine paramilitary group. They participated in the killing of some of the bandits paid by the vendors and the people from downtown. Cleaning the streets... That was a paramilitary squad—different from the one that killed street children in Rio⁹⁰—that tried to put some pressure on me and tried to know who I was, what I was doing, etc. The reason they put me in prison is because they saw these books over my locker and after I did a “little noise”... Well it was not a rebellion, but I just stop hanging with them. In my view, maybe it's not true, but my perspective is that these people started to make a profile of me, and they looked at me like “Ah... this guy did this, and he did that... and we found these

⁹⁰ Extreme violence against street children was very common at the time and here Mestre Cobra refers to the Candelaria massacre in July 23, 1993 when 8 *meninos da rua* (street children) between 11 and 20 years old were killed while sleeping in the Candelaria church stairs by several people, some of the members of the police. Amnesty International Report 19/011/1997 in <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR19/011/1997> [Accessed on 02/12/08]

books... Nooooo... No, no... no way! This guy is something else!" I think this is what they thought about me.

Cobra denied the police charges. However, he was locked down in solitary confinement before any further interrogation for ten bitter days, totally alone, without any explanation about the investigation. They would pass him food through a hole in the cell door. To Cobra, this was a very hard moment of solitude. After the confinement, they offered to let him go if he would sign a confession along with his resignation from the force. Cobra Mansa stood firm: he would not sign a resignation letter. He demanded to be expelled for any reason they might invent, but firmly resisted agreeing to their conditions. Mestre Cobra Mansa explains to me that he could have claimed unfair treatment and obtained compensation money when, after the democratic transition, the political forces of change revised the irregularities they committed during the dictatorship. But Mestre Cobrinha never did: "That was already in the past."



"They would go as far as putting you in prison for ten days?" I am in shock, trying to imagine how was for him, used to roaming free to be locked up in a jail cell.

"Yes, that was the time they needed to do their investigation."

"But this was the right thing to do, to investigate you?"

"Let me say, we were in the period of 'the transition time,' there was no right or wrong. The military at this time had all the power in Brazil, they were ... if they ask you for your papers, your identity documents and you couldn't show them... you could go to jail! You just went to jail." It sounds very familiar to a similar law in Spain around the time of the end of Franco's *dictadura*.

"For vagrancy?"

"Yes... *vagabundagem*... Just like that! So there wasn't much to do... They just put me in jail at this time. My job was inside the quarters..."



"And you were still in the training phase?"

"Yeah, they just could say that I was put in jail because I insubordinated, or I spoke badly to somebody or whatever..."

"There was something like prevention? I guess it is like in the military... my brother

had once some ‘little differences’ with a captain, that means that you were locked in a small cell?”

“Yes, that was what they did to me, it was called the *solitaria* (lonely cell). You could not speak to anybody, even to the guy that would bring you the food.”

“Could you write?” I know how much he liked journaling at the time.

“No, I could not keep my journal... but I think I still have it... I just could have one book, and I started to write on the covers and the white space, the margins... I didn’t have anything else! And it was interesting, because it was a Christian book” he answers laughing.

“Oh, I bet you didn’t have much interest in the subject, but I guess it was... paper!”

“Yes, It was about this guy, he is on drugs, and then discovers Jesus... I don’t even know who gave me this book, but this book was with me, and I read the book like three or four times. But that was what happened. They arrested me for no reason at all. It was illegal, that was what people told me... A lawyer told me ‘You should come back and sue them.’ But, I didn’t want to move anything. It’s in the past. He read the case and said that they did everything wrong. First, they arrested me before starting the investigation, they put me out without any proof... Everything was based in circumstantial evidence. About the book, you could say... ‘This book is not forbidden, is everywhere!’ I wrote that poem about the dogs, but you could say: ‘Hey, this is poetry’ I just thought that it wasn’t worth it!”



Rolling away from the aggressive attack of a *media lua de costas* (sideway half-moon), Cobra graciously puts behind him one of the most difficult turning points in his life. Many times during our conversations, I see how he overcomes not just adversity, but learns from his mistakes and makes efforts to clean away traces of resentment, anger and frustration. His personal philosophy and attitude in “letting go” is a freeing act:

“You did already your time...”

“Well, I had already moved to Bahía. The truth is that I got a little scared, but I was already doing good, at peace. I didn’t want to deal with these people anymore.”

Trying to live a simple life, not carrying any more baggage than necessary, and as a good capoeirista, playing the game in the big roda as in the small one, Cobra Mansa gets away from another existential crisis stronger and wiser.

In the Spiritual Path: of Women Protectors and the Telling of the Sacred Shells

New belief systems, influences and encounters would play an important role at this stage of Cobra's life, certainly one of the darkest, where he also acknowledges in the "big transition" unexpected allies and supporters, truly existential teachers who rescued him from the difficult moments and at the same time opened the doors of his spiritual path:

"I stayed in Belo Horizonte about two years, not much, but it was a big time in my life. Because as I told you, I grew up in Rio, and I had this girl, Rosangela, and I broke up with her and I just took the bus and I didn't know anything about Belo, nothing... Zero! In the first morning I met already people and I started working... after a while I began to discover new people over there... I always have had this good relationship with old people. I used to say: 'I always found a mother to adopt me'..."

"Is that true?" I suddenly remember him talking about his discovery of his Oedipus complex reading Freud in his library sessions and I laugh with him.

"It's true! Here in the US was Mama Gene, in Bahía it was my spiritual mother, and in Belo it was this woman... I always found someone who took me as a son... Who would say 'I am going to take care of you.' And that's what happened... this old lady, Oneida... I called her Tia Oneida... I have a picture of her, I don't know if you have seen it... She was a really powerful figure in Belo Horizonte in the Black community. She created the first *Afoxé*⁹¹ in Belo, that has been going until today, and she was a *Yalaorixá*, *Mãe de Santo*⁹²... her house was always full of people... and I used to teach at one of the dance places where this woman [Marlene Silva] taught African Dances... Tia Oneida one day said... 'Come to my house, I want to talk to you'. My life, at this time was horrible... I was completely, completely lost. Lost on my mind, because I have left my home, left my wife, my kid... I wanted to go back, but my brother started to go out with my ex-wife..."

I think "Oh Lord! Another twist in the already complicated family tree!" I say instead: "It must have been hard..."

⁹¹ Of African origin, it has elements linked to the religion of Candomblé (African religion widely practiced in Bahía), bringing *axé* (positive vibrations) to the festivities of which they participate. When the *Afoxes* prepare to parade on the streets, especially during Carnival, they make offerings to the *Orixás* (African deities) to obtain protection. The songs and dances performed during the parade are also connected to Candomblé and are sung in the Nagô language. The music is played mostly with traditional African percussion instruments such as the *atabaque* drums and the *agogô*.

⁹² Literally translated as a "Mother of Saint," she is the figure of the female spiritual leader or Priestess in the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé. Fruit of the syncretism of African and Christian religions, the *Mãe* and *Pãe de Santo* mediate the rituals and the initiation ceremonies guiding the devotees through their spiritual paths.

“He had nothing to do with that... It was totally my fault, but he started to get closer, to be involved with her... Luckily, it resulted a good marriage because it lasted until today! They love each other. They are the ones that took care of my son Marcelo... We are good friends, I go over there; we have not a problem... But in the beginning, it was just this kind of conflict like ... man! My mother was so worried about that... I started to drink after that. It was just like for three months and I just stopped, I have this thing radical when I decide something... Anyway, that woman took me to her house, and started talking to me. She was the first one that introduced me to the religious side of my life.”

The initiation period that Cobra began with Dona Oneida started with a cleaning ritual and a reading with cowry shells, the *jogo de buzios*,⁹³ where he would learn some things about his future that he could hardly believe were in any way possibly related to him. Although his first involuntary contact with Candomblé started the day his mother took the four-year old Cinézio to the ocean for a ritual bath, “pure naked at five o clock in the morning,” to cure his tuberculosis, he recognizes that he had no idea of what he saw or what was going on there. Nonetheless, he felt a strong attraction to the Candomblé house in his neighborhood and the rituals that took place there:

I was so fascinated, I did not know why I was so attracted to that house... I just would go over there and scoot down and just watch and watch... I didn't understand a thing, but even I didn't know a thing, I could not be less interested, I was always attracted. So, I go to this woman [tia Oneida] and she played the buzios for me, it was my first time and she was very involved. She asked me to go to this special little room “I'm going to play the buzios for you” and after she read them, she looked at me and said “Oooh... I see that you are going to go to so many places... you are going to travel the whole world... and blah-blah-blah” and I thought: “She's drunk!”

Nonetheless, even though Cobra Mansa did not believe the reading, he learned important things that day. Under candomblé's belief system, everyone has their personal orixás, who are guardians and are determined by the pãe or mãe de santo after consulting

⁹³ The play of the shells is an instrument of divination used by a trained priest or priestess of candomblé to consult with the spirits. With the appropriate ritual setting, sixteen cowry shells are tossed and read and the adequate course of treatment for misfortune or illness is prescribed (Murphy 1994, 44-81).

the jogo de buzios. In one of our conversations, we are talking about heroes and archetypes and Mestre Cobrinha tells me how the orixás work as archetypes in candomblé, and how by knowing the personal characteristics or your orixás, the positive and negative traits, you can work with them and be aware of the challenges in determining courses of actions in your life. He gives me the example of his primary orixá, Ogún the warrior, a male “god of fire, short tempered, volatile and reactive” (Voeks 1997, 56). He tells me how he has to control his emotions and pause to think, “I cannot be angry, because I destroy everything and I destroy myself.” By identifying one’s self with the deities, with their qualities, one gets to know their strengths and weaknesses and can control one’s reactions. He adds:

“My other orixá is a female warrior... ”

“Iansá?” I ask him, since in my jogo de buzios the mãe de santo that read my orixás told me ‘*guerrera da vida, não é?*’ (You are a life warrior aren’t you?), when she found my third orixá.

“Yes, Iansá! To me, is like women make me passionate, brighten my eyes. So I really need to be careful. This female orixá I have makes me feel like I want to take care of myself, to be more beautiful, without losing my warrior side, you don’t want to be like Oxúm... too much!” and he imitates a ridicule pose of painting his eyelashes and we both laugh openly. I’m laughing because Oxúm, the female goddess of sweet water is the orixá of vanity and material excess, adoring gold and perfume⁹⁴ and my second orixá!

“I don’t have water... that’s the unbalance! I think when I am around a female that has some water it gives me balance, it makes my life easier and calmer, but when I have a female that is fire... ”

He springs up from the chair to look for a book of the orixás mythology, giving me to read one of the many legends of Ogún, “defender of freedom and enthusiast of love adventures” (Prandi 2001, 89). In this particular myth, Ogún beheads all his vassals in a bloody rampage, self-flagellates in repentance for he does not have anybody left to care for, until the earth opens and swallows Ogún converting him in orixá: “Ogún is featured

⁹⁴ Voeks 1997, 59

in my archetype... it's my life!" He tells me how this information is important because in order for the mãe de santo to help or heal, the solutions have to be based in these archetypes. Acquiring the knowledge and awareness about these details of his personality and future projection was a slow process of gaining understanding for Cobra Mansa. Some of the revelations at the time of his first initiation to candomblé practices in Belo Horizonte were too far fetched for him, far removed from his immediate experience in life, to believe.

"I couldn't believe it... It was something that just... (*slaps one hand over the other*) crashed me... Wow, I almost cry now remembering it. Because I said, 'This is impossible! I am not going to travel the whole world, I barely came here...' "Cobrinha laughs openly.

"Or the way you arrived to Minas... Randomly in the first bus to pass!" I add.

"I know! It was just like none of these things made any sense for me. She started to give me this spiritual guidance: 'Okay, you need to take a bath and take these herbs... etc.' and I said, 'yeah, yeah... I'll take the bath! At the beginning, everything that she was doing for me it was to protect me. I remember that very clearly. After she played the buzios, she said... 'Do this and that' but when I think about it... she had already everything prepared so casually 'Oh... come here, I have a little bath over there... you go now and take it... I have a towel that you have to use...' Because I knew already through friends that you take a bath to protect you and this kind of thing, so for me it wasn't a big deal... like 'Mmm... What is she doing with me? From what do I need to be protected?' She also would give me advice like 'You cannot be with your woman for three days and blah-blah-blah... please don't break it...' I wasn't worried about that. I started to like her. I began to go to her house and we talked about different things and after that she just would say, 'Ok, here... this is for you' She never asked anything from me."

Tia Oneida would provide Cobra not just the information and advice, but also the material things needed to progress in the spiritual path. She supplied the ritual clothes, objects, and food he needed in order to prepare for the rituals without asking him for any compensation, "not a single penny." Soon enough, Cobra Mansa would start corresponding and bringing gifts for her as he experienced change in the circumstances in

his life, “The best part is that my life started to go better! Things started to change, to move... because I was in a big crisis!”

For the purpose of presenting my written work I have talked with Mestre Cobrinha about a division into chapters, segments to follow the unfolding of different events in his life. In talking about the markers for these segments as existential turning points, we realized the crisis always occurred when it was time to move from one place to the next one. We revised together how the stages in his life develop and we agree that they are related to his relationship with women not just as mothers, but also as partners. “Every woman that entered in my life made me go to a higher degree.” When Cobra met Rosângela, he was “the guy who owned nothing. I wasn’t zero, I was zero-zero!” he jokes. As other life partners, Rosângela was the first one to support his capoeira way of life, even the artistic passion for woodcarving he had at the time. Equally, when she was pregnant, she continued to support Cobra Mansa economically, “You love capoeira, you have to do what you love.” He describes how he was able to change his perception of how to have a different way of life:

She worked like a dog. I felt so bad that I thought about doing something. That's when I got the job. I started to work in a supermarket, we got a little house for us in Caxias, the whole house was just a small room. She made me think about another way of living. I started to see things differently, even talked to go back to school and everything. And when I messed up, everything blew up and that's when I ended in Belo Horizonte. I am in zero again, but at least now, I have another perspective. I know how to work in the streets and take care of my life.

At the beginning of his Belo Horizonte residence, Cobra had a brief relationship with another woman, Lucia, who also would adopt and protect him, opening her house for him to stay, supporting his dedication to capoeira, “making my life in Belo Horizonte a bit more comfortable; when Isabel came, she gave me this intellectual and revolutionary

vision.” His education in politics and the issues with the world at large would bring growth for both of them, but because of the police problem and the consequent rejection by Isabel’s family, another crisis would force his move to Salvador, Bahia, again without any preliminary planning.

Checking my “lives comparison chart”—fruit of an exercise on life history recommended by Caughey⁹⁵—as I reconstruct Cobrinha’s journey in parallel with my own, I see surprisingly, how my own timeline is about to start a jump at the same time as Cobra’s. I am thinking of my big move to Barcelona in September of 1983, when I realized that the trip from La Rioja to Catalunya, from the Cantabric North to the Mediterranean East, passed through a virtual (cultural) trip to Mexico that lasted six months. When I left the job at the conservatory to join a mariachi band touring Spain in a bus, I did not realize one could be traveling to another culture (Mexican) through my performance without moving there. As I grew up with the *rancheras* of the Duo Gala my father loved to listen to, the music was not foreign to me; the electronic keyboard I had to use to play it, was. Dressing in a male costume to “fit” was foreign as well. Performing with a drummer a *tango* was one of the most challenging encounters I remember from that time. I was contacting a kind of music out of my musical literacy training and performative experience. Playing the dance music one could hear on the radio was not something I ever thought possible. The disconnection between my training and the music that moved the world outside the conservatory, and that moved me became more manifest

⁹⁵ The charting exercise mentioned earlier in the prologue compares contrasts and convergences in the cultural traditions of both Mestre Cobra Mansa and me. I discovered that our stages of existential development and geographical moves were parallel. Once I placed the stages on top of a double timeline, I was able to see the correspondences of significant changes were sometimes less than two years apart, which was even more impressive considering the comparisons were between “not only obviously matching traditions but also connections between seemingly unrelated systems” (Caughey 2006, 57)

with every music I encountered. Reading the music from scores that only had an orphan melody line—missing another staff for my left hand accompaniment, where the chords were mere letters annotated on top of the melodic line—was another tough learning curve. After rehearsal, I would expend the evenings translating the letters into notes. It will take a couple years of practice to read ciphered harmony, an ability I have to thank my jazz studies for it. The genres, the styles, the cultures, the instruments... The sameness in the differences finds me wondering about the instruments that traveled to the Americas hundreds of years ago. I invite the reader to walk with me to the bench to substitute another musician from the bateria, the pandeiro player.

Traveling Instruments: I Say Pandereta, You Say Pandeiro

Whereas I am very familiar with the Spanish *pandereta*,⁹⁶ a reminiscence of Christmas and medieval students ensembles,⁹⁷ I find the Brazilian pandeiro, the hand drum tambourine with jingle-like flat discs, heavy and too big for my hands. Two of them



flank the berimbaus, marking the four part beats of the toques with different techniques and sound. The instrument has two differentiated sounding parts: the head (skin or plastic) and the metal jingles. The first and third beats are struck with the thumb on the rim resulting in a thin, higher pitched sound with a clear vibration of the jingles. In the second beat, the open palm strikes in the middle of the drum resulting

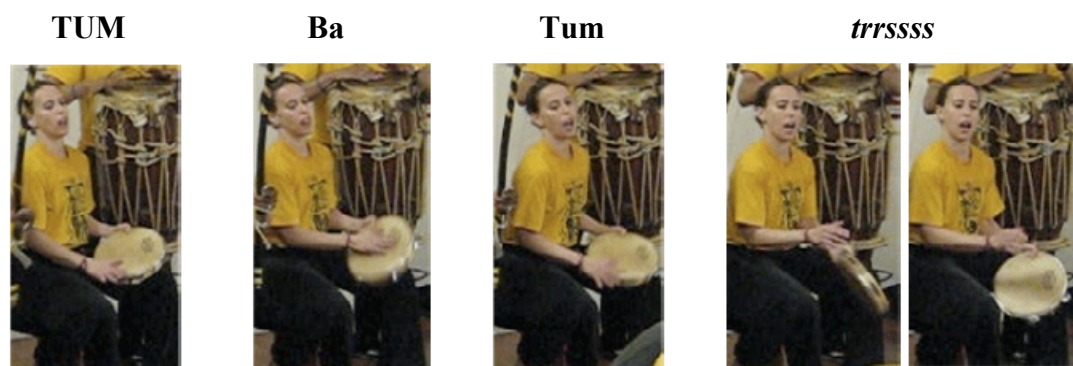


in a lower pitched sound. The fourth beat, depending on the player skills, may be silent,

⁹⁶ Spanish hand drum of smaller size and lighter than the tambourine with flat jingles.

⁹⁷ In the Goliard style, the Tuna Universitaria appears with the consolidation of the first universities sponsored by the Catholic church. Still today, dressed as in medieval times, the students sing the satiric *rondas* (serenades) accompanied by virtuoso pandereta players and plectrum instruments like guitar, lutes and *bandurrias* (similar to mandolins)

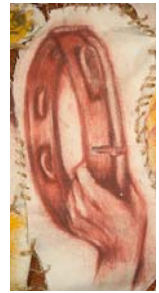
or due to a lateral or vertical swift movement of the pandeiro without percussion, results in a jingle only accompaniment. In this case, and following the homophonic rhythmic line, the two 8th divisions of the fourth beat fall in synch with the caxixí and preso berimbau attacks, since there is an up/down movement of the jingles. I have observed different ergonomic systems of filling this fourth beat that result in a mesmerizing dance depending of the player technique.



Attracted since the first time I saw her artwork, I contemplate once more Mariko's drawings about the capoeiristas hands in the bateria instruments. I have been asking for that piece, saved in some box at FICA school to take some pictures and refresh my memory. One day, early in my fieldwork I arrived at the school and there was a collection of new art on the walls: "They are from a student from Japan, and since she is leaving, she donated all the artwork" somebody explains. Borboleta (butterfly in Portuguese) is her capoeira name. I did not have time to talk to her until several years later in Brazil where she was painting a mural in the Quilombo Tenondé. "I hope you don't mind because one day I'm going to use your artwork in my writing" I tell her. "Of course not!" she answers smiling without leaving her brushes dry, a mermaid in pale aquamarine shades emerging in a wall. I look again at her patchwork piece full of hands, of

suspended animation in silence. I see for the first time they were drawn from the player's point of view.

*The ways of my hand
The weight that extends through the arm
The non-stop São Bento march
One, two, three...,
Thumb, palm, thumb...,
Throbbing flesh
Acute pain in the bone that feels blue
The open hand reaching wide and deep
Flat, hot, and tingly
One two, three, four
Thumb, palm, thumb, shake
Look down at the ways of my hand*





Marker Three, *Becoming a Mestre: The Revival of Capoeira*

Angola, investigates the decade *Cobrinha* spent in Salvador, Bahia. He starts discovering his life mission and purpose applying it to the revival of the tradition of Capoeira Angola. Finds the Grupo Capoeira Angola Pelourinho GCAP with his mestre from Rio, Mestre Moraes. From this collective and thanks to his persistence luring out of retirement Mestre João Grande, the community of angoleiros established the art form as an efficient fight, culturally grounded in its Afro-Brazilian identity, politically committed to raise social awareness and justice. The toque of São Bento Grande, the movement of attack *Rabo de arraia* and the introduction of the double bell—the agogô—are part of the segment as well.

<i>Na roda de capoeira ,</i>	In the roda of capoeira,
<i>Menino sou mandingueiro</i>	Little boy, I am a trickster
<i>Se toca Angola,</i>	If it plays Angola
<i>Eu faço jogo de dentro</i>	I do the inside game
<i>É se tocar São Bento grande</i>	And if it plays São Bento grande
<i>Menino eu jogo dentro</i>	Little boy, I play inside.

Velha Companheira (M. Cobra Mansa, 2005)

Marker 3: Becoming a Mestre: The Revival of Capoeira Angola [1982-1993]

Place: Salvador, Bahia (Brazil)

Rhythm: São Bento Grande

Movement: Rabo de Arraia

Instrument: Agogô

*Din Dão Dão Tchch
Din Dão Dão Tchch
Din Tchch Dão Tchch
Din Dão Dão...*

*The gunga calls for São Bento Grande
The energy is high, the heat up,
The players dance, smile,
threat and retreat behind hands,
legs, twists... Tchch
Din Dão Dão*

Closing the Circle: Becoming a Contemporary in Capoeira's History

Brazil was the major importer of slaves to the Americas. Estimates put this forced migration at between 4 and 5 million by 1810. Salvador de Bahía, the city in the Northeast coast of Brazil 750 miles North from Rio de Janeiro, is considered to be the main door for their arrival and today it is the largest predominately African city in the

Americas.⁹⁸ I never felt so much dense energy as in the Pelourinho, the harbor quarters where the slaves were sold, stored until their further auction, and often publicly punished.⁹⁹ The spiritual weight of so much suffering is still in the air and haunts the visitor with a special sensibility. Today, the Pelourinho, traditionally a poor neighborhood of African descendants, has become the center of a resurgence of African-Brazilian identity. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, Pelourinho is the largest tourist attraction in the city. Its original population has been evicted and displaced in the extreme makeover that took place in the early nineties. It was in the Pelourinho where Mestre Pastinha opened the first capoeira angola school in the forties and, in homage to Mestre Pastinha, Mestre Moraes included it in his school's name in Rio. Over time, that idea would become the Grupo Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP). Cobra Mansa was one of those responsible for the GCAP growth, resulting in the revitalization of the angola style in Bahia to which many other mestres and capoeiristas who were not in the ideological line of work with GCAP also contributed (Assunção 2005, 189).



For Cobra Mansa, it was an important time of personal growth as he encountered a structured medium for his continuing learning process in capoeira, close to his mestre and to the elder angoleiros. In addition, the collaborative process of establishing effective organizations like GCAP, as well as developing capoeira's African racial and political

⁹⁸ Brazil holds the second largest African descent population in the world, second only to Nigeria. (Myers 1999, 300)

⁹⁹ The pelourinho, which gave the neighborhood of the Largo do Pelourinho its name, is the Portuguese name of the pillory, the whipping post to which slaves were bound, beaten, and sold (Ibid, 160). Today the place is marked with a marble stone in front of the Jorge Amado's house.

consciousness, helped to claim space and visibility for capoeira angola in the Bahian society. Isabel Green recalls the benefits of Cobra Mansa's partnership with Moraes:

The discipline was to stay together in a place, finally with a partner in some project, building something. In this sense, Moraes gave him the project and the discipline to do it. He was very strict. "Be on time! Be here, do that..." So Cobrinha would have to structure [himself]. A guy that never had a watch, never had a bank account, never had nothing in his life that could qualified as a box to contain him, now was in a leadership position in the [GCAP] group with somebody else having to coordinate, training and everything. I believe that that discipline was very good and Cobrinha understood the value of it in certain moments. He was capable of taking whatever good the discipline had for his learning process. (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

This effort would be accompanied by other simultaneous events, and 1982 would prove a significant year for the development of capoeira angola. Not only was this the year that Mestre Moraes and his "top student"¹⁰⁰ Cobra Mansa moved to Salvador initiating a collaboration that would yield tremendous visibility and respect for capoeira angola in Bahia and beyond, but it was also the year that one of the traditionalist elder mestres, Mestre João Pequeno, opened his academy, the Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola (CECA), at the forte Santo Antonio as well, in the first floor right underneath GCAP which occupied the second floor. The fortress, formerly a prison, then recovered from squatters, constituted a popular cultural center facilitating collaboration among different politico-cultural activist groups in the city. The bloco-afro Ilê-Ayê also held rehearsals in the fort. Cobra Mansa commented: "The dictatorship in Brazil just ended and it was the time of let's say 'democracy' and all this movement was starting to grow. There was Ilê-Ayê, Olodum, Malê-Debalê and other [Afro-centric performance based] movements, and at that point the GCAP started to get involved also." For Moraes and

¹⁰⁰ (Assunção 2005, 187)

Cobrinha and their students, the work involved more than just the *fundamentos*, the basics of the physical technique, but included learning the musical repertory, capoeira history, and the connection to the tradition and its ancestry. As Mestre Cobra believes “the capoeirista becomes a political being from the moment he creates his own consciousness.”¹⁰¹ The work of GCAP was also a pioneering work in structuring the learning process democratically in a number of areas to raise their consciousness and sense of responsibility. Members were organized in several *Comissões de Trabalho* (Work Commissions)¹⁰² and study groups which took care of a number of diverse tasks as a group such as space maintenance, instrument construction and care, archival record keeping, video and photo documentation, public relations, finances and research (Costa Araújo 2004, 51). This structure, including discussions about political, social, and racial issues, became a substantial part of the learning process and of the values transmitted through capoeira:

The GCAP was always a place where we discussed a lot about blacks, race, political [subjects] and I think it was a big school for everybody to learn so many things about so many different concepts and I think Mestre Moraes was learning a lot too. We were together, we could learn a lot from students, from outsiders, I think it was a big investment and I came out full of knowledge.

Furthermore, this structure of the working groups and political discussions would be replicated in the several capoeira angola organizations that would derive from GCAP. At the time, it was a two-way political influence between the Movimento Negro and the angoleiros:

¹⁰¹ M. Cobra Mansa in Langlois 2007, Chapter 2: Política “Capoeira é preto, kalunga!”

¹⁰² Pictures and Sound, Documentation and Archives, Maintenance, Dissemination, Projects and Research, and Finances (Assunção 2005, 188) probably an extension of the hierarchic positions Mestre Pastinha institutionalized like the mestre of songs, mestre of orchestra or mestre of archives as a sign of *progresso* (progress) (Pastinha n/d, 10b)

At the same time that we were inserting the capoeira discourse in the movement, we were learning the discourse of the black movement itself and we brought that discourse inside capoeira. I think it was an interchange, the insertion of capoeira inside the [black] movement and the [black] movement inside capoeira. We learned a lot and brought that discourse to wherever we went. This was very important on the other hand, so people would start to do more research about the question of capoeira's African aspects. Capoeira at the time was going through another process called "the whitening process"¹⁰³ where capoeira, a black thing, was becoming increasingly whitening even in the discourse itself, so it was important that people would turn back to the African-ness of capoeira. (M. Cobra Mansa in Langlois, 2007)



The struggle to preserve the African roots and identity of capoeira angola he and Mestre Moraes defended, would make Cobra Mansa very well known in street rodas against regional players. It was believed that the slow game and close to the floor angola moves

were signs of an inferior "martial art" technique, and the capoeira regional circles had many chances to see a young angoleiro in action. This was also the time Cobra Mansa would get his second capoeira name. Mestre Pastinha in one of his *ladainhas*¹⁰⁴ in homage to two of his favorite students, João Pequeno (João Pereira dos Santos) and João Grande (João Oliveira dos Santos) referred to them as *cobra mansa* (tame snake) and *gavião* (sparrow) respectively. As a result, Mestre João Pequeno himself would start to name Cinézio as "cobrinha", or the younger snake. Soon enough he would be widely known as Cobrinha in Bahia for his work with GCAP and his participation in street rodas. While people in Belo Horizonte and Rio would still call him Cobra Mansa, even his

¹⁰³ Referring to the changes in modern capoeira styles, particularly Bimba's Regional (Frigerio 1989, 85-98)

¹⁰⁴ *Eu tenho dois irmãos/Todos dois, chama João/Um joga pelo ar/Outro joga pelo chão/Se um é cobra mansa/Sei que o outro é gavião, camaradinho.* (I have two brothers/both of them are called João/one plays on the air/other plays on the floor/if one is a tame snake/the other is a sparrow, comrade).

family would start using the Cobrinha appellation “otherwise nobody would know who they were talking about.”

Preparing the materials for the structure of this dissertation, I noticed how Cobra’s moves to different cities were of significance as well as his changes of names. I asked Mestre Cobrinha how the different periods in his life might be characterized or symbolized by some key capoeira angola moves. Some stages would require a defensive movement, like the rolê for his time in Belo Horizonte, but others, like his phase in Bahia, would be clearly represented by a movement of attack like the *rabo de arraia* (stingray tail). At this point in time, the early 80s, the style of angola was in danger of disappearing. In order to assert the effectiveness of the so called “more traditional” style, the capoeiristas had to demonstrate that capoeira angola was not a thing of the past that was only practiced by elderly people: “We were using a tough game in the rodas with the capoeiristas from Regional; we were in that argument. Probably it is not an argument anymore, but it was at the time, through harsh play. We were creating and defending our space, it was wild!” Young capoeiristas like Cobra Mansa and Mestre Moraes would have to prove themselves as excellent players by going to open rodas and playing against regional practitioners to earn the recognition as angoleiros and a spot in the capoeira arena, which was overwhelmingly represented at that time by regionalists. “The movement of *rabo de arraia* is also one of the traditional moves in capoeira. If you are going to make a parallel, that’s what we were trying to do at GCAP, bringing back the tradition” Cobrinha stressed.

Salvador, Bahía: Where Two Life Paths Became One

Much was done during the time Mestre Cobra resided in Bahía. There were historically important developments for capoeira in these years and Mestre Cobra, along with Mestre Moraes, remained at the center of what would be the new involvement of the arts with social, political, and cultural movements. This flow of collaboration helped construct and structure new capoeira group studios that differed markedly from the formal martial arts academy setting or the backyard play of the old mestres.¹⁰⁵ This model remains the one that Mestre Cobra Mansa encouraged in the United States through the development of the International Capoeira Angola Foundation, FICA, and its global expansion without much innovation: “I didn’t invent or change anything at the beginning, we just kept doing what we were doing in GCAP”.

As important as this was for the development of contemporary capoeira angola, what is more interesting for the purpose of this dissertation is to illustrate how Mestre Cobrinha got so deeply involved in capoeira and what it meant for him personally. His move to Bahía was initially intended to fulfill his spiritual needs; his decision to stay was apparently once again decided by a higher power and became essential to who he is today.

My life was all this big mess... But Tia Oneida gave me advice... “It’s going to get better” she would tell me, and she started to teach me about this spiritual path and told me what my Orixá (spiritual guide) was, and that I needed to take care of some things, like light some candles, etc. Slowly, she gave me all the knowledge. She would make small ceremonies and invited me to go over there where I needed to put on my white clothes. I started to be involved at a slow pace and it was very nice.

¹⁰⁵ About the transformation of the training space and the socio-cultural role played by a mestre’s backyard, see Abreu, 2003.

The process of walking through the spiritual path involves many rituals and ceremonies that are crucial for the further development of the *filho* (son). One of the very special ceremonies happens in a *camarinha* (small room). It is a special retreat in a closed space for some days. The initiated pass most of the time sleeping. As Cobrinha found comfort in the spiritual practices, he decided he would travel to Bahia to participate in this ceremony:

I slept for more than 40 hours. I don't have memory... I got into this space and my mother put me in a dark room, covered me with this white cloth and I just fell asleep. I just remember opening the cover, drinking some water, getting back to sleep... I couldn't move! I passed [like that] almost two days.

I recall my own experience with an energy field cleansing after a life threatening illness that required a long recuperation process. I would be laying on my therapist's treatment table and fall almost immediately in a deep relaxation state. I definitely thought of that state, "being deep asleep", with no recollection of what had happened or how long I had been out. In "waking up," I would comment to her yawning: "What a nice way to do nothing for an hour!" To my remark, she would answer sharply back, "Don't ever say that! We both have been working very hard during the session cleaning both the physical and the aural bodies." As I recovered from facial and spinal paralysis without any chemical relaxants against all allopathic prognoses, I experienced the truth of her statement. There was some kind of connection with the spiritual world in her line of treatment because she asked me after our first session if I had somebody "watching over me." I told her my mother had passed away when I was fifteen. And she went on: "She is definitely helping. As I started working on you, this bright white light came in filling the room, and I felt like floating during the whole session." I felt immediate comfort and explained to her that I noticed when she put her hands over my face at the beginning of

the session, I could smell her hand lotion faintly. Without touching me, I felt the warmth, a change in the feel of the air around my skin and instantaneously, water started to pour in from inside my eyes, like crying backwards, my mouth—the clogged parotid (salivary gland) that caused the problem in the first place—my nose, my ears, my throat... It seemed like something had popped out and water started flowing inside. The memory of that first session has never faded.

She did it first for me in Belo Horizonte, just for one day, I slept for almost 24 hours, that was the first time that I had this kind of experience. And what is funny, is that because I never had a experience of incorporating the spirit¹⁰⁶ I used to make fun... because is really fun to see other people incorporate (*laughs*).

As Cobrinha relates his experiences, in my mind I am picturing my friend Corey, a theater major and an actor who researches Umbanda religious practices. In one of our classes impersonated the different spirit behaviors that are “incorporated” through the ritual by initiated mediums in the ceremonies: *crianças* (children), *preto velhos* (old Blacks), *caboclos* (indians), *boiaderos* (cowboys), *marinheiros* (sailors) and the advice that they give to the consultants. Certainly, the incorporation would look funny to a small child since the persona “disappears” to temporarily host the spirit of such extreme personalities, spirits or orixás, whatever the case may be. I can see how to young Cinézio’s eyes, the possessions would have been truly amusing performative experiences. Cobra Mansa continues:

She used to check with me often and prepare me for this trip. She would read the buzios for me and see how my life was going, what decision I wanted to make. So I told her: “I want to go to Bahía with you” and she said “Really? Just one thing:

¹⁰⁶ Candomblé and Umbanda, the two principal Afro-Brazilian cults, are ecstatic religions, in which devotees, cued by prolonged drumming and chanting, enter trance and become possessed by African gods or other spirits. Candomblé, the Bahían version, has the most purely African characteristics, with a liturgy largely in the Yoruba language and an exclusively African pantheon. *Receber santo* (to receive the saint), regardless of the spirit involved, is a synonym of going into trance (Wafer 1991, 101).

If you go to Bahía you are not coming back!” It was like she didn’t know what she was saying. I told her “Naaaah, how am I not going to come back?” I thought she was just joking, so I said “No, I’ll come back, now that things are going so good here”.

After two years of hardship in Belo Horizonte, Cobra Mansa was starting to be accepted and even found a space at the university “like a small club” to teach capoeira. Cobrinha sincerely believed that for all his struggle he could not leave that effort behind and Bahia would be just a short trip, but the búzios must have told Tia Oneida otherwise, because she insisted “I am serious, if you go to Bahía, you are not going to come back.” The advice forgotten, Cobrinha arrived in Bahia in January of 1982 to comply with the ritual:

She got me in this place, with a big waterfall, it’s a very special spiritual place and everybody went there to do their things¹⁰⁷. Tia Oneida asked me to go over the waterfall and put my head in. I just remember that it just hit me there... Zas! It was the first time I incorporated and it was... WOW!!! I asked later “What happened?” She told me “*Voçê bolou*” (you rolled).¹⁰⁸

In spite of the evidence of his spiritual experience, he had a hard time believing in it. “I always thought they were faking it,” and ultimately Cobrinha would have to



surrender his skepticism as he could not remember anything of what happened for a lapse of several hours after he put his head under the water and incorporated a spirit. He continues his reminiscence:

It was interesting that she had there about four or five people, and everybody started to incorporate almost at the same time. This was going on in a little hill and another lady was also there. The woman watched us and she was like “Oh-oh... this thing is going to get out of control.” So she went over there to help Tia

¹⁰⁷ Saint Bartholomew Park, close to the city of Salvador, Bahia, is a traditional space used for generations by Candomblé adepts to gather herbs, deposit sacrifices and make ritual cleansings (Matory 2005, 178).

¹⁰⁸ Candomblé term from the verb *bolar* “to roll” in the saint—to fall in a special state of trance that precedes initiation. (Johnson 2002, 202)

Oneida. The woman's name was Mãe Bia; she became my second [spiritual] mother.

El mundo es un pañuelo (the world is a small tissue) says the Spanish proverb.

“Candomblé is like capoeira,” Cobra says, a family with intricate lineages and kinships that creates spiritual connections beyond rational understanding. Tia Oneida and Mãe Bia recognized each other afterwards as daughters of the same *terreiro* (candomblé house), where both had been initiated through the *camarinha*¹⁰⁹ ritual within a year of each other. In between ceremonies and spiritual obligations, Cobra would roam the streets looking for some Angoleiros to play capoeira. In one of the *vadiação*¹¹⁰ he casually ran into Mestre Moraes. It will prove to be a very significant re-encounter:

I thought that Mestre Moraes was still in Rio, but he arrived to Bahia just three or four months before me when mestre Pastinha was dying¹¹¹ and he was trying to help him. So, when he saw me he said: “Perfect... Let's start something together!” I thought... “Ah, my mestre is here...” I also saw a nice spot for me to work, you know, my thing with the knives (*laughs*). So I have found this nice spot I was making a lot of money it was a new thing and there were a lot of tourists in the Pelourinho so I thought “Belo Horizonte...” (*waves goodbye*). Tia Oneida stayed in Bahia for two weeks and I stayed for three months! I just went to Belo Horizonte for my books and my things. I visit my [spiritual] mother and I told her I was moving to Bahia. She didn't tell me a thing. I was already established in Bahia for two years when she would say to me “Do you remember? I told you that you wouldn't be coming back!” I thought: “Hey, yeah... she told me. How did she know?” And she just looked at me “Wait and see, it's more to come!”

At this point in his initiation process, Mestre Cobra started to believe that his spiritual path was an important part of his life. If his rational side still had insufficient understanding of the religious practices and traditions in Candomblé, he was eager to

¹⁰⁹ The *camarinha* (small room) also known as *roncô* is the sacred room where the initiated retreats (Johnson 2002, 205).

¹¹⁰ Derived from the verb *vadiar*, loafing, hanging around, used in the past as synonym of capoeira as idleness, vagrancy.

¹¹¹ Mestre Pastinha passed away on November 13, 1981.

learn and he respected the authority of his Candomblé mentor, little by little overcoming his skepticism, sometimes the hard way:

- “Once I decided to stay, Mãe Bia became my actual [spiritual] mother... She was a little harder and complete than my first mother. The first one was more like me. You know, in capoeira I am maybe a little more flexible than other mestres. Tia Oneida was like (*imitates a sweet and calm voice*) ‘You need to be here, and you need to do that, okay?’ The other was like (*severe and sharp*) ‘You need to be here, NOW!’” He stresses the last remark with a decisive handclap. “Mãe Bia was strict and structured. I learned a lot from her. She could teach me about the Orixás, about the ritual, about everything. She had lots of [spiritual] sons that have been initiated in this big ceremony. By the way, I have a video of a part of this ceremony...”
- “Really?” My ethnographic ears prick up eagerly, I definitely want to see that footage. Cobrinha reads my non-verbal expression with a smile.
- “Yeah, you can see it anytime, it’s at the school. It was funny what happened at this ceremony, I was at the time trying to learn how to film, and my mother was: ‘Okay you can film just one part, not everything’”
- “Some parts of the ritual were open?” Now, I am not sure if I want to see the tape. I think that I would feel uneasy watching a ritual meant only for initiated practitioners. He reassures me that he only filmed the open parts.
- “Yes, they were open, but there was a beautiful caboclo. This old lady was so beautiful and she was incorporated as a caboclo. She was so beautiful (*gesticulates and talks as an angry caboclo*) ‘I don’t want you to film me!’ I said to myself ‘Bah... I can do it!’”
- “No, Cobrinha!” I gasp “Did you sneak in the camera?” Through my mind, I’m running stories of disobedient neophytes and I am dying to know what happened next. Cobrinha doesn’t let me down with the storytelling.
- “Yes, I put the camera on, and I put it hidden like this behind my hair” he gestures behind his long dreadlocks. “Just perfectly sneaky, and I was about to start... Man... As soon as I start recording, when I click the button... POW! POW! (*Yells very loud*) The two big lamps exploded and everything became really dark... Damn!” he laughs with the memories.
- “Don’t play with these things...” I shake my index finger at him mocking a reprimand while I laugh with Cobrinha with all my heart, loving the story and wondering what is the moral, if any, he learned from it.
- “Well, I started to respect more. I was new in all of that. She came to me (*severe*) ‘I told you not to film.’ I defended myself ‘I was not filming!’ She didn’t said anything else after that, but let me tell you, these big expensive lamps” he shakes his head “I was so pissed!” Cobrinha still laughs at the result of his imprudence “That was a big experience.”
- “I bet!” I agree with him “Big and expensive workshop!” I cannot stop laughing trying to picture him in the moment of the lamps’ explosion.
- “Seriously,” Cobrinha resumes grave “Mãe Bia taught me so much! That’s why I became so involved with the spiritual path.”

The connection with his spiritual path raised Mestre Cobra's awareness about



some aspects of his personality, something “you could call it half-orixá, not exactly evil” that has to be recognized and controlled as we have talked about other times. The learning process and involvement in his ritual practices gave him tools to

develop self-awareness and understand his role in the spiritual world. Not meant to be a priest, he had another lead role to acquire that implied his participation in concrete rituals and special ceremonies. As he was returning periodically to Salvador, I would ask during our conversations about the continuity with the different stages in his spiritual development. Due to a stroke several years ago, he tells me, Mãe Bia has been unable to advance him in the rituals and now he is caught in a dilemma that bans him from progressing. As she cannot move, she needed other people to help her, but she does not want to give in and accept the kind of help she needs. Cobrinha could go to somebody else, as other Mães de Santo have offered to finish the ritual process, but he is torn because doing so would imply he is leaving Mãe Bia behind, who currently only has two sons, Cobrinha and another man, his “brother” who cares for and visits her.

“I don't want to leave. She is always ‘Ah, my son, you always come to visit me and blah-blah-blah’ I don't want to tell her ‘Mãe, I am looking for somebody to finish my path’ and things like that. On the other hand, I don't want her sending me to somebody that I don't like, or I don't trust... I am in this crossroad... maybe I am going to choose someone that she is not going to like! And vice versa...”

“So in the meantime you do nothing, just waiting to see if something happens?” I can see his dilemma and admire his loyalty and respect.

“The last time I said: ‘Mother, we need to do something, because the last time I did something it was like seven years ago!’ You postpone something that is waiting for you. Now in the spiritual world, an Orixá is waiting for me to be part of him. What I do for now is that I give things [offerings] to him. I told

my mother ‘Look, give up, I don’t want to do it wrong. I am waiting for you to decide, but I want to do it right.’ Because you are going to give your head [to the saint]... I need to cut my hair.”

“Oh, so it is a lot involved” I think that his hair is very special for Cobrinha besides spiritual beliefs, I recall young Cinézio running away from home at ten because his stepfather would force him to have an extreme haircut.

“I am going to wait for her. When she was ready, I was working very much here [in the United States] and I couldn’t do it. I don’t know, I’ll just wait. That is how my spiritual path started and how started to merge, my spiritual path and my capoeira path, and that’s how I got to Salvador. I decided to go to Salvador for my spiritual path, but I decided to stay because both became one. However, I can’t stop thinking about Tia Oneida... How she knew?”

Cobrinha learned that when Dona Nenem, his biological mother, put him in the waters to heal him of tuberculosis when he was a little boy, she was making an offering to São Jorge, associated with Ogum, Cobrinha’s Orixá: “I was given to the Orixá way before I knew who my Orixá was.¹¹² A lot of things started making sense after I went to Bahia, and today, even more, I understand things in my life and everything makes sense.” The fate that merged these two paths would bring about the affirmation of the traditional style of capoeira in front of the blended style of regional and other fighting techniques and to Cobrinha the opportunity to dedicate himself professionally to capoeira.

From Cobra Mansa to Cobrinha to Mestre Cobra Mansa: The Professional Identity

One of the first ethnographic outcomes of self discovery happened through the process of unearthing more—and reflecting some more—about Cobrinha’s life experiences, as I was trying to respond to his own invitation: “you don’t know me.”¹¹³ I call them the “uncommon common experiences,” since some of the scripts we were

¹¹² In the syncretism of Roman Catholic and Afro-Brazilian religions like candomblé there are regional variations as in this case where in Rio de Janeiro Ogum’s associated would be (Saint Georges) whereas in Bahia would be Santo Antônio de Pádua (Saint Anthony of Padua)

¹¹³ After one of my comments about his theatrical aptitudes, Mestre Cobra made this remark before explaining how he had worked in the streets as a vendor. This comment would open the door to my research about his life history during the fall of 2003 and winter of 2004.

supposed to play in our lives referred to the gender construction of our socially accepted roles. At some point in our conversations some of his hidden talents, like the embroidery abilities, would shatter all my preconceived images about him:

“So, how much of Cinézio is left in you now?” I ask him. He pauses thinking his answer.

“I think that’s only in my family! Because my name is only spoken when I am with my real family. Otherwise, my name is not spoken at all.”

“Don’t you miss that?” I wonder, weighing up his last words, which have a somber ring to me.

“No,” he denies, “It’s the opposite!” Looking at my surprised expression he explains why. “Because I get surprised when somebody calls me by my name! Some of the people I grew up on the street call me still Cinézio. It sounds so strange to me! Now, I am more used to Mr. Peçanha from my travels.” He imitates different voices: ‘Mr. Peçanha here... Mr. Peçanha there...’ So now, Cobra Mansa and Peçanha are more familiar to me, but Cinézio...” He pronounces it with incredulity, while I listen to its sound. “Even now, my sister calls me Cobrinha, because no way other people are going to know who is she talking about if she doesn’t say Cobrinha.”

I was curious about how one became identified with another name and really cannot recognize who he/she was anymore. I hated that some family members used call me with a diminutive, *chiquitita* (small one), in what I identified as a way to mortify me and disrespect who I was. Until I was nine, I had been the youngest one—a very unprivileged position in my family. Other nicknames, derived from my name, Isabelita, Maribel... sounded equally horrible to me for I did not feel represented by them. Although I became Isa by choice when I left home at eighteen, my family continues to call me Isabel. Interestingly enough, the diminutive “Isita” does not carry any of the same weight other variations of my name do. I hear it as a loving mutation. I created a new role and name for myself when my nephews were born: *tieta* (aunty in Catalan), which worked happily for me during some years.

However, as I am living farther away now and they do not have the frequent reminder of my presence, my nephews are learning to call me Isabel too. My very good childhood friend Rosalia, my accomplice in prohibited musical excursions and devoted fan of my early compositions, was the one who started to call me Isa and it immediately sounded both familiar and original to me: for the first time a new variation of my birth-imposed name. I felt immediately comfortable with it, and I have been Isa since then. Like Cobrinha, people from my birth region where I spent my first 23 years of existence, know me and treat me as Isabel. Today, so used to the diminutive, it sounds very unfamiliar to me. When I moved to Barcelona in 1983 I would introduce myself as Isa. In some ways, I feel more pleased because it has none of the negative emotions of my infancy and it has become a symbol of liberation for me, being referred to who I am as a friend, away from the assumptions and roles that family members created about me.

In Barcelona, incidentally, I also was called “Bli” by my fellow musicians for my customary usage of that word as a substitute for whatever item I could not remember the name of. Some years ago, I got in contact with another informal naming. On one of my trips back to Spain, I learned that the neighbor who takes care of my house while I am in the States calls me *la profè* (short for “the professor”). That does not bother me at all. I see it instead as an affectionate and familiar way to honor who I am professionally. In Catalunya it is a very common practice—culturally appropriate—to refer to the people by their nicknames, or the family nicknames. I am aware that by the standards of the local community, at least by the elders, I am not considered part of Sant Llorenç Savall, the little town where I have been living for more than fifteen years now. Within the local parameters of acceptance, since I was not born there nor had any of my family there, I

will be always the *forastera* (foreigner) to them, as Mestre Cobra in Minas was not “da terra.” For this reason, I appreciate the sense of inclusion that my neighbors show towards me, acknowledging that my thirty-five plus years of teaching gives me a professional status that is now part of my identity. I do feel that represents me, and to them it means I have become closer than a neighbor; I have become family—since they have my keys—and they do not consider me a stranger in view of the fact that they do not need or want to use my “formal” name anymore. Cobrinha has to answer many times where he got his capoeira name:

I’ve always been very skinny, agile and fast. Later, when learning capoeira angola, I developed a light ginga. People started saying “Hey man, you are a real ‘smooth snake’, you astonished and bit!” So that became my capoeira name. But then, I arrived in Salvador where Mestre João Pequeno already had the same nickname. So he called me Cobrinha, and nowadays people call me Cobra Mansa, Cobrinha or Cobrinha Mansa.¹¹⁴

I could trace the different versions of Mestre Cobra Mansa’s capoeira name to the



point of his arrival to Bahia. Cinézio became Cobra Mansa in Rio and this would be the name he used to introduce himself to new people in Belo Horizonte, many of whom do not know his birth name. After

arriving in Bahia, he was renamed Cobrinha by Mestre João Pequeno and that is how many of his elder students, today Mestres, refer to him. Along the way with his work in GCAP where he would be acting as Contra-Mestre teaching classes and organizing the activities of the group he would be already treated as Mestre by the students as “you make your own name.” When finally Mestre Moraes decided to give him the diploma—

¹¹⁴ M. Cobra Mansa interview in Agogo 21, January 2004
<http://www.agogo.nl/archive2/agogo21/cobra/cobra.htm> [Accessed on 21 March 2008]

“it was such a big surprise, never thought about it”— in 1986, although it was due and a formality, it was very emotional nonetheless as Isabel remembers:

He was a *contramestre* for a long time. He became a *Mestre* seven or eight years after the GCAP was formed. Moraes graduate him during one of the *oficinas* (workshops), we have a tape of it... Cobrinha crying... He was so happy. It was a very important thing for him. (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

Receiving the title was *uma emoção legal* (a cool emotion) for Cobrinha, and he



says, “but at the same time I was already deserving it because of my work.” I have learned that *Mestre Cobrinha* never received this diploma. Moraes took it after the ceremony “to sign it” and never gave it back. The fact remains that the lineage and ties to one’s *mestre* are so strong and the student who moves from one *mestre* to

another is not well received; the prospectus of advancing in the graduation process can be delayed due to such moves. In *Cobrinha’s* case, it was because he started with *Mestre Jozias* as we saw in *Marker One*, and left for *Belo Horizonte* right before Moraes promoted his group of students in *Rio*. These circumstances would create what *Isabel Green* qualifies as “kind of competition” between the older students and *Cobrinha*, even though the timing of *Cobrinha* was very important for the development of *capoeira* in *Bahia* at the time.

We already have seen how *Cobrinha* had found in *capoeira* a structure, a community of practice, and good male role models—father figures—in the *capoeira mestres*. During the following years, he would claim also the elder *mestres* as GCAP and would organize special events and *rodas* with the *mestres antigos*, by persistently inviting them to participate in the new scene luring them out from retirement like in the case of

mestre João Grande. Retired from capoeira and working in a gas station close to Cobrinha's home in Salvador, João Grande would get a visit from Cobrinha on Sunday mornings who would sit with him to talk "like a son" about the things they were doing in the group, inviting him to come and see, since the older mestres did not want to participate in the open rodas anymore.

He would sit with him saying "mestre," like a son would talk to his father, "mestre, come to see what I have done of myself. You will be proud of seeing the group, come over there to see, we are playing the capoeira angola that we believe you would be proud to see being played. I know many mestres don't want to go and play in the roda because the capoeira that is played is not what it used to be, times change and capoeira is ugly now, but you have to come and see what we are doing." And the mestre would say: "Well, maybe, next week." (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

This would go on week after week, until one day when a special event was going to take place and Cobrinha told João Grande, using his best street selling techniques, "Everybody is going to be there, we have invited so and so... Paulo dos Anjos, Boca Rica, Canjiquinha, and they are coming, you have to come too, mestre!" Mestre João Grande did not just go to the event, but afterwards started teaching Moraes and Cobrinha and the rest of GCAP students.

Even though Cobrinha worked shoulder to shoulder with Moraes to build the GCAP organization, there was always the hierarchical pressure to submit to the mestre. Moraes was working as if he was in the military; he was very authoritative, a strong character and personality who would come down very hard at times which made Cobrinha and the students feel invisible. One of the two first female students, Mestre Janja recalls how "we didn't get a name, we were called *as meninas de Moraes*¹¹⁵ (the girls of Moraes)." Cobrinha, the resilient survivor, showed from the beginning that he had

¹¹⁵ Interview March 9, 2008

a subterranean way of doing “what was his, and nobody impeded... It was in his nature to be in the world.”¹¹⁶ From the arts of deception of capoeira itself Cobrinha would learn ways to play the game of life with life’s players. Like his mestre, Cobrinha used alternative channels to do what he thought was right. There were open rodas that Moraes did not authorize his students to participate in. Cobrinha would sneak off and play. From this experience, Mestre Cobrinha learned that authoritarian leadership takes away freedom from the rest of the group, and when he created his own organization years later, he would open the space for a shared leadership. Commenting on his view on encouraging his students to participate in the decision making process he stated: “I want them to have what I did not.”¹¹⁷

Working in the Streets of Bahia: Enjoyment Is a Job

In some of our conversations the subject has come up of what people consider a job: as something that has to make a person miserable. Mestre Cobrinha tells me how much he loves what he does and how difficult it is for some people to value his work because he is having fun with it. I understand in my own terms what he means. Many times while working as a professional musician doing gigs as a pianist, many of my friends would like to come and tag along for the parties where my fellow musicians and I would be the main entertainers. The “groupies” would be free to drink, dance, hang around, flirt, drink some more and have a different kind of fun than we musicians were—in theory—having. For us, regardless of how much we enjoyed playing our instruments, we were performing, doing our part as entertainers. We were in a *having-a-good-time* mood, for nobody likes to see a sullen musician at a party. But it was very challenging to

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹¹⁷ Interview with M. Cobra Mansa by Sylvia Robinson and Lucia Duncan May 2004. FICA Archives.

keep up a “good vibe” with calculated control in a merrily drunken crew of partygoers. The main advice of the mestre to the capoeiristas, “always look out,” might be the only way to end a jogo / gig without harm.

The integrity of the instruments and safety of the musicians were especially in danger during New Year’s Eve, extreme weddings and Sant Joan *verbenas*.¹¹⁸ Once, I was hit by a flying beer can that fell onto my synthesizer keyboard, just missing my fingers. It was thrown from behind the stage by a drunken “friend” and damaged the mechanism of a cluster of keys. Mestre Cobra Mansa remarks that since he works in the streets and travels a lot to teach, it seems to some people that he must be on perpetual vacation. “It’s the opposite!” He describes his obligations counting with his fingers: “I have to be on time, get up early, warm up for the training, always be available to students and researchers’ questions...” He looks at me and laughs at my comment “Some of them especially persistent,” and concludes, “That is a lot of work; you know what I mean?”



Some other people would qualify his work during the street labor days in the *cidade alta* (upper city) Elevator Lacerda square of being proper no-one but a “medieval mountebank.”

He would set up a bicycle rim with large knives inserted point inwards, and offer to dive through the small hole in the middle. A crowd would inevitably gather

¹¹⁸ In Spain, but especially in Catalunya the night of June 24 is celebrated with bonfires, fireworks, and music and dance parties at night called *verbenas*. Along with New Years Eve, this is the night that all musicians have a gig and it is also the most dangerous time to be on the road for many accidents happen from mixing alcohol and driving.

round to witness this feat, but Cobrinha and his assistants managed to keep them going for hours with a sales pitch for a “massage ointment” laced with a local anesthetic, xylocaine (lidocaine)—a precursor of Viagra—and otherwise manage to avoid taking the deadly plunge between the knife points for as long as possible. It seemed impossible, because the hole was smaller than the breadth of his shoulders.

I only saw him do it once. He literally dove through the hole with his arms stretched well above his head, reducing his shoulders to their narrowest point like a diver into a pool. It was brilliant, and people were willing to hang around for hours—and even buy his product—on the off chance he'd do it again. (Sabrina Gledhill, 27 July 2007) ¹¹⁹

All the acrobatic experience he learned from Tigre early on and perfected over the years in street performances would grant him a place as the first teacher at the Picolino Circus of Salvador “I was one of the instructors and founders with Verônica and Anselmo¹²⁰ to teach people about the circus artwork.”

The benefits of having such an early involvement with performance skills enabled



him not just to earn a living over many years, but also kept him in disciplined training, taking care of his physical form, treating his body with respect, which is still today a fundamental part of his life. In one of his recent projects, the Kilombo Tenondé, Mestre Cobra

Mansa organized circus workshops for kids in the neighborhood of Coutos in Bahia where he has been trying to build a cultural center. In the summer of 2005 he was collaborating with the FICA-DC group teaching a workshop of capoeira to children in the Columbia Heights area: “Some of these kids, don’t have an awareness of their bodies... They are so disconnected!” Mestre Cobrinha found his connection between the use of his

¹¹⁹ From the blog entry “More about Cobrinha” in <http://capoeirablogger.blogspot.com/2007/07/more-about-cobrinha.html> [Accessed on 05/06/2008]

¹²⁰ Anselmo Serrat and Verônica Tamaoki, founded in 1985 and transformed in a Non-Governmental Organization affiliated with UNICEF in 1997.

body in capoeira in the acrobatic exercises and the joy of sharing his knowledge and experiences with others.

Another Chance in Salvador: The Father, the Partner

We fell in love with each other from the very beginning. I was very worried about the consequences of the environment, because although I come from a very poor family from the countryside, emigrants to the city and all of that, we were fourteen children, but never, ever, related to the ghetto, with the marginalized. We were a poor working family. (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

The fact that he moved to Bahia did not stop him from having a romantic involvement with Isabel with whom he agreed to maintain a long distance relationship, both taking turns to visit each other. There were “lots of letters, phone calls and he wrote



so many poems... It was quite lovely,” remembers Isabel. In one of the trips back to Belo Horizonte Cobrinha learned that she was pregnant. He was aware of how he “messed up” things with Rosângela and he was determined to make it work this time. Both of them were happy about the baby: Isabel felt ready to be a mother and Cobrinha wanted to be together with

them because of how much he loved her. The pregnancy would be the motivator to move in together “for good.” It took some time for Isabel to transfer from the University Federal of Minas Gerais to the University Federal of Bahia working as a university hospital nurse.

Cobrinha, who had been living in Janja’s house for a while and after that in a rented room in the very poor neighborhood of Cosme de Farias, would find a house for the family. Isabel would send half of the money necessary to buy the house and Cobrinha’s



savings covered the rest: “We got a good deal and the guy was so nice to let us have the house...we had only half of the money to pay and he gave it to us for less because he saw we were starting our life [as a family].” When Isabel arrived in Bahia, seven months pregnant, it was to a home of their own, and Cobrinha’s second son Makindé was born on April 13, 1986. This is a period of stability of an established routine: a home, a family, a good spot to perform, GCAP to train and teach capoeira, a project to channel his creative energy. Mestre Moraes convinced him to take the *Supletivo Segundo Grau* (General Education Development) exam in order to attend the university to get a Physical Education degree.

Isabel would start training with the GCAP group of founder students, getting very close to the women, Janja and Paulinha, until today. She would bring baby Makindé and leave him in a corner on a blanket. Not surprisingly, Makindé’s first words were not *papãe* (dad) or *mamãe* (mum), but a corrido of capoeira *Sim sim sim, não não não*¹²¹ (Yes yes yes, no no no).

There was another element of dysfunction to Cobrinha’s experience that would set him apart from Isabel’s background. Besides the difference of having a stable job versus depending on an unconventional circus-like and trickster street occupation, the lack of a stable father figure in his life left him ill equipped to become a parent and a partner in his relationship with women. Isabel details:

On top of all that it's very hard for him to be the caretaker, to know that other person depends on him. It's like the weight of a chain. The idea of being constrained or chained in any way, kills him. And he really could get closed to

¹²¹ The musical proficiency of children immersed in capoeira ambiance since birth has already been studied. For example, a boy, barely 5 years old, is “capable of playing all the instruments used in capoeira and sing at the same time” with an aural accuracy highly elevated “since he can reproduce any sound he hears” (Cassiano 2005, 27).

himself very depressed, very bad when he feels himself trapped. He always finds the way to escape, to get away... So he loved the idea of surprising. After we got together and were living as a family, he would come to the house entering through the window. He wouldn't use the door, just opened the window and jumped inside. "I just wanted to surprise you" Somehow, he wanted to keep the idea that the house wasn't a trap. (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

As soon as I heard the window story, my mind raced back through time. I have personal experience with this use of windows as doors in a more dramatic way. A family member, whom I will call Peter to protect his identity, threw himself out of a window, in an extreme situation when he was abused and felt psychologically trapped. He knew he would not kill himself because it was a first floor height, but he wanted to hurt himself, so they would determine he was crazy and consult a psychiatrist. Then Peter could finally "tell everything." I understood at the time, upsetting as it was, that the decision to exit the situation in that dangerous and self-deprecating way, was because at the time Peter could not find the "door," the straight exit, to get out of the abusive situation. He did not know how to deal with the abuse and psychological distress and the oppression he felt that was also related with an old and deep experience of feeling powerless as a kid. In addition, he felt the social discrimination commonly held against people who needed psychological treatment, which remains a taboo subject in my family and is a stigma and sign of weakness. For Cobrinha, the conventional entrance point to the house, the door, could have meant the traditional role expected of him at the time as the father, the provider... a role he never learned:

If he was going to a trip or to work on the streets, he would never tell me what was the day or the time he would be coming back "I don't know when I'm coming back... I'll come back when I come back." (Isabel Green, March 8, 2008)

Using the window as an entrance and providing few details about his whereabouts, Cobrinha also was blurring the boundaries of the behavior of a capoeirista

in the small roda, extrapolating it to the big roda of life, always surprising, always doing the unexpected, keeping his personal freedom above all.

First Trip to the United States: The Wonders, the Cultural Shock



Cobrinha and Moraes first came to the United States in January of 1984. The trip was funded from a grant proposal by Kenneth Dossar, an African American scholar doing research in Brazil. Cobrinha and Moraes left Brazil to stay for several weeks in Philadelphia participating in the “Bahia Week.” It was a struggle because of language and cultural barriers. The US Partners of the Americas contributed airfare and a \$100 stipend to live on. Both capoeiristas stayed as guests in

Dossar’s house. Performances, lectures and demonstrations were scheduled and the formality of participating on time was an important consideration under North American standards. Not everything was difficult, for Cobrinha would also make contacts with the local Rastafarian community in Philadelphia. The opportunity to be in a position to introduce capoeira angola to a variety of audiences, including universities and cultural centers in the US, was a big accomplishment for a *menino da rua* (street boy) from Rio de Janeiro. Cobrinha would return to Brazil very critical of US politics and racial divisions. It was outside his experience. Some of his prior knowledge about the United States was based on the information provided in black movement meetings where US foreign policy, particularly its support to the Brazilian dictatorship and other oppressive governments in Latin America, were harshly criticized. This limited his inclination to

learn English, as “my feelings against [North] America were so big that it was very hard for me to learn [English]. It was in the wrong side of my mind. Only started to learn when I started to make contact with American people in 1983-84.”

There were very positive outcomes of the trip: the contacts, the respect, their authoritative information about the capoeira angola art form, the admiration for their skill and knowledge and being asked to represent their tradition outside Brazil. However, there were also experiences of cultural shock which all their militancy and activism did not prepare them for:

“That [trip] was the first time in my life I really saw racism, my own experience. Because before in the Black Movement in Brazil, race was subtle, you could not see really what was going on. Well, you could see some discrimination if you went to a place and they would take a little longer to serve you, but this is the first time I really... BLAM!! (*slapping one hand on top of the other*) me and Moraes, had experienced anything like that.”

“Really?” I am interested in his point of view, because I had some experiences on my own of seeing discrimination in Brazil, or more specifically seeing my privileged treatment as a white person. “What happened?”

“There were three experiences for me that were a marker of racism. The first one was the guy we were staying at his house, Ken Dossar, he lived in this black neighborhood and the first day we were getting friends with a lot of people we were not thinking about black and white or anything. ‘You cannot bring a white person to my house’ he said.”

“Ken Dossar?” I met him twenty years after the time Cobrinha is talking about and I cannot imagine what would be the reason for him to say something like that. “The same Ken Dossar that invited you to the trip?”

“Yeah, see, what happened is that the first day we came over there they had a big reception for us and we made contact with so many people, some white Brazilian spoke Portuguese and gave us their addresses and contact information. And he would tell us directly ‘Don't bring any white person to my house because of my neighborhood.’ We were in shock, it didn't make any sense to us!”

I try to imagine an all black neighborhood in Philly in the 80's and I really don't know what to say either. My experience of four years in the states doesn't help to illuminate so I let him follow up.

“The second one happened one day we got lost. We took the metro and got out at the wrong station, and Moraes didn't really speak any English, just little words and this white woman, kind of old, comes closer and Moraes was trying to ask her a question and she just spat at him ‘Nigger!’

Now I am speechless because I know that's a word very charged, imagine more so in the 80's and more even if it was a white person spitting at a black one.

"Did you understand the word? The meaning of the word?"

"Oh I knew the word, but Moraes was like 'Did she just called me black, can't she see that she is talking with a black person?' I remember very clear how she spat in the floor while she said the word. We were like, completely... out. This didn't make any sense!"

"Wow, I get it, even if the word didn't have for you the meaning that would have had for an African American person, the spitting... that would have been really scary."

"We would ask afterwards Ken about what happened and he explained the whole story and we were like 'Ah!' Moraes then understood and he was mad, really mad, but Ken explained the whole concept to us and we understood where it was coming from."

"How about the third one?" I think these two stories are enough to tell about his experience with racism, but I am curious about the third one. I believe there is something that has made him remember all during the years to make a serious impression.

"The third one was me and him and Ken in the metro. I don't know if it was a coincidence or not. But in this car most of the people if not all were black and then one white guy enters and seats down and this other black guy gets over him and says 'Give me all your money!' And we were astonished. We wanted to go over there to help the guy that was robbed, but Ken said. 'No, no... leave it alone, he went to the wrong car.' I was like 'just because everybody is black and this guy is white? We didn't understand. After [this] we started to learn more about segregation about what happened in the past and how society worked in the US, things started to make a bit more of sense. That doesn't mean it was right or wrong, better or worse than slavery in Brazil, just started to make more sense for one side and for the other the reaction of the other people, but for us, it was a big shock."

The state of shock would make him more knowledgeable about black history and experience in the United States, conditioning him for his move to Washington DC where



he started to work in his own group with racial issues.

This would be the first of many trips during the following years as a capoeirista guest of special events in the US, such as his participation along with a group of other capoeiristas in the second biannual summer

festival National Black Arts Festival Atlanta, Georgia in 1990.¹²² Cobrinha would get the opportunity to tour the United States twice with the spectacle called “Oba-Oba” in 1991 and 1992 including six months at the Marquis Theater on New York's Broadway. “Many artists from the company would quit the group during the tour to stay in the States. Not me... I never left the group. I didn't want to live here!” His reservations about living in the States were also related to the fact that he was finishing his degree from the Universidade Catolica do Salvador where he graduated in Physical Education in 1992.

Another project very dear to Cobrinha and to many other capoeiristas who participated over the years, was the *Projeto Axé* (Axé Project)¹²³ where he served as a instructor of homeless children in 1992 and 1993. A social project initiated in June of 1990, connected with the National Movement of Street Children, the program developed many alliances with other nonprofit organizations in the area of Salvador to offer qualitative services to children.¹²⁴

Many things would set Cobrinha apart from his generation of capoeiristas; for example, his accomplishments in school and his desire to read, learn and further study. In addition, his chances to travel outside Brazil offered new opportunities for capoeira and the capoeiristas committed to its dissemination. With the reader's collaboration, we will relieve the agogô player contributing to the revitalization of the roda's energy.

¹²² Cobrinha and mestres Moraes, Lua, Nô, João Grande from Brazil and from the West coast, Contra Mestre Themba Mashama and one of his students for a week of workshops, rodas in a week festival.

¹²³ *Axé*, word of Yoruba origin, means force and power. It is the force, the divine energy in candomblé, that makes things grow and transmitted to all living beings.

¹²⁴ A project of solidarity “from the included to the excluded,” initially intended to provide education for children making a living in the streets of Salvador in addition to ensure their basic human rights, the project now extends their programs to the children's families. (Mickelson 2000, 174). One of the main areas of action includes creative and physical activities, like the classes of capoeira, contributing to the building of self-awareness and self-esteem and the structuring of new habits and behaviors.

The Instrument that Embodies Duality: The Agogô

The double bell has a clear African origin: Moraes explained that in language nagó (or Ioruba) the agogô was called *gan*, which means ‘two’” (Capoeira 2002, 327). As



in other African languages, in Brazil the instrument maintains the onomatopoeic naming. In Nigeria it is called agogó, agogoró, oGegê, uGegê whereas in Ghana it is called gan, gongkokwe, gongné.¹²⁵ The two cowbells are usually struck with a metal rod as are the African bells used accompanying drums in trios, like in mandingue doununs. In Capoeira, to avoid



overwhelming the sound of the berimbau or other instruments in the bateria, they are struck with a vaqueta with the resulting in a suppler sound. Other variations of bell instruments are used in Afro-Brazilian religious contexts with specific ritual functions, and they are also used in the more profane celebrations such as samba de roda and other popular dances.

¹²⁵ Béhague, Gerard. *Brazil*, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy [Accessed 04 February 2008], <http://www.grovemusic.com>

Ringings Worlds (May 2008)

*The subtleties
of the capoeira conceptual world,
of this dissertation work,
the double bell
ringing the symbolic duality of
the small roda and the big roda
the world of the living and the dead
the orixás' world and the humans' world
the inversion of the berimbau rhythms
the call and response of the corrido,
the brincadeira (teasing) and the briga (fight)
the black and yellow colors of the angoleiros
the feet standing and the headstands
the mestre and the student
the street roda and the school roda
the capoeirista and the ethnomusicologist
the black man and the white woman
the Brazilian and the Spaniard
the acrobat and the musician
the research partner and the ethnographer
the community and the academia
double bells
ringing worlds*



In Marker Four, *Going Global: The International Capoeira Angola Foundation*



(FICA), the “going around the world” of Mestre Cobra Mansa emerges after his first trip to the United States. During his ten years of residence, Mestre Cobrinha breaks his ties with the GCAP in Brazil and founds an international organization creating new avenues and methods to preserve and expand capoeira angola worldwide. The toque changes to *Jogo de Dentro* in the version of the mestres Traira and Cobrinha Verde. The movement of the Chamada appears as a metaphor for the calling Mestre Cobra experienced at this time. The segment ends with the substitution of the reco-reco, the scraper, giving a chance to the reader to know another bateria instrument.

<i>A capoeira essa velha companheira (bis)</i>	The capoeira this old companion
<i>Já rodamos o mundo inteiro</i>	We went around the whole world
<i>Cantada dessa maneira</i>	Singing this way

Velha Companheira (M. Cobra Mansa, 2005)

Marker 4: Going Global: The International Capoeira Angola Foundation (FICA) [1993-2003]

Place: Washington, DC (USA) and beyond

Rhythm: Jogo de Dentro #1 (M. Cobrinha Verde) & #2 (M. João Grande)

Movement: Chamada

Instrument: Reco-reco

The musical score is written for six instruments: Gunga, Médio, Viola, Pandeiro, Atabaque, and Reco-reco. The time signature is 2/2. The score consists of five measures. The Gunga part starts with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The Viola part also has a triplet in the second measure. The Pandeiro, Atabaque, and Reco-reco parts play a consistent rhythmic pattern throughout the piece.

The toque of *Jogo de Dentro* (inside game) in Mestre Traira and Cobrinha Verde style¹²⁶ implies the need for a more mature game, signaling progress, a gesture of “knowing more.” Mestre Cobra Mansa relates to my idea of presenting the evolution of the rhythm along with the development of his life story: “If you want to make this kind of analogy, with [the toque of] jogo de dentro you need to play more inside, cautious,

¹²⁶ Mestre Cobrinha offered the two versions of the rhythm that I transcribe in this chapter. The main differences are in the gunga and médio berimbaus (since the médio plays an inversion of the gunga). Other differences relate with speed of execution added recently polemic to the pool of execution styles. In 2003, historian Matthias Röhrig Assunção unearthed several recordings from the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University made by African-American researchers in the 40’s and 50’s Lorenzo Turner e Franklin Frazier. http://www.lmilani.com/m/content/view/479/91/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=479&Itemid=91 [accessed 15 April 2008]. The recordings, where Mestre Bimba and Mestre Cabecinha perform with their respective accompanying groups, are precious stances of the performances of the time. In Mestre Cabecinha’s tracks, there is a version of São Bento Grande performed faster than Mestre Pastinha’s recommendation of playing this rhythm slower than São Bento Pequeno (Pastinha 1988, 39).

focused; you are going to have to pay attention to the variations in the berimbau that is going to call the jogo of mandinga in the game. You are not just going to respond to the *chamada* (call) of your partner, but you respond to the *chamada* and clues of the berimbau.”



Dão Dão Din Tchitch
The heat, the sweat
The music speeding up
Pearled foreheads
Wet shirts
The drone singing
The laughs
The Ahs and Oops
The tricks
The circle shrinking
The arame sparking
The call for Jogo de Dentro
Fuels the fire
The jumps, the twirls
The sweeping legs
Dão Dão Din Tchitch
the sweat, the heat

Cultural forms [...] [that] have structured content, are often visual manifestation of social relations and may be part of an elaborate aesthetic system. (Kaeppler 1985, 92)

If the *jogo de dentro* toque entails the expertise to hear the clues of the game, the *chamada* brings, under innocent steps of waltz, the *mandinga* and cunning that makes one aware of the dangers and challenges of the response to the calls. The ritualized structured movement system covers a sophisticated set of rules of engagement during the *jogo*. Similarly, Mestre Cobra Mansa’s answering the calls and invitations that people outside Brazil were making to him shows his ability to connect the small *roda*-game with the big *roda*-life.

Washington DC: The Workshop that Would Change Everything (Again)

If Mestre Cobra Mansa's decision to go to Washington DC to teach a workshop was another turn of fate, the decision to stay to work in-depth with a group of the workshop participants was fully deliberate. In 1993, Mestre Cobrinha was becoming known in Brazil as a good capoeirista and Jelon Vieira paid his airfare to New York to play in a tour he was organizing with his Capoeira Foundation¹²⁷ although "he had another intention behind." After the workshops in New York, Seattle and Texas, Vieira would reveal his project of establishing a capoeira school at the University of San Antonio putting Mestre Cobrinha and another person in charge of the school. The offer was not bad: a year long contract, a salary of \$1,000 a month and housing. Although Cobrinha did not want to live in the States he did consider the proposal:

I thought it sounded good and asked him where was San Antonio. When I looked in the map—I swear to God—and saw it, I asked "Where is NY?" Here... "Where is San Francisco?" There... [I was] just looking for the places where there were capoeiristas, and I thought... "In the middle of nowhere?" I said "Nooo... Is nobody there!"

It seems like the chamadas would be multiplying, since at the same time, the Ausar Auset Society (AAS), an international Pan-African religious organization, invited Mestre Cobra to teach a workshop in its New York chapter. Attending members of the Washington DC chapter liked what they saw and invited Cobrinha to do another workshop in the District, where he would do a ten-day workshop for kids and another for adults. The AAS director made him an offer to stay in DC to teach regular classes to the kids during the school year, but Mestre Cobrinha, wanting to go to Europe to visit

¹²⁷ Years after taking on the suggestion of one of his girlfriends, Carol Hilton, to make a foundation for the incipient organization that would develop into the International Capoeira Angola Foundation (FICA), Mestre Cobrinha discovered that Jelon Vieira's organization also was a foundation. The decision came to be because it was a better deal in the States in order to tap into grant money for developing projects to be a foundation rather than just an association.

Rogério, his capoeirista friend from the time of Caxías, so he turned down the offer. In spite of his rejection, the AAS sent him another proposal to stay in Washington DC for six months.

I started to think... The things with my daughter [Maria] and her mother [Maria Lima Falcão] were really shaking, we were already separated, but it was trouble.¹²⁸ The things with Mestre Moraes were difficult, we were always fighting with different ideas, and I had to do some work in my house, so I thought, I can stay six months save some money for the house... So, I stayed. I didn't know anything about Washington DC before—well, [it was] the capital of the USA!



Mestre Cobra Mansa's work with the group children of the AAS would be the initial seed of what a year later would become FICA. He did not plan to stay long in USA, but after only eight months of training, he brought the twenty-five people of the group to Brazil in what would be the First International Encounter of Capoeira Angola. It was the first Brazilian experience for many of them.

Sometimes, when I think of Mestre Cobrinha as a facilitator of multicultural experiences I get dizzy, like when I got mesmerized with the *Cola-Cao* tin of my childhood breakfasts. The chocolate powder mix came in a tin where a “mum” with an apron held a tray with a smoking cup and a smaller tin of Cola-Cao. In the front side of this small tin version, you could see a smaller mum with a smaller tray and another Cola-Cao tin. The sequence, if only visible in three or four sizes, was disturbing enough for a too imaginative little girl. As I think about the fresh idea of giving his students the opportunity to experience capoeira first hand in Brazil, I cannot avoid reeling with what it means in terms of economic, conviviality, language, spiritual and cultural dynamics. Here

¹²⁸ Mestre Cobrinha left Brazil without knowing that Maria Lima was pregnant. His daughter Maria was born in October 1993.

we have a man, twenty years after learning his first moves in capoeira, organizing international cultural tourism experiences that would change his students' lives forever.

The impact of the “encounter” would affect equally people from the States and people in



Brazil, and would not stop there. Like the Cola-Cao tin the impossible self-perpetuation “ad infinitum,” the ramifications of Cobra's intervention extended in the future like the tree that shaded the first Roda Livre de Caxias, with the roots firmly deep-seated in the tradition.

Besides the difficulties of living in a country to which he had such a visceral rejection of its politics and language, Mestre Cobra had to run the extra mile to adapt to the cultural differences.

I had a lot of difficulties due to the US itself. Arriving there, wanting to plant a mentality, a philosophy, a culture that was different and to change the people's mindsets from individual to a collective work. I had to make people understand all the philosophy behind capoeira. These were my difficulties, but in being a mestre of capoeira I had none. Thank God, I had a great relationship with everybody, I always was treated [well], I always treated [everyone well]. I was not questioned, ever, about my behavior as a mestre. I think that was very good. (Mestre Cobra in Costa Araújo 2004, 204)

The shock was not just cultural but also class related. “I need my space,” he would mock his American students. “What space? I grew up sharing my bed and my plate with six other people!” I understand his surprise. Being from a country where there are multitudes and the space is generously shared, there is no shame in touching the naked arm of an unknown person with your own in passing through a narrow space or just piling into a packed concert venue like sardines. Just dance at the same rhythm and you are in synergy with the crowd. In my first bar concert in Washington DC, as I was waiting very close to the stage to sneak a look at the equipment, I thought there were very

few people there. “Weird,” I thought. In my experience, people usually crowd the precious close-up positions early on. The group was a famous one, and five minutes before the concert began there were still only three or four people, counting myself, in the first row. The music starts, lights on stage are up, I anticipate my body compressing, getting ready to hold my spot as multitudes from the back advance to the front. But nothing happened. Ten minutes into the concert, I notice a slight touch on my elbow. “I’m sorry,” I heard from somebody already beyond arm’s length. I relaxed and let my body expand into the emptiness around me. I scribbled a mental note: “This is the States, people do not crowd in concerts, and if they rub you accidentally, they apologize.”

I have no doubt that US African-American students, already motivated by the African-ness of capoeira angola, once given the opportunity to go to Brazil, would find personal connections there. Treinel Santemu, a young African-American teenager in the FICA’s archival footage of the first capoeira angola workshop in DC, who barely could hold the berimbau straight—I can relate to that—was one of Mestre Cobrinha’s first twenty-five students to participate in the Brazilian encounter. I know he defines himself as an angoleiro and I wanted to know what it is like to experience that connection with Brazil. He had been leading the Afro-Samba group for years until Babajan, a native Brazilian Treinel came to the area and emanated fondness for Afro-Brazilian musical traditions. I have a mental picture of him with his baby girl of six months, Nkati, in his arms during a roda, wrapping his big hands around her chubby small ones, clapping together the *tum-ta-tum* of the atabaque. Incidentally, I learned his father is the director of the AAS school. I anticipated a strong Afro-centric vision would be “part of his personal cosmogony” which he revealed during our conversation.

“The way capoeira angola has come to me is the way any African culture has come to me and my family. And what is it, is that it passed along with the slaves. It began with slavery, and what happened is of course, that black people in the US had gone through certain phases since having physical freedom. The waves had changed. From having emphasis in physical freedom, [the phases] changed to have mental freedom. Unfortunately, there are not as many people out there who are fighting for physical freedom as they are fighting for mental freedom. But in any case, what I always have been told, and what I know, is that wherever African culture exists in the world (as we in US are Africans) because the black people that are here unlike Brazil and other locations not have been able to hold on to the rich cultural traditions [as they] have been able to do in Cuba, in Rio in all over the place. Here they try to get whatever they can, so to speak.”

“Something that is missing...” I wonder.

“Exactly! I mean... they have a culture here, the idea is that the culture here is still... is not as rich. I can't say that it doesn't exist because it definitely exists, but the idea is that is not much abundant. That you can see that is not as ... what is the word?”

“Closer to the roots, maybe?” I offer.

“Exactly! And... and how to put it? How to say... it is more... socially adapted, in the sense of...”

“Community, maybe?” As far as I've seen, community is the first thing you capture from capoeira.

“Exactly. Here, a lot of culture is twisted. Everybody understands some of the roots but the way people do it, they don't understand why, how they should [be] doing [it]. The point is not that somewhere else's don't exist [the problems]. Everywhere that have suffered slavery, they have something that maintain...”

“Like symbols of resistance, is this the relationship?”

“It's that they still have a closer relationship with the root, so to speak. You can still see clearly the connection between culture there [in Brazil] and culture in Africa. Here, in the US, it's there, but it's not as clear. Only people that, for example, they are from Africa, they can point it out easy... ‘Oh yeah we do that’ but people who are [from] here, that still have the...*[he touches his temple with his index finger]* chain, that are still brainwashed, chained in [their] mind, they cannot see [the connection], they are uneducated.”

“So, awareness is important and it is something that capoeira angola does for you?” I want to know what is his connection.

“That is how I got involved in capoeira angola. Because people here saw the roots of Africa inside capoeira angola and that [it] had African roots and was part of African culture, and [they] said: ‘Ah, that's something we will want to learn, that's something that we will like to re-learn, because our ancestors did hundred of years ago.’ So that's why I came here and I got involved, I mean... capoeira angola is one resource, one entity to educate and have people re-trace some of their ancestors' roots.”

In addition to different definitions and levels of education and a clear yearning for bonding with the invisible roots, Cobrinha was also facilitating a deeper understanding of ancestral culture for many of his students in the Washington DC area. No doubt, their interest and enthusiasm would keep Mestre Cobra Mansa engaged with the idea of staying, “for a while, maybe three or four years to build something, no more, as I was going through personal changes in my life.”

Out of GCAP: Leadership Divergences

After their first encounter, the power struggle that was constant evidence of Cobrinha’s and Moraes’ ideological divergences, led the group to a point of no return. Nobody except the two of them knows exactly what argument caused the final rupture. Most likely, it was not a particular incident, but it happened over a long period of time. “Don’t ask me about it because I never told anyone and every time people ask me, I tell a different story” I hear him say. This was just a way to indicate he never would reveal the specific content of their argument; any story Moraes chose to tell would become the official story for him. As with many other connections I make between separate traditions I ask Cobrinha about Moraes’ orixá. “Ogum” he says and I think it must be a variation, since in Africa there are seven different types of Ogum and Cobrinha has the same orixá. “But by his way [of being] I think he has more of Xangó” he adds. I am reading these days the book *Orixás* by Pierre Fatumbi Verger, the French photographer and he makes interesting connections between the African Yoruba gods and the archetypes. Verger claims that it does not matter if one is of African origin or not; people have the innate

qualities and behaviors similar to their corresponding orixás.¹²⁹ Whatever the exact argument of his split with Moraes might have been, the conflict was between diverse cultural and personal standpoints in the tradition and, in archetypal terms, the tension between the intransigence of the Ruler and the innovation of the Creator. On one hand, the young mestre had the utmost respect for the elder mestre: “Moraes always trusted I would never break his trust.” On the other hand, Cobrinha slowly realized that he had a voice as well and a different vision, and when he tried to use it for the growth of the group, he was rejected.

The way my mestre led the group and the way I understood the group should be led is the only difference. I thought we should give the group the opportunity to develop, to learn from their own mistakes without so much pressure, but my mestre had a different concept. He thought until the people don't do right we cannot give the freedom for them to do something. Everything else was superficial [disagreement].

Mestre Cobrinha's “dream for GCAP” was to strengthen the group, extend its capabilities through networking with other angoleiros and grow to “a big group to go everywhere to teach people about capoeira angola.” Mestre Moraes' intention for the future was to maintain his personal leadership while keeping the group at the same size it was. GCAP at one time was full of highly skilled and mature capoeiristas, but now it was losing members. In Mestre Janja's words, the capoeiristas were living examples outside the group “of expressing freedom, of the democratic model in society”¹³⁰ that contrasted with their experiences in a rigid group capoeira group environment, which diminished the

¹²⁹ Non-African believers cannot claim bloodlines from the orixás, since the religion is tied to the notion of family. The numerous family “descendant of the same ancestor that includes the living and the dead” (Verger, 198, 18)

¹³⁰ The dictatorship ended after the civil movement “Diretas Já” (campaign to vote) with the return to civil government in 1985. A new constitution was approved in 1988 and the first presidential election was celebrated in 1989.

possibility that they would stay. It was only a matter of time before the teenaged children would leave the parent's house to "create a new order."

As Mestre Cobrinha was leading the group in the District under the GCAP flag, Moraes decided to remove him from that position and replace him with somebody else. Cobrinha was aware that Mestre Moraes' critiques of him, at the time, were very negative. "Today I see it as a positive thing, in the sense that is good to be alert, if you don't have anybody to criticize you, you may think all the time you are doing the best and you lower your guard, because you know nobody is watching you." The fact that he did not assert his divergent views and opinions, and that he avoided confrontation rather than standing his ground, were regrets that Mestre Cobrinha has from his reflections about the past: "I should have been more daring, have challenged him a little more." Even when Cobrinha was aware that things were not going well in the GCAP group, he did not "have the courage to confront the problem directly." Being afraid of damaging the project he worked so hard to build, or of being excluded from the process of making things better, "or that suddenly, people were coming back against you thinking that you want to take over, I know there is a situation very confusing."

Cobrinha recognizes now how he grew apart from the group before being separated from it, and when he tried to return, "I was truly misunderstood." Time that heals all has provided opportunities to enter into dialogue with the people that lived through the same situations from the opposite side. Cobrinha appreciates these conversations because it shows how people formed their opinions hearing just one

(biased) side of the story; “that just means there was half of the story told. I think the GCAP has deteriorated from inside. It imploded. It did not grow.”¹³¹



Many members of GCAP disagreed with Moraes’ resolution at that time, but it was the mestre’s decision. If Cobrinha, a graduated Mestre, could not stand up to Moraes, how much less could the other members—who were slowly leaving the group—be expected to do so. For Cobrinha, it was

a long period of disappointment and solitude:

Mestre Moraes intended to bring somebody from Brazil to be in charge for the group in DC. That, let me say, was a difficult time for me, because my whole thing during this time [is that] I decided “I’m going to drop capoeira, just stop.” It was over for me! “If I cannot stay on GCAP, if I’m not leading the group here... I am just going to be a capoeirista, just go to some roda and play.” Until it came to my mind and I said: “No. I’m going to lead this group and I’m going to start something.” You know?

The discipline, the structure that was such a strong point at the beginning of Cobrinha’s journey in capoeira angola under Moraes’ teaching, would become the main difficulty at the end. Or maybe it was just the crisis needed to build from his own experience and vision. “I never had a big vision. My vision was just do for today. I was building on my experience what I do everyday.” Although he denies having a preconceived conscious idea, once he recognized his own mastery and dared to take his own leadership further, it would become clear what he was yearning for was another dimension of freedom.

¹³¹ (Costa Araújo 2004, 206)

Reaching Out: In Search of Partners for a Foundation

Starting his multiple chamadas between the ex-members of GCAP like Zé Carlos, Braga, Neco, Angolinha, Mano, Valmir, and Jurandir among others, Cobrinha tried to create a new organization following the GCAP model with a dimension of enhanced space for people to develop their own work in a flexible manner. At the time, he was badly misunderstood since he did not have anything to offer except a jump into the emptiness following a still undetermined new model of freedom. Mestre Cobrinha was looking for equal partnership with the others, “I thought people would run to accept that idea, which in my head was very cool.” People did not commit unless there was something for them. Cobrinha crashed with the number of negative answers he encountered, finding only one capoeirista open to follow his lead: his childhood friend from Duque de Caxias, Mestre Jurandir.



It was like five or eight months after I left GCAP, I started the conversations, first by phone and then I decided to go to Brazil and talk with some people in Rio. “I don't know... I don't think this is a good idea... What you are going to offer me?” I'd say “I have nothing. I just have this idea about working together and making a big group. Just support each other, organize a big event, people coming together, bringing their students... That could be nice for everybody, wouldn't it? [They would answer] I don't know... just start doing it and we'll see...”

“I went to Mestre Jurandir and he said, ‘OK we can be together’ and after five or six months I went to Valmir [in Salvador] and he was already with everybody ready for us and I said ‘OK, we are going to do it.’ That's how we started all three together, this concept of FICA. But the concept was that each three of us will have his own independence. Each one can do whatever he wants to do. The only

thing keeping us together is the brotherhood between us. We are going to make events together and it's going to be the best for us and for capoeira angola. If we stay together, we can do better. Each supporting the others just to make a good group and do nice things.”

Out of this interdependence there was also a good rationale for the advancement of capoeira. As each mestre had developed his own techniques and game, the students were not at risk of becoming clones.¹³² If one outgrew their comfort with one instructor, there were rotating rodas and exchanges of the mestres with each others' groups. Traditionally, students only followed one unique mestre. We have seen already in Marker One what a hassle it was to change mestres, and how it could be detrimental to the growth of the capoeiristas in gaining acknowledgment for their expertise. In the FICA format such changes were not just allowed, but encouraged to participate in the workshops of visiting mestres, which opened the groups to special events, and to training in different areas. This concept of mestres in partnership, was not implemented successfully in GCAP. It was an “exceptional situation” by historical standards (D'Aquino 1983, 147) such as the making of instruments, in the case of Mestre Valmir. Furthermore, the travel of the mestres around the globe brought the chance for the capoeiristas to access books, recordings, films about capoeira produced in any territory visited by the traveling mestre. Prime materials like *beriba vergas*, *dobrãos*, finished *cabaças*, *caxixís* were frequently brought into the US and abroad from Brazil in an informal import business.

After we started making the concept better, other things we did—that was my model—was to give opportunity for people in the US, to go to Brazil to learn capoeira. That was my main thing since I was in GCAP. The other thing was to have an opportunity to bring people from Brazil to come to the US and to know this is not the whole fantasy that people was thinking [it was]. You can make

¹³² Proof that a mestre always can recognize the personality of other capoeiristas, Downey explains how when he had the chance to meet Mestre João Grande, he could recognize Moraes as Downey's teacher through his game (Downey 2005, 41).

something [of yourself] here, but not the way we thought when we were there [in Brazil]. My whole dream, and still is until today, is just making this kind of cultural exchange.

In the beginning Mestre Cobrinha innovated little from what he had created with Mestre Moraes in GCAP, which essentially was a vehicle for Brazilians to learn from Afro-Brazilian culture. At the time, American educators were interested in the possibility of people from different countries—Germany, Spain, Trinidad, Cuba, the States—coming to Brazil to learn about Afro-Brazilian culture and capoeira and to get the experience of practicing it. This exposure would facilitate the expansion of capoeira outside Brazil when the first guest mestres left Brazil to demonstrate and teach stable groups abroad.

When Cobrinha started to work in Washington DC and created the structure for FICA, he had already established connections with people who could advise him about developing the basic legal structure of an organization in the US, writing bylaws, participating in the board of directors, showing their commitment to capoeira and Mestre Cobra Mansa. Scholars, attorneys, people from the tourism industry, and students with administrative experience accepted to be part of the FICA board of directors and steering committees. They helped set up the organizational structure and its legal aspects to match the particular way Mestre Cobrinha wanted to implement FICA. It was a question of being surrounded with the right people and trustworthy people to implement Mestre Cobrinha's organizational vision. Ken Dossar credits Cobra's "awareness of the importance of academics" by the fact that Cobra was already registered at the University of the District of Columbia to pursue sociology and anthropology courses. Unfortunately, they went unfinished because of all his intermittent travel. But he was coming back to his center of interest to connect with people who could help him create a non-profit organization. These people helped him not just with advice, but also with moving the



paperwork required because they believed his work to be a tool for transformation and that capoeira was an art form that “changes peoples lives.” The FICA logo, a serpent that devours its own tail¹³³ holds a capoeirista in a *bananeira* (headstand) opposite to a zebra¹³⁴ over the map of Brazil and Africa united by two berimbaus crossed. I ask Mestre Cobra what the symbol means: “It’s the symbol of eternity; capoeira angola won’t die, since one of FICA’s objectives is the preservation of capoeira angola.” Another logo used only over white T-shirts for the special occasions of the *rodas de branco* (rodas in white clothes), was based on the Kongo *Yowa* Cross. In words of Desch-Obi:

The horizontal line referred to as the *kalunga* is linked to the rivers or the sea, which forms a line between this world and the next. The point corresponding to cardinal East is linked with conception while cardinal North represents maleness, noon, and one’s peak of physical strength. From there to the cardinal west point represents a phase of decline, reaching death at the *kalunga* line. This “death” for the Kongo people actually means regeneration in the spirit world with the southern point corresponding to “midnight, femaleness, south to the highest point of a person’s otherworldly strength.” [...] This cosmogram is not mere a symbol it is believed to mediate power between the spiritual world of the ancestors and the world of the living. (Desch-Obi 2005, 78-79)

The pulse of encounters facilitated by the international conferences brought the support of many academics and experts in African religion and culture who lectured and participated in round table discussions. “I did this [design] after



¹³³ The Egyptian emblem of the alchemists, Ouroboros or Uroboros, appears documented in The Hieroglyphica of Horapollo. It is also a symbol of the universe and as the serpent sheds its skin, a symbol for rejuvenation As symbol of eternal return, of infinity, it means that what is divinely created is received back into the divinity (Cocking & Murray 1991, 186).

¹³⁴ Reference to N’Golo, the Angolan “Dance of the Zebra” believed to be the closest African reference to capoeira moves.

Doctor Fukiau and Daniel Dawson made many explanations about [it]” Mestre Cobrinha tells me. The new knowledge would expand FICA’s identity markers at the same time that it educated the capoeiristas in many signs and symbols of capoeira’s Kongo-Angolan roots. I recognize in the cross dividing the eternal circle the signs drawn at the foot of the berimbau for protection. The foundation for future growth was solidly planted in partnership and collaboration.

The Umbrella Metaphor: Growing to Become a National Non-Profit

If the first step was to create an organization to “preserve the aesthetic, cultural and spiritual principles of Capoeira Angola,” the second step was to grant its status as a non-profit in order to benefit from available grant funding to develop the projects of disseminating capoeira in the US. The non-profit process evolved over the years to expand into a national organization with subsidiary chapters and affiliated groups, Cobrinha’s “fantasy of having this big group and working together as a family.”

Since FICA started as a local organization based in Washington DC, the possibilities of its operation were limited by having to offer all the organizational activities restricted to the DC area. Mestre Cobrinha regularly trained an average of 37-40 students in the group. After a period of sustained growth membership stabilized at an average of seventy students. Mestre Jurandir, after working in Belo Horizonte for many years, had established himself in Seattle (Washington), and Contra-Mestre Valmir continued his work in Salvador. Both would travel to DC and other locations abroad to teach in special workshops, just as Mestre Cobra Mansa would go to Seattle and Bahia to participate in the reciprocal relationship he had originally envisioned. After FICA gained the 501-C3 status, the group started to write grant applications and received new funding

to augment membership dues. The additional funding improved prospects of increasing visibility and fulfilling the organization's mission. FICA managed to keep a stable number of members in the core group, but as students who were not from the DC area moved away, an interesting phenomenon occurred.

When these students moved back to Atlanta or Chicago, or elsewhere, they missed not being able to train and play capoeira as they did while they were in the DC area. They could not stop talking about their experience and hoped for a way to restore this missing piece in their lives. Soon they started to gather with other friends and teach them some basic capoeira movements. The others would grow curious about the strange bow-like instrument hanging on the walls until they had a chance to try it, and maybe learn to sing some lines in Portuguese. These seed-students kept in touch with the Mestre, just as Cobrinha did with Mestre João Grande, telling him about the growing interest in their small group until one day, the leaders extended an invitation to the mestre to visit: "You have to come down here some time and see for yourself this people's work." They hoped to train for a weekend with Mestre Cobrinha, and introduce him to the new group of interested people, and finally get a demonstration from him. Cobra found a free weekend and went to visit. He would demonstrate, teach some basics, talk about capoeira, tell stories from the past, maintain the friendship, and attract other capoeiristas in the area to come to the special event. Before long, these seed groups would develop more intense interest and needs as their membership grew and stabilized. The "habit of capoeira" of the leaders pushed them to organize small study groups that would host sporadic events growing in visibility and attendance and having Cobrinha to teach them regularly in special events, one being the annual conferences which were a venue for re-

encountering other capoeiristas and networking. From the FICA standpoint the need arose to support these groups:

I think the mestres had an idea for that structure in their own minds, having groups in different places working together, but the underlying idea is that you need to have some kind of organization in order to take advantage of funding. The organizational part was driven by the paperwork piece of it, at least the part I was involved with was driven by the 501-C3. We finally got the non-profit status, but it was as a local organization and we couldn't help all these small groups forming. We were maturing and growing as an organization, we were just going first and they were coming after us. Luckily, Willard (Taylor) was a board member and he had a lot of experience in this and there is a process where if you are a national organization with chapters, each group doesn't have to be going through the same long process to get the 501-C3 status as we did. We just said, "All those groups are just like ours so if you give (funding) to us, you should give to them too." (Sylvia Robinson interview, March 28, 2008)

The process of going national would be a long process; it was a "big struggle" to match the paperwork to Cobrinha's ideas. Every Friday night for a year, a small core group formed by Willard Taylor from the board of directors and several students and members like Sylvia Robinson, Skher Brown, Sheryll Aldred, Breakdance (Mark Lewis) and Cobra himself along with other people that would come in and out of the process, would sit down and "patch paragraph after paragraph, word by word, detail by detail"¹³⁵ to develop the umbrella concept.

You heard Cobrinha "I don't like paperwork, I just want to make the deal!" That's the way he works, always has done. So the issue was having to form an organization around that, because in his mind is just "I call my brother and my friends, and it's done and we make a pact that we now are a group." But what does that mean, is that an organization? Is it going to be in DC, spread up? It was formed more in his mind than was formed organizationally long before there was even a structure in place. Being able to do things only locally in the DC area without helping financially other groups didn't mean anything. (Sylvia Robinson interview, March 28, 2008)

The principal idea would be about how to have a central organization running different groups. They had to be uniform, respecting their idiosyncrasies and respecting

¹³⁵ Sylvia Robinson interview, March 28, 2008

the work they were already doing, but formalized. There was some need to “concretize thinking”¹³⁶ as Mestre Cobra was following what he thought was good for capoeira and implementing de facto the collaborative leadership he wanted in his group intuitively.

Cobra was functioning on instinct. “I’m going to bring this mestre; I’m going over there; we all should get together to do this...” He certainly knew what he wanted and it was just a question of translating it to an institutionalized context. He would have relationship with the leaders and it was a question of having them to work on commissions¹³⁷: Archives, Public Relations, Finances, and Instruments, named in the bylaws, the absolute critical commissions. You cannot be a group if you cannot come up with an instrument commission. We all would agree this has to be there for every group. (Sylvia Robinson interview, March 28, 2008)

There was another issue that needed to be taken into consideration. As FICA was growing popular in the capoeira angola arena in the States, some people were seeing the potential and growth and wanted to be associated with the organization. The concept could easily be appropriated and exploited, with control being taken from the original thinkers and transmitters. That started to happen when people who had participated in one workshop but had not trained regularly, would say, “I trained with FICA.” The issue of identity and belonging, the rightful claim to a lineage, made the group sit down and ponder what elements make up a group, what the mestre and the group wanted to see happening in a FICA group, and how to make it all legal. Some strategies to protect that branding were genuinely creative, like the initiative of getting special T-Shirts with the legend “Mestre Cobra Mansa” below FICA’s logo that only selected students would have.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*

¹³⁷ Modeled after GCAP structure, today FICA-DC has also commissions in Photography, Space, Video, Grants and Web. (notes from the FICA-DC meeting in March 19, 2008)

Finally, after all the careful crafting, the bylaws were changed and FICA officially became a national organization with chapters and affiliated groups during the massive members assembly in the 2002 conference in Prince William Forest Park, Virginia.

Growing Beyond Borders: Study Groups, Affiliates and Chapters

Before the groups in different locations could be named as chapters or affiliates they were working “unnamed” as capoeira groups. The most seasoned were in Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Seattle, and there probably is a story to be told behind each group’s “adoption” by Mestre Cobra Mansa¹³⁸. Each group changed from just being people he would “just go to visit” to ones with whom he had a personal relationship. After Cobrinha worked with them they became more popular, more political, more involved with capoeira as a community of learners, and in one case, inside an institution of learning.¹³⁹ For Cobrinha, it was a clear decision:

I made a choice, but my choice was “I need to do one of these: I can let this group grow with no help and they are gonna do whatever they wanna do thinking they are doing capoeira angola; or I can get somebody who is going to take advantage of them and not help them with nothing; or I can go there and see if they are really interested in knowing about capoeira angola. The choice I made was “I’m going to help these groups”. It’s better to help them to do something correct than let them try to do something they don’t know. Better than let them completely out of control, out of their mind, out of what capoeira angola really is. And I made the choice “I wanna help them.” And that’s what I am doing today.

Under Mestre Cobrinha’s mentoring, the groups motivated FICA’s organizational structure to change and evolve. The groups not fitting the chapter or affiliate categories¹⁴⁰ would fall into the “study group” category and would be admitted to FICA under the

¹³⁸ The more recent history of the organization is also transmitted orally being difficult to find actual dates of constitution of the groups, stability of membership of activity. I hope that as new students enter the organization new research projects to pass on the institutional memory will be undertaken and accesible.

¹³⁹ There is a “Wesleyan Capoeira” group and a Connecticut branch of ICAF in Middleton, CT since 1996.

¹⁴⁰ See appendix X or the latest bylaws revision proposed to pass in the next member meeting at the 14th International conference in Chicago, in September of 2008

umbrella after studying their potential, commitment and contribution. Today, under FICA's national organization, whose headquarters are in Washington DC, there are six chapters (Washington DC, Philadelphia, Chicago, Seattle, Oakland and Baltimore), four affiliates (Texas, Connecticut, Atlanta and New York), and one study group (New Orleans). Although the Foundation works de facto internationally there is no legal or administrative binding to those groups outside the territorial US, but internationally there are three chapters (Belo Horizonte, Salvador and Paris), four affiliates (Japan, Montpelier, Evergreen and Mexico) and ten study groups (Rio de Janeiro, Stockholm, Italy, Moscow, Ukraine, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Finland, London, and Mozambique).¹⁴¹

I didn't envision to have so many groups in so many places. My first vision was just to have all the mestres and capoeiristas together, if they were from different places that was nice, but my whole concept was "let's stay together because together we can do things much nicer for everybody."

From an initial vision of family-hood, the organization grew during a decade of extensive traveling and passionate work for the dissemination of capoeira angola. By maintaining their relationships and through intense networking, three masters and a bundle of students multiplied into twenty-nine groups of capoeira angola located all over the world.

To facilitate his intense traveling, in April of 2003, Mestre Cobra Mansa became



a US citizen. After several years of traveling with a green card, he obtained his first American passport, an interesting document full of seals from all the countries he had visited around the world. He maintains a double nationality, allowed by the treaties between

Brazil and the United States.

¹⁴¹ Taxonomically, the naming matches the organization denomination in its organizational chart (see Appendix X1 for dates and leader's names)



Din Dão Din Tchtch
The heat, the sweat
Pearled foreheads
The drone singing
The Ahs and Oops
The circle shrinking
The call for
Jogo de Dentro
Mestre João Grande style
The jumps, the twirls
Din Dão Din Tchtch
Din Dão Din Tchtch
Din Dão Din Dão
Din Dão Din Tchtch
The sweeping legs
The sweat, the heat

Graduation Day at FICA: New Mestre, New Treinels the Results of Ministering

The concept of shared leadership would raise another issue—who was certified to teach—which Cobra resolved in a bold move, which was highly criticized at first and later on imitated by other capoeira organizations. If the only people authorized to teach and pass along the capoeira tradition during the old days were the Mestres and Contra-Mestres, Cobrinha perceived that more power should be given to dedicated students with

years of commitment to capoeira. The yearning for freedom he had as Contra-Mestre under Moraes' leadership motivated his experimentation with the concept:

I had already a phase in which I intended to value a lot *os mestres antigos* (the elder mestres). Now I have a proposal to value also the new (people). [...] I stopped with the elder mestres scheme because there are people working with that idea and they are already getting expensive to work with today [*laughs*], it's a reality! As FICA, I have also the project to make the work accessible, we have to work with people who can accept to work with popular propositions.¹⁴² One of the great things of the Foundation is to be a self-sufficient group. We do not fold on being self-sufficient. This means a group that is able to maintain itself with or without external support, from either the government or other sources.

Our proposal is this: the students have to maintain FICA. If we receive an incentive, we improve the work being done, but we do not count (on this) to structure the group, or to continue the plan for the group. (Mestre Cobrinha in Costa Araújo 2004, 201)

As the groups were growing, it was clear that if the mestres were going to be traveling to all these places to teach capoeira, the groups needed to be kept in shape, trained “com fundamento” to grow effectively as a community of capoeiristas and show progress to benefit from the mestres' advanced work. Cobrinha opened the space for a new leadership position, the *treinel* (trainer), that had not been used since the time of Mestre Pastinha. Following that principle, and having taken into account that to be recognized as a *treinel* one had to show not only good working knowledge of all the traditional aspects of the art form, but also have initiative and leadership skills. As a result, in the FICA study groups even advanced students who had not graduated as *treinels* yet, had permission to teach capoeira.

I think the mestre has to have the ability to recognize the student who achieves certain level, but on the other hand the student has to try to develop the proper ability. I always say that to me is more beautiful is you see a student treated as a *treinel*, see a *treinel* treated as *contra-mestre*, see a *contra-mestre* treated as a *mestre de capoeira* than the opposite. I tell people “I can give you the title of

¹⁴² The reference to “popular propositions” would be to the price that an elder mestre would charge versus the price that an advanced student or a *treinel* would receive or accept as a stipend.

mestre, but would the capoeira community give you the same consideration? Or I would have to be all the time proving that you were a mestre formed by me.

I think that it should be [...] I tell them “It has come the time you become...” because these people are already earning the title by themselves, it’s not me who is giving it. (*Ibid*, 208)

In a special ceremony for the first time in FICA’s history, during the 9th International conference celebrated in July of 2003 in Sarzedo (state of Minas Gerais, Brazil), Contra-Mestre Valmir, after ten years leading the Fica-Bahia group, graduated as a Mestre. In the same ceremony, a group of Brazilian and US advanced students graduated as treinels.¹⁴³

In my fieldwork journal I have many notes from hours of observing Mestre Cobrinha teach, discussing with students after the classes, even sitting in on a couple of crises. There was continuous feedback about what was going all right and what was not working. The mestre had eyes and ears in the group, even when he was traveling abroad. One of the most exciting teaching moments I observed was when the treinels and advanced students were reporting about some special event where they had gone to teach a two hour workshop demonstration. There were complaints about the participants being out of shape or overweight, and that the energy of the workshop that had started to decay by the time they got to put their hands on the instruments. The Mestre’s attitude was of illuminating simplicity. It reminded me of his time on the streets selling the empty box of illusion, getting the audience’s attention and interest continuously: “You have to think differently about training and about the workshop. If you teach a training session, nobody

¹⁴³ From Brazil, Treinels Gegê (Maria Eugenia Poggi), Fabio (Fabio Melo), and Babajan (Livaldi Pereira da Cruz) Jorge, Canjica, Beto, Caxambu, Yenanna, Sergio and Chico Bento. From the United States, Treinels Skher (Skher Brown), Kojo (Kojo Johnson), and Santemu (Anwar Amari). There were also recognized as Contra-Mestres: Urubu, Rogerio Teber and Silvinho.

will come a second time! Too hard, they may get hurt, discover they are out of shape or overweight, and not trying again.” I was curious, that was the point, was it not? Seeing them train for one hour and a half, maybe two hours, sweating and doing unthinkable things upside down might feel to the observer like it must hurt. “You have to entice them, if you see they cannot do movement on the floor, just teach them a little ginga, put them in partnership with other physically challenged people so they don’t feel left out, let them have the *complete capoeira experience*” (my emphasis). As I was wondering what Cobrinha meant by that, he clarified it, “At the beginning of the International encounters, the classes with the older mestres wouldn’t get many students. They didn’t know how to teach a workshop. They only knew to do training. It was too hard, a model for continuous sessions, not for a couple of hours of demonstration.”

I was genuinely surprised by his intelligent “promotional” system. I could understand the experience that somebody totally alien to capoeira, a first-timer, would get from the chance to experiment with some movement at their own pace and stamina, experiment with some musical participation in the bateria, and being part of a holistic performance in community. People could easily get hooked on it. “What we want is for them to want to come to training after testing the capoeira experience. Then we can be as tough as needed. They will come back.”

The treinels and group leaders would need to receive special training because their mission was not just how to play capoeira, but how to help others learn to play. It was training narrowed to just the transmission aspects. The leaders more than anybody else needed to understand what being a capoeirista, an angoleiro, meant.

I have had some experiences in Washington. Working together, working in community. Learning to be humble, how to work with dedication. Sometimes I do

not see this and when I don't, I am sad because I see that I could not pass what I would like to teach people. And then, suddenly, you see that it didn't happen there. So I taught the movement, taught the berimbau playing, taught the singing, taught to play capoeira, but didn't teach to be capoeirista. For me, this is the hardest part. (*Ibid*, 209)

The relationship that a mestre needs to establish with a treinel, with a student (the respect and commitment that students have for their mestres, a lifetime of dedication and acknowledgment, even genuine admiration and devotion in some cases) does not always work as expected. Some people would not understand the ethics and traditional hierarchical roles, no matter how the relationship could evolve as a capoeira comrade, as an equal human being that Cobrinha promotes so actively. There are some things that could be worked out by talking, by discussing the issues and would make the group grow over differences of religion, politics, philosophy, ideology, race, class or gender. Crises that Mestre Cobra Mansa had experienced before in his life, would result in a new opportunities for overcoming challenges, for struggle at a new level of maturity. Over the years of building the organization, strengthening the FICA capoeira community, the disrespectful would fall out of sync, drop from the shared vision and in extreme cases could be “banished worldwide” without the possibility of training or participating in any of FICA’s future events.¹⁴⁴ When only a handful of people could not abide by the rules of engagement from hundreds of members, that is not necessarily a failure.

In the FICA-DC group, differences and conflicts—as in every family— are not unknown. “Conflicts are conflictive,” but Mestre Cobra feels very proud of how a group

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Treinel Skher in <http://www.angoleiro.com/interviews/skher.html> [accessed on April 18, 2006] When I asked about the conflict with people banned from the organization, four in total over the years, Mestre Cobra gave me the names and circumstances of all involved and invite me to do a “journalist investigation” to get the other versions of what happened. Knowing that I hear other versions was something that would make him feel “much better.”

of people, who in any other context never would have gathered to do anything together, overcame their differences and found a way to sit and work as a group.

Building a Global Community: International Encounters / Women's Conferences

One of the venues of greatest excitement among capoeiristas today is the celebration of special events like the capoeira conferences and international encounters. Modeled after the First International Encounter organized by GCAP in August of 1994, these special events are celebrated annually all around the world with a structure borrowed from the GCAP model of the first conferences. This structure was adapted to the capoeiristas' personal interest and ways of doing and being in the world. For instance, the photo exhibit, a piece that is rarely missing in any conference today, responds to Mestre Cobrinha's personal interest in photography.

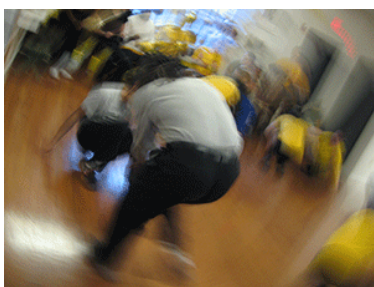


Just as he used to write notes of games of old mestres and angoleiros during the rodas, he had also a special interest in photography. It is rare that a book on capoeira published today does not include a picture from Mestre Cobra Mansa's archives.¹⁴⁵ There are permanent exhibits in capoeira spaces where photos of important moments in capoeira history, mestres, rodas, events, occupy and dress the walls of capoeira groups. There are pictures for conversation and teaching new students, pictures to recognize the mestres. When was that picture taken? What was the occasion of that

¹⁴⁵ In some books the pictures are credited to C. Peçanha archives (Downey, 2005). The older pictures from the GCAP era are generally part of the corpus Cobra Mansa created with Isabel Green, also a photographer, since he was in charge of the photo and video commission. More contemporary photography is often credited to the ICAF archives, with Treinel Gegê being the main photographer, a student following the steps of her mestre.

roda? Capoeiristas display their contemporary history at the same time that they render homage to their elders, their heroes and their leaders. There is a Zumbi day and the celebration of Pastinha's birthday, special events to celebrate each year with rodas, and workshops where the presence of the mestre is also sought.

The first time I documented a roda in Brazil in 2001, there were maybe a couple or three cameras, shooting from outside the circle, and the other person was documenting for the local group. In the last women's conference in March 2008, I observed many more cameras, two or three video cameras, one from the group, and a couple of photographers with professional cameras. The rest of the cameras were in the hands of capoeiristas seated in the roda, shooting from inside the circle. Some time afterwards, several of the photographers shared these images on the web, inviting people to see and add. I requested permission to use some of the shots, and I added as well some of special moments that I was documenting when the others were participating. My boldness as an ethnographer, so hesitant most of the time to disrupt sensitive moments, yielded some unique intimate communal experiences on a digital memory card.



Everyone had a good laugh when Mestre Cobrinha demonstrated manually how to get a blur of movement in a picture. All of us want to try. Somebody jokes, "He invented the effect and then we discovered you can do it in Photoshop!" He is the first one to laugh and we gather

around trying, getting tips “Oh no, you have to take out the flash,” watching each other’s little screens “Cool!” Swirls of yellow and black against a glare of misty fog create instant art of movement in motion.

Another element that is never omitted in an encounter are the group discussions or the lectures inviting community people. How an encounter gets organized may change over time, but the first requirement is to have a vision and a commitment to fulfill it:

The first international capoeira angola conference we organized in Brazil was so nice and everybody was so excited to meet all these new people that around six months after that I said “OK, we are going to do a conference here in Washington DC.” The people in the group looked at me like “This guy is crazy! How are we going to do a capoeira conference here in DC if we don't have even the money to pay the rent?” I think at the time the group was about 10 students. I told them “We can do this and we are going to invite Mestre Moraes to come here.”

The people looked at me like... [*puzzled*] and I had this fantasy about organizing this big conference with a lot of people, but the students thought “This guy is crazy, he doesn't know what he's talking about.” Some people even told me “Here, we are in the United States, this is not Brazil, where you get everything for free.” I told them “I don't know, but I can try to do something.” It was so interesting because I was sure there must be some way I could organize the conference.

I went to the Brazilian Cultural Center and talked with Doctor Nese¹⁴⁶ and I told him “I would like to organize a conference here and bring some mestres from Brazil.” He didn't know if he could help, but I told him “I just need a ticket and a place, maybe you know somebody who can help me.” He told me I could go to Trans Brazil and talk to somebody there. So I went to Trans Brazil, I didn't know anybody there, but I asked for the manager. They asked me who I was and if the manager knew me. I told them I was Mestre Cobra Mansa and no, [*laughs*] he



didn't know me. I talked and talked and they asked me “Who told you to come over here and what do you need?” I said “Doctor Neste did and I need three tickets.” They wanted to know “What is Trans Brazil going to get out of this?” I said “promotion, because we are going to bring many capoeiristas from many places and blah-blah-blah...” And he said “Ok, I can give you only two tickets” I was short of one, so I went back to Doctor Nese and I told him I

¹⁴⁶ In Brazil is costume to call “doctor” to attorneys or functionaries in high administrative positions.

still need one more ticket, because I wanted to bring my mestre [Moraes], Valmir and Paulinha and he said he would try to get them. At the end, he found two more tickets not just one, so I brought Moraes' son also.

In my mind, I already had the tickets so I thought “now, I only need to find the space.” I looked for many places, but people charged much money for the spaces. At this time, I was a student at the [University of the District of Columbia] UDC and one day I was in the gym and I thought “Man, I could do the whole conference in this gym!” So I started talking with people about it, but nobody could give me the price except one person who told me it cost three thousand dollars for three days and I thought “Ouch! That's crazy, I cannot pay for that.”



And then is when I met Willard Taylor.¹⁴⁷ One of my advisors said “It will be better if you try to look for Willard, see if he can help you.” I went to talk to him and told him what I wanted to do and that I only needed the space. He told me he could find the space, not for free, but for me he would find it for little money. So I went back to the group and told them “We are going to have the conference” and the people was again “How are we going to have a conference?” I told them “Yes, we are going to do it. If we have the tickets and we have the space, then we have the conference!”

So we did. We started to advertise, send the flyers to everybody and we did a big conference. It came a lot of people, close to a hundred and I invited many people, like Mestre João Grande and mestre Acordeon and so many students that came from far away. It was the first capoeira Angola conference in the United States. Except for us, Mestre João Grande students and a few students from Timba, the rest of the people were from Regional. And at the end, I still had to pay around a thousand dollars of deficit, because after we paid all the expenses, some bills like the telephone came later and it was a deficit, but for me it was nothing. It was a great conference!

The story of how the first US conference was organized speaks for itself of Mestre Cobrinha’s driven passion and his capacity to materialize his dreams. Comfortable engaging with people in all social levels, he sold the conference “fantasy” to the people who could facilitate it with the same ease that he sold “electric fish oil” on the streets. The main difference now was that the knowledge, access, and relational power he had acquired over the years made people engage and participate, in a much

¹⁴⁷ Willard G. Taylor, at the time a Media Specialist in the Learning Resource Division at the University of the District of Columbia, became a member of the Board of Directors of FICA.

larger scale, co-creating with him a group, a conference, or an international organization—whatever he put his mind to.

An idea that branched out of the international conferences was from a group of female students who thought that the women needed to play a more visible role inside capoeira. They started with the idea of organizing a conference for themselves: “That was not new, because in GCAP we had a group who used to talk about the role of women in capoeira, like Janja, Paulinha and other women over there, and I supported this thing inside the group.” I think of Cobrinha’s openness and support of gender issues in capoeira derived from the key influence of different women during his life, particularly at the historical moment in Brazil at the end of the dictatorship. Besides the influence of his mestres in the male figure, we have seen the strong influence in his personal and spiritual life of women: his mother, Tia Oneida and Mãe Bia, elder women that had a role of protection and initiation. Whereas the women had a prominent, socially accepted, role in Candomblé, there were not so much historically in capoeira.¹⁴⁸ When they were accepted to train—and they found the time to juggle the training with motherhood or other personal obligations—their rôle was peripheral to leadership positions. It has been Mestre Cobrinha’s generation of capoeira mestres, moreover under the influence of female students in the US more advanced in the political and social struggle than their sisters in Brazil, the ones to open the space for a meaningful role of the women in capoeira. “Brazil exported capoeira to the United States and the US exported the women’s conferences to Brazil” Cobrinha jokes about the influence of the feminist movement in the States on capoeira women’s groups in Brazil. Acknowledging his personal progress in life to the

¹⁴⁸ The few women mentioned as capoeira fighters were subjected to “doubts about their sexual orientation” (Assunção 2005, 109).

support of women, Cobrinha learned not only from his partners and the elders, but also from his female students. Increasingly aware of their needs, connecting himself more to balance his female side as well as to balance the all male dominated art form of capoeira Mestre Cobra continues to stress the need to make capoeira and FICA specifically as group, more inclusive and sensitive to women struggles.

The first women's conference under the title "Women in Movement" was celebrated in August 1997 in Washington DC and in a few years it will find its own date on the capoeira calendar around March 8, on the day of the celebration of the International Women's Day.¹⁴⁹ Treinel Gegê, one of the last conference organizers remembers the 10 years passed:

I searched and organized photos for this conference's material and it became clear that up to a point it was very hard to find a roda with only women in the bateria; actually, on the first years it almost did not happen since there weren't that many female students with enough time in capoeira to hold a viola for example. (Treinel Gegê in *Caxixi* 2008, 28)

That is not the case today, and since part of making history is learning from the elders, this year the capoeiristas reached out to other women fighters and organized a panel titled "Women in the Martial Arts" who brought the inspiration of martial artists with more than 30 years of experience.



¹⁴⁹ Routed in the labour movements of the late 19th and early 20th century, International Women's Day was celebrated first on March 8, 1911

The women's conference was a sparkling idea that would ignite among women participants, and it was exported to Brazil in 2003 when women invited to the FICA conferences took the initiative to have their own conference in Rio de Janeiro. One time, the project crossed the Atlantic to the first European encounter in Köln, Germany in April 2006 and the idea spread south of the US border to Mexico in February of 2008. A review of the invited teachers shows the consistent participation of the first mestras angoleiras—Mestra Janja and Mestra Paulina from Grupo Nzinga—students of Mestre Cobrinha at GCAP and Contra-Mestre Cristina (student from Mestre Manoel) from the Grupo Ypiranga de Pastinha in Brazil, and Treinel Gegê from FICA-DC. Mestre Cobra Mansa appears as a guest in almost all the women's encounters, which makes him an exceptional witness to the growth of the initiative over the years. We talked after the Women's Conference in DC last March. I am so used to getting his report after the encounters that, even though I was a participant this time, I want to hear his evaluation of the event.



“For me was very successful, first in the number of people that came, more than a hundred...”

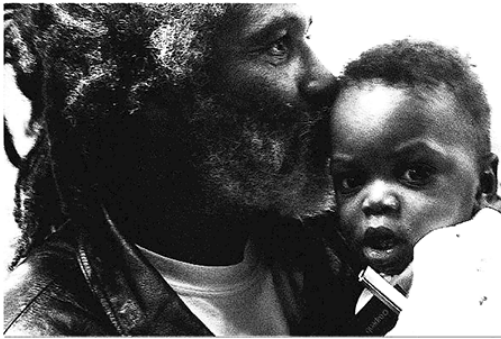
“Your class had over sixty people” I remember the crowded early morning class on Sunday at 7am—which in our biologic clock still was 6am because of the daylight saving time change—and the fact that so many people (me included) would get little sleep to participate. “I counted them. I enjoyed it a lot!”

“Yes, it was very nice, I really liked the discussion because the focus has changed. The focus before was men versus women, now it's more mature.”

“It's less polarized?” As this year the discussion was broken down in smaller discussion groups there were many subjects of interest.

“Aha, even the discourse is more open and more inclusive and for me, this is a big game. Because I have followed the discourse for many years and I was getting tired of being beaten, beaten, beaten... I wanted to be more included

and I see how they are getting mature now to see how they are not putting men out but teaching them a little more and giving them more consciousness, we need to understand to support each other. On the critical side, I still don't see a lot of advance in the commitment of all the women to one goal [...] things have become so much academic and we are losing the group we started with. I feel the same about the discussion sometimes, because it becomes so academic that we lose the ground when we start fighting. Another thing is that you need to respect and understand that people have different backgrounds and people come from different environments and if you want to make some [common] goals you need to respect that. Sometimes it's difficult. The people who have the academic background, have the tendency to dominate the conversation and to put their view as the only view and as if this is the only view without respecting others. The other thing is that if you are a person from middle class, your needs are different from people who came from different class, the needs are going to be different, and what they fight for maybe are going to change too."



Mestre Cobra's insights are also critical of the lack of public acknowledgment of the men who put off their own training to take care of the kids. One of the best scenes of the conference, in my opinion, was to see babies fed

by different breasts, toddlers passed around while their mothers played or trained.

That's going to make the whole difference, when I talked with some of the brothers afterwards, some of them said: "Nobody recognized what we did!" And I told them: "It's okay you didn't do it to get recognition, just to help." But on their heart they could feel like: "Why I am going to do that again?"

During the discussions in the conference it was clear that still there is much to be done for the needs of the angoleiras. There are a diversity of differences among women—if they are mothers or not, if they come from an educated background or not, or if they belong to a different economic and social class—but through the conference they manifested continuous progress in



getting space and visibility in a tradition that historically has been a male dominated environment. There are changes in the game; a pregnant woman develops her mandinga where her bodyshape cannot do the usual acrobacies. There is space for it. Downey tells of a student of Mestre João Grande who had learned all his techniques from the old capoeirista; he had “internalized the odd kinesthetic quirks and signature gestures of his teacher, echoing the older man’s distinctive corporeal character” (Downey 2005, 42).

Cobrinha recognizes the need for FICA’s growth as a group with a family orientation which offers more support for the different needs of its members. For him, work on a conference, especially as a host, is work of commitment with dedication and sacrifice: “Being the first to arrive and the last to go home. Otherwise, don’t organize it if you cannot commit because when I am in the conference, I sleep two or three hours and if it’s necessary I don’t sleep, but things get done and I don’t need to put the fault on anybody because it was my decision to do it.”

Mestre Cobra Mansa’s dedication during the conferences, does not pass unnoticed or unappreciated. One of the participants writes in *O Angoleiro*, the FICA newsletter:



I still haven’t been able to put into words the depth of my experience at this conference and in Brazil. When the weekend was over and we got back to [Belo Horizonte] BH there was supposed to be a roda, but everyone was exhausted. It felt great to be able to relax a little there in BH. The whole weekend I was just taking everything in no writing, no sketching or anything. Afterwards there was a really special moment when I looked over and saw M. Cobra sleeping – and I realized that I had not seen him sleep for the entire weekend. I had not seen him so immersed in a leadership role before and I was impressed with him. His leadership was practical and meaningful, being serious when he needed to be, yet allowing the event to unfold. He did an excellent job of motivating people. I didn’t understand that much Portuguese but the emphasis was always on what you can do for the community, not just what movements you can learn. (Walsh 2003, 6)

Many times the teaching, the learning, is not about the music, the movements or the history, but about the extent of what it means to be a capoeirista dedicated to work in a community.

Teaching Capoeira: The Physical Education Enhancement

Following the trail of Mestre Cobrinha's teaching experiences, I remind him of a conversation we had in 2003 about our respective teaching strategies. I was videotaping the interview as I was showing him some movement analysis for one of my seminars, and I treasure that footage as one of veritable sharing between education colleagues. We discovered a common thread in our methodology, or our lack of it. We both preferred to



“feel” the group needs over programming everything months beforehand, sometimes down to details as small as segments of the lesson plans:

I had trouble doing my program [ahead] when I was studying physical education, because you have to plan

“I'm going to do three minutes of that, five minutes of that” [and that was] because I learned from the improvisation of capoeira. Sometimes, I go to a class and in the middle of it, I see the group is no going anywhere, what I am going to do... Stick to my plan?

I tell sometimes my students “Look, if I am in the middle of the class and I change something you know already that something that have to [be] processed were not coming along.” I have this philosophy inside me that is, if half of the people cannot do what I am asking for it's my fault. There are many variations: [either is] because the people wasn't ready for this [or because] I didn't explain very well what they needed to do, [or because] I rushed the process. Sometimes what I do if there is a sequence, I cut it in little pieces. Sometimes I have to teach again the basic movements. I do like a trick, because I say “OK people, let's play with each other for 10 minutes” and then I'll be looking around and I'll see many things [wrong]: an *áú* (cartwheel) too open, they are not looking [at the other player], etc. Then, I'll make them change [partners] because I



thought maybe that was because of the people they were playing with. After that—I say diagnosis—people need to work this, this and that. Sometimes it works beautifully and sometimes it doesn't.



Mestre Cobra Mansa's knowledge of body functionality adds to his capoeira training techniques even when he is just teaching within the tradition. After a long training session for example, there is time in the class dedicated to carefully stretch the worked muscles and ligaments to avoid injuries. Looking at how consciously he uses his body—his temple—and the things he can do, his agility and flexibility, there is no wonder he has



the respect of students and expert capoeiristas alike. In the eve of his forty-eighth birthday, I receive an email with a couple of pictures, with *o velho ainda ta vivo* (the old man still I alive) in the subject line. The pictures are professional, capturing beautifully not only

the incredible stamina of Mestre Cobrinha in a jump, how aggressive the attack is in the frozen moment, but also the joy and love of the reencounter, for a jogo is also a chance to reconnect, of their embrace after the jogo has ended.



Self-subsistence: The Fundraising Efforts

The organization of the first international conference had the purpose of stimulating the students' cultural interchange, and as Cobrinha states. "The reason why we have the

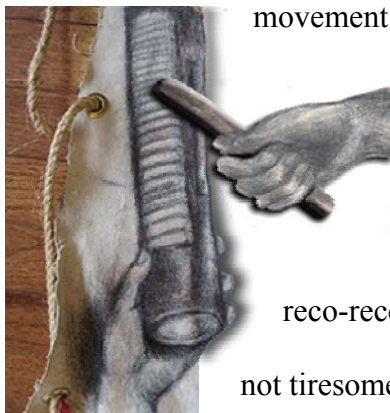
conference one year in Brazil and the next year in the States, otherwise, there is no reason to do that.” Conferences are hosted biannually in each country. In order to pay the airfare and stipend of the mestres or contramestres invited to teach, the different local groups host fundraiser events. The conference’s hosting group will dedicate all its fundraiser effort in advance to fulfill their economical obligation, but they also receive economic help from other groups organizing special events to contribute to this significant effort. Members of proximal groups, like Baltimore, Philadelphia or New York will attend the special event to give moral support to the hosting group. The main activities to generate funds are scheduled demonstrations: whoever is free on the date and time requested participate in the demonstration, which pay stipends for the group. Another popular venue for raising funds are the street rodas where instead of a hat, somebody passes a berimbau to invite bystanders to fill the cabaça with donations. One of the most creative fundraising ventures, very popular and effectively implemented since the first women’s conferences, is the *Rodathon*. As its name suggests, it is a long roda where the capoeiristas look in advance for supporters to pledge money for each hour the player stays in the roda. The duration of a roda varies depending on occasion and country. For instance, the monthly rodas held the first Sunday of each month in the FICA-DC group last around three hours. I have witnessed the impromptu making of a *mini-roda* for about 40 minutes when a meeting was re-scheduled for an hour later. Rodas in Brazil, foremost during the conferences, are famous for lasting the whole night. A rodathon usually runs for eight hours of continuous playing, and donors sign a pledge of any amount per hour of playing



for each individual capoeirista. If the person who signs the pledge knows what capoeira is, they generally understand that the concept of participation is wide and circulatory. One can play several jogos, play an instrument in the bateria, sit in the circle to sing, take care of arming new berimbaus when the arame breaks or gets loose, serve food for guests and participants, sell merchandise, accept pledges and donations, etc. Creativity and boldness are key in generating venues and funds for the group and its projects of self-sustainability. As the Rodathon lets substitute another musician in the bateria, the player of the humblest instrument, the reco-reco scraper.

Rising to Excel: The Metaphor of the Reco-reco

They are often known by their onomatopoeic names. They are popular, easy to play, and welcoming to neophytes. Musical instruments like the reco-reco, a popular type of scraped idiophone generally made of bamboo, embody a powerful message of inclusion and participation in the bateria. Capoeiristas often see the reco-reco as the first step of the initiation to climb for more glamorous instruments. The last person to arrive gets to play the reco-reco. One of the intriguing mechanisms of the vigorous performance of bateria musicians is the energy that makes the music flow and keeps the players'



movement moving forward. Musicians share leadership to keep

fatigue at bay by relieving the bateristas of their instruments without stopping the music, one berimbau here, the pandeiro later—except for the reco-reco. The

reco-reco player receives no substitute musician, not because it is not tiresome—in fact, the capoeiristas fall into the hypnotic simplicity

of the basic rhythm, diluting possibilities of enjoyment and participation. During the

Women's conference discussion after Mestre Cobrinha's early class, I decided to speak up for the modest reco-reco:

I have something to say if you don't mind, since I already paid my registration (*laughs*). [These days] I've mastered the reco-reco, which is the humblest instrument (*people laugh and clap*) in the bateria... I'm a musician, so when I see somebody (*imitating languid playing*) rec... rec... rec... It just hurts... hurts... hurts... (*people laugh*). So if you are able, and I really have to thank Janja's lesson for me, I was trying humble to step up, "Let me see if I can get to the agogô, build up to see if I can get to the berimbau" and just stayed the whole time with the reco-reco, because nobody rescues the reco-reco-player! (*people laugh, yell and clap*). Let me tell you that one of the things I've learned, being trained in the Western Classical musical tradition, is that you are only allowed to play with this part of your body (*signals the fingers*) which [I think] is wrong and should be forbidden. You can play that reco-reco while sleeping, whereas you can bring so much from that instrument, because it is like the new guy gets that [instrument] and once sits there, just stays the whole time, (*people laughs*). Janja showed me—I'm looking at how the teachers teach—so when I was ready to let go of the reco-reco, when finally somebody came nicely to take it away, she took it from my substitute and gave it back to me, telling her to play the pandeiro [instead]. I thought "Oh, I wanted to play THAT instrument!" But she is the Mestra, I just had to take it and wait to see what was there for me. I saw that she was paying attention to me when I was trying to be just a fly in the wall. And she showed me some variations. Did you see me playing? How I am moving? You cannot play that like this (*imitates the sleeping player*) you have to be the instrument because the rhythm is there, all the beats and floreios, you put that energy in the reco-reco and I bet you notice the difference in the bateria... So I think you have to build up from the humblest part in the jogo or in the roda, starting from the stupidest and tedious instrument that there is (*people laugh*) it's something that you have to master and you should do it and be more generous with the person that is there [holding it].



After my comment, Mestre Cobrinha intervenes to tell the group how the simplest beat, like the drums Olodum use for the basic foundation of the Samba Reggae, are played beautifully: "The guy is playing just this bum... bum... but then, if you see the people playing, they have so many movements... They can have fun with the instrument even though they are playing just a single beat." Afterwards, several people came to tell

me how much my comments on the reco-reco had motivated them and others, or just thanked me for speaking up about the attitudes of lack of solidarity. I think my intervention stuck because I received a message in my Facebook wall a month later from one of the conference participants about it, later reiterated in a chat—“It is now impossible for me to play reco-reco and not think of you! What you said was soooo true; people are always hesitant to pick up the reco-reco; it is very neglected.”

My comments made a difference in the roda that day—and beyond; people were intently being much more dynamic in their performance with the scraper, and one of them came to ask me if I had noticed the improvement. The call for inclusive participation in music also needs to be done “à la capoeira,” with grace and playfulness, beauty and sensitivity.



Marker Five, *Returning Home: Projects that Search for a New*

Sense of Community, looks at the most recent ventures of Mestre Cobra Mansa after moving his residence to Salvador. In Brazil, he develops community-based projects while in his teaching tours worldwide seeks to strengthen FICA's community as a family of practice. In addition, Mestre Cobrinha's trips to Angola affirm his pursuit of a personal scholarship in capoeira studies from his research about the berimbau. The call of the berimbau and the movement of *A Volta ao Mundo* are an integral part of the narrative of this segment, which ends with the substitution of the atabaque player moving towards the *Coda Roda*, an occasion for the reader to experience the performance of capoeira music in real time.

<i>Vamos jogar esse jogo de Angola</i>	Let's play this game of Angola
<i>Se jogar pra mi eu pego</i>	If you play for me, I take it
<i>Vou jogar para tu agora</i>	I will play you now
<i>Sou mandingueiro</i>	I am a trickster
<i>Menino me da valor</i>	Little boy, give me strength
<i>Jogo aqui a capoeira</i>	I play here capoeira
<i>Jogo lá em Salvador</i>	I play there in Salvador

Velha Companhia (M. Cobra Mansa, 2005)

Marker 5: Returning Home: Projects that Search for a New Sense of Community [2004-2008]

Place: Salvador, Bahia (Brazil) and abroad

Rhythm: The Call of the Berimbau

Movement: Volta aõ Mundo

Instrument: Atabaque

The musical score is written for a Berimbau ensemble in 2/2 time. It consists of seven staves, each representing a different instrument. The Gunga, Médio, and Viola parts are played with eighth notes, with triplets indicated by a '3' over the notes. The Pandeiro part uses a mix of eighth notes and rests. The Atabaque part features a repeating pattern of eighth notes with rests. The Agogó part uses a repeating pattern of eighth notes with rests. The Reco-reco part uses a repeating pattern of eighth notes with rests.

Both the rhythm and the movement—in which the players start circling counterclockwise—imply an interactive and forward motion. “I’m doing a *volta ao mundo* (around the world), but at the same time, I’m listening to the call of the berimbau to return to Bahia. When the berimbau calls you, it’s not the end of the game, it can be so many different things, ‘pay more attention,’ ‘listen to the mestre,’ ‘come back again.’ If you don’t listen, it means that you are disconnected from the group.” At this point in time, Mestre Cobrinha decided to listen to the big roda berimbau call and to move back home to Salvador leaving behind four leaders: Treinels Fabio, Gegê, Kojo, and Santemu, in charge of the FICA-DC group. While the movement can be considered as an impasse in the game, or just a rest from the fighting by simply “walking around,” one needs to be

aware of the capoeira deception and what D'Aquino interprets as a struggle for power (D'Aquino 1983, 141). The player who initiates the movement may not be tired, but just forcing the other player to follow him, to recognize his control over the game and submit. Keeping connected with the group while at the same time taking on further leadership roles and personal decisions was another turning point in Mestre Cobra's life.

The Latest Traces of the Cobra's Path: So Now, What?

On December 2003 while Mestre Cobra Mansa was away and I was struggling with several hours of recordings, I received a succinct e-mail from him.

From: Cobra Mansa
<cobramansa@hotmail.com>
Date: Sat, 13 Dec 2003 15:20:13 +0000
To: undisclosed recipients
Subject: O Quilombo da FICA



THE DREAM IS COMING TRUE, THAT IS
THE QUILOMBO DA FICA EM
SALVADOR PEACE M. COBRA MANSA

PS: If you want more information and how you can be a part and help that project, please send an e-mail to cobramansa@hotmail.com

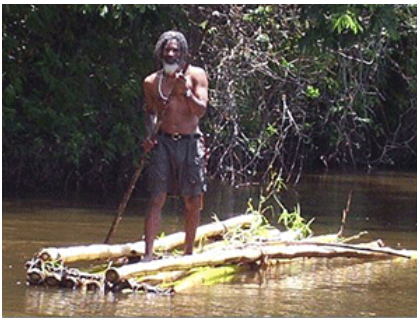
The message contained a link to a website hosting online photo albums, as we have seen, a very popular way to share pictures among the angoleiros. The pictures were



breathtaking. Mestre Cobrinha had closed the deal to buy a beautiful *fazenda* (property) in Valença, in the state of Bahia where he could complete his dream project of living in the country, in a self-sustainable community, called the

“Kilombo Tenondé,”¹⁵⁰ dedicated to the study and preservation of capoeira and traditional agri-cultural¹⁵¹ traditions. A tireless worker, he had been saving for years with this goal in mind: to find a corner to retire, to provide for when the old age would arrive, to have space for his large birth family and his extended capoeira family. Mestre Cobra had learned his lesson from Mestre Pastinha’s fate, who died in total penury after a life dedicated to the transmission of capoeira.

Cobrinha proved again that he looked out for himself without missing one important and ancient aspect of the development of capoeira: the strength that sustains the individual comes from the energy that only can be built inside a community. The seed of that idea was planted years before by the book *Quilombismo*¹⁵² where “[the author] had this concept of a place where people could live and do things together, and that idea



stuck to my mind.” I have imagined many times Cobrinha’s reading moments: sneaking out books from his friend Paulo Brasa, spending days reading in the library of Rio, in Belo Horizonte, from dumped magazines, in the airport, on a mattress on the floor at

FICA. I have observed him extending his hand automatically to pick one of the free newspapers out of the press booths outside the metro just to have something to read in the car ride to the next workshop, performance, class, or other engagement. It may be just a

¹⁵⁰ Tenondé is a word of Guaraní origin that means to grow, advance, go ahead. <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/translation/Guarani/tenonde> [accessed on May 22, 2006]

¹⁵¹ Courses are offered on agriculture, permaculture techniques, traditional medicines, recycling, capoeira angola, culture & arts, construction, hair styling, computer training, among others. <http://www.kilombotenonde.com/> [Accessed on April 12, 2008]

¹⁵² Abdias do Nascimento. 1980. *O Quilombismo: Documentos de uma Militancia Pan-Africanista*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes. More information on Afrocentric view of Palmares on Kent 1996, 170-90. For a more critical view of the allegedly African philosophy of Palmares see Funari 1996, 31 and Bergad 2007, 214)

couple of sheets of advertisement, but soon enough a connection would be made: “I read this article about the quality of the chicken meat...” he blurts out from the back seat between the noisy passing of oversized newspaper pages. “I have decided to stop eating meat.” The statement would start the next thread of conversation about the quality of contemporary life in the cities, how young people in the US schools do not receive proper nutrition and cannot concentrate or stay put long enough to learn. His interests are vast and his opinions assertive. Many conceptual seeds must have been populating his mind and informing his decisions, his instinct, over the years, but the progress of making



something of them came from taking one day at a time:

This is the thing until today. Some people [ask me] “Okay, what’s the philosophy of ICAF, what’s the vision for ICAF?” I don’t know! Whatever I have done until today, that’s my vision. For tomorrow, ok I have this Kilombo vision, but I don’t know what is it yet, but at least I have a concept. Some people get frustrated [with me]. “That’s it [all]?” That’s it!!

His Tenondé project looks ambitious and wonderful, a dream come true. The property has a large flowing river—I could not believe that lobsters and gigantic shrimp were matter of rivers until I saw the luscious pictures—plenty of forest, farming and diverse fruit cropping land, and a small house, enough to host the first quilombistas. As I would learn soon, the project would include the collaboration of many people before it can be a reality.

Building for Capoeira: The Transformation of an Architecture Curriculum

Cobrinha sees himself in perpetual motion: “I’m like a bicycle, I can go faster or slower, but if I stop, I fall.” Encounters with people help him achieve his goals. People are fundamental agents of networking, an essential element in his life of communicating

and building communities. He recognizes many people who have been acting as his mentors, spiritually, pedagogically, and personally: “It’s the only thing I miss everywhere [I go]; I have passion for people.” His easy going, likable and engaging personality makes it easy to start a conversation. His diverse interests and passion, his openness to share and his continuous mobility facilitate new possibilities for networking. Through Mestre Cobrinha, through capoeira, many lives have changed and many people have changed their ways of being in the world, of doing their daily work. Some changes are more transcendental than others. Because their work relates to changes in society, they involve playing in the bigger roda of life as we will see in detail below involving changes in an Architecture curriculum. A well known capoeira adage of Mestre Pastinha says, “Capoeira is for everybody, but not everybody is for capoeira.” For educators and community leaders, the contact with capoeira certainly entails changes that transform curriculums and projects of involvement. For Cobrinha’s quilombola adventure, one of his newest capoeira students, Meghan Walsh, would be of great importance, and from that relationship, other creative endeavors emerged.

I was doing boxing at the time. My grandfather was an Irish professional boxer, so I had ancestral connections... I discovered it made me really angry (*laughs*). For the way I was moving, my instructor asked me if I did capoeira. At the time, I had no idea of what capoeira was, but I took a class, and since I have a background in dance, I really enjoyed it. The flexibility was easy for me but not other parts, like the engagement with a partner. Initially, I only trained once a month it was really bad (*laughs*) for a year. I used to hate sitting in the circle after the class, I just didn't get it. I've grown to love that circle, but Cobrinha then came and made us write a paper about capoeira and I started to get more interested, intellectually engaged with it. That made the whole difference, because I liked the training, but it wasn't enough for me. In one of the circles, Cobrinha made a comment “If you really want to learn what capoeira is, you cannot just train once a month” and he didn't say it directly to me, but I got it. Why not? So, I decided to start training three times a week. (Meghan Walsh, interview on May 20, 2008)

Due to her more intense involvement with capoeira in the FICA-DC group, Meghan also got to participate in other communitarian aspects of sharing chores and maintaining the space. Meghan would point out to Cobrinha and the group that she could contribute with other skills, since she was an architect. One thing would lead to another and soon enough Meghan was sharing her architectural knowledge and ideology with the capoeiristas, helping one of the women leaders to renovate a building for a community center.¹⁵³

One day, he [Mestre Cobra Mansa] came to my house and I showed to him things I had done in South Africa. We talked about my interest in sustainable architecture. That particular project—it was for housing in a squatter settlement—involved using natural and recycled materials, rainwater collection, passive cooling, organic processes and challenging the notion of “master planning.” Even just the word “master” in the context of that setting... Instead of creating a plan for building boxes, it was about the development, by planting a seed and watching it grow to see where it went. This was developed in a circular form. So, with that, we just started to talk about architecture a little bit and he was discussing how he wanted to have a farm, mostly about the farming, planting, etc. He had started to look at properties in Salvador—a very common dream for many people for what I see after all the time I have spent in Brazil—and he showed me a lot of tapes he had of walking through different farms, photographs and things. (Meghan Walsh, interview on May 20, 2008)

In time, Meghan decided even to invest in Cobrinha’s project, for her as an architectural educator, the site had a fantastic potential for community oriented projects and the participation of her Catholic University architecture students. The idea of the quilombo was to have its physical space in the farm in Valença (outskirts of Salvador), but it changed over time to include the construction of a cultural centre in Mestre Cobra’s house in Coutos (Salvador). With that purpose in mind, Meghan would use the project as

¹⁵³ Sylvia Robinson, editor and soul of the FICA’s newsletter published monthly from Spring 1987 to December 2004, started the project of creating a community center in Washington DC, the Emergence Community Arts Collective by rehabilitating what once had been the location for the National Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Women and Children. The center opened to the public in June of 2006, and in the first floor operates the FICA-DC group being the official address of the national organization headquarters. See <http://www.ececollective.org/emergingwomen/> for more information about the history of the building.

a base for her curriculum at the Catholic University in a revolutionary pedagogical experiment that shows the power of capoeira to transform people's experiences.



I based my [design] studio¹⁵⁴ [class] around capoeira [roda principles]. I made my students attend a capoeira movement class, a music class and a roda, and I made it mandatory. More so, I had my students work in pairs in the studio and the way they exchanged [ideas] was like in a roda. They would take their project and work on the model for one week, and the next week they would exchange it, let's say you are my partner I would give you mine and you would give me yours, work on it for a week, and give it back. Whatever I contributed to it you play off with it; whatever you contributed, I'd play off with you. What you gain is dialog between each other and, since in the design studio architecture is very solitary, also collaboration. For me, it was a groundbreaking way for the students to learn the act of a not necessarily compromised collaboration, because that's what I think the students usually learn traditionally, that a collaboration is compromised and of course, they are not very excited about that. [...] For me it was the way I could teach what capoeira was and have them design something that I felt was appropriate for a cultural center to do capoeira angola. (Meghan Walsh, interview on May 20, 2008)

The purpose of use of the space in the cultural center was to train capoeira, and then open it to the community for other uses. In Cobrinha's plan, capoeiristas traveling to Salvador would come to the quilombo to train in his famous early morning sessions having the rest of the day to spend at their leisure, or collaborating with the different projects going on in the community. If the people chose to just train, they would have to pay for the training and stage if they needed room and board. If they collaborated, they could stay for free and just pay for the training. The Catholic University students worked a collection of projects for the design of such space and, as it could not be celebrated in

¹⁵⁴ The prime course of the architectural education is the Studio and most regular classes (structures, environmental sciences, etc) are 3 credits but the studio is 6 credits. (In Architecture schools all over the US from 2 to 6pm every Monday, Wednesday and Friday all the architecture students are in the studio.) "Typically, you are assigned a project and you work alone on it. Your professor (comes around your desk during that study time and) critiques your work occasionally. You are encouraged to talk to other students, but (still) you only work in your own project." (Meghan Walsh, interview on May 20, 2008)

any other form, a roda was held the day of the final models' critique. In an interesting superimposition of cultures that in the past would have been non-supportive and even destructive of each other, the formal opening was a liberating performance of capoeira, presented as such.

There were a lot of people that appreciated what we did. Here I am, in a Catholic school, and I am Catholic, bringing a roda, related with *candomblé*... (*laughs*). The students really got something out of that. I wish I had continued in touch with all of them to see how they progressed and see if they still have that spirit. One of the students that I know, still has it. She has gone into collaborative work with other people and [is] "hands on" building things that are for community projects. So I think there was some seed. Even some of the students took capoeira classes after the studio. Some of the professors that came to the opening really loved it.



[...] We had a presentation at the end with all the models built [showcased] in a big circle, the room was round and we did the roda in that room. [...] I had sixteen people, eight professors and eight capoeiristas, paired to go and give the critique for every project. They walked around in the circle talking with a group following for 20 minutes. [...] So there was a consistent dialog and collaboration [during the whole process]. (*Ibid*)

I am fascinated by the story. I remember attending the party at the capoeira school where the definite model chosen was presented in a series of fundraising events. Meghan, who appeared very tired at the beginning of our conversation, has suddenly appeared excited and vivacious in explaining the experience. I recognize the passion for meaningful education and congratulate her on the success of a wonderful experiment. As an educator, I recognize in Meghan's story the way that capoeira acts through subversion, inverting roles and preconceptions while transforming the life experience of its participants. It changes the perception of what an academic critique is by opening it to the community: transforming how an architecture studio is formed by rewarding collaboration and shared leadership; showing how exciting a curriculum can be by

bringing it into a sync with the culture(s) it tries to serve, and in Meghan's case, transforming the role of the western trained architect as a designer of culturally sensitive living spaces.

Visiting the Quilombo Life: First Steps in a New Networking Scene

In September of 2004, Cobrinha left the United States after ten years of residence and moved to Brazil to work on—and live in—the Kilombo Tenondé project. Many resources were necessary and everybody was invited to participate. In addition to the fundraising parties and rodas, Meghan's non-profit organization, Axismundi,¹⁵⁵ planned an exhibit with donations and deposits from local artists and hosted a silent auction event to raise money for the construction and materials. I wondered what it meant in the life of someone like Mestre Cobrinha “the guy who never had a watch, a bank account,” over the years to become more used to possessions and goods, to become the owner of a terrain of such proportions like the farm and a new project that involved so much community participation.



Nobody knows him as well as Isabel, Cobrinha answers when I ask him. Laughing, he reads aloud her answer to the same e-mail I received with the pictures. I have to laugh with him: the text is not just hilarious, it resumes the trajectory of his life with mordant and surgical precision.

What a life... I was very impressed with the immensity of land acquired for Your Majesty. The milord that already has been juvenile delinquent, fisherman,

¹⁵⁵ Created by Meghan Walsh, Elizabeth James and John Lezcano, Axismundi “seeks to bring together people of a variety of different skills, talents and experiences to invent, learn, build and grow” <http://www.axismundi.us> [accessed in May 10, 2008]

trafficker of dry and wet, representative of pharmaceutical products (horn of fish-bull and electric fish oil, just to mention some of the most powerful medicines), university student, graduated in physical education, photographer, clown, actor, artist and professor of the circus entertainment art, formed *macumbeiro*¹⁵⁶ and apprentice of “father of saint,” militant and activist of the organized and disorganized Black Movement, lecturer and discourse maker, internationally known dominating diverse languages and dialects (also Carioca and Baianese), recently president, vice-president and currently demoted as secretary of a foundation internationally known as FICA, sworn master of capoeira and capoeirista in the hours of leisure and danger, now it takes the first step in the direction of retirement! And intends to establish itself as *latifundium*¹⁵⁷ owner in Salvador. Wow!

I thought, what a beautiful place! (Isabel the Sousa, e-mail to Cobrinha on 01/18/04)

I was eager to see Mestre Cobra in his new environment, so I visited the quilombo in the summer of 2005 right after the International encounter celebrated in Coutos.

Produced in partnership with the Cid Passos elementary school, neighbors of Cobrinha’s property, the house is at the heart of a very poor fishermen neighborhood in Savador. I had brought with me some small school supplies as I wanted to visit the school. Cobrinha put me in touch immediately with the outreach person, Luciana Balbino, also a capoeirista training in FICA-Bahia with Mestre Valmir, and a theater instructor. Very politely, she thanked me for my donation to the school in the children’s name. We talked a bit more. She did not speak English and my Portuñol was in its earliest developmental stages worsened by the phone, but I managed to explain my work with Mestre Cobrinha. The moment she learned I was a music teacher, she was enthusiastic. “Would you like to meet and talk with the music teachers?” I was very surprised. At that moment, I had an instant run with my preconception that in Brazil everyone should be musical, moreover

¹⁵⁶ Practitioner of *Macumba*. The term is sometimes used as a synonym for the religion worshipping the Orixás (Santeria, Candomblé, Umbanda...). In fact, Macumba is a derogatory word used to refer to a supposedly evil form of witchcraft.

¹⁵⁷ In Latin, large rural state, my translation from the original text in Portuguese.

the music teachers and the students, thus they would not need any additional ideas from a Spanish woman, would they? I honestly thought I had nothing to offer except the bundle of pencils. As I had done many workshops for music teachers in Spain I thought frantically; let see... I have my laptop here, I could pull up some pictures or materials from my last experiences in Spain before I moved to the US, so I closed my eyes and accepted the invitation.



I loved every minute of the visit to the school. While I was waiting, I snooped around the walls, full of capoeira themed decorations the children had done to welcome the conference participants. With Luciana, I visited an art



classroom where approximately twenty six-year-old kids, dressed in white sleeveless T-shirts and short blue pants, were learning about the tradition of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.¹⁵⁸ Sitting around three knee high round tables covered by newspapers, the kids were holding the interior carton cylinder of a bath tissue roll while painting it in black with their index fingertips. Dollops of black paint were poured to water bottle caps for each child as needed. They were making the body of a bull-puppet, subject of the legend as an integrated curriculum that would have months later a festival with representative songs and dances from the tradition. In another moment of the visit, I walked down the corridors taking pictures of the murals and chatting with the kids I encountered. When they saw my camera all of them had to have their picture taken, except a girl that wanted to take mine. I showed her how to work the machine and I posed

¹⁵⁸ An expression of resistance of African slaves in Brazil ridiculing and satirizing their masters. The dramatization of a danced story with costumes, and accompaniment of musical instruments changes from cities but is performed mostly in the north-east.

for her. The next day, I learned, there was a festival where all the classes would be presenting their pieces. After several minutes, a group scheduled for a rehearsal session for the next day's performance, entered the room. The rehearsal was uneventful until a latecomer entered the room accompanied by another teacher.



The adults talked by themselves for awhile while the boy hastily went to sit down by the side of the stage. All the kids seemed very small and fragile, but full of energy, acting up a bit in front of the visitor with the camera, but this new kid was much skinnier and was walking very slowly. I learned later that he had been missing for several days; he had escaped from home and had not eaten for days. A teacher had been looking for him, knowing of his troubled family, but nobody had seen him until he returned by himself, directly to the school. The child was not older than five or six years old. Something very heavy sunk in my stomach when I heard the story and thought about the kids in the corridor, asking me to take their pictures, to look at them, to shoot and show them the



picture in the screen, their big smiles so satisfied with being visible.



Next on the program was a talk with the teachers. Practically all of them were waiting for us in the teachers' room, not only the music teachers, but almost all the teachers and Mestre Cobrinha were also present. I was overwhelmed. I think it was the

first time he saw me at work as a music specialist. I wanted to know the teachers' names and the subjects they taught so we went around the room with the introductions and then I told them about my work in Spain with my students. I told them I did not have instruments and we had to craft them from recycled materials, "heroic pedagogy" somebody called my activities in an ethnomusicology conference when I presented a paper about my experiences in the classroom.¹⁵⁹ "Cultural activism" I think it was. We organized a revolutionary statement of protest every time we ran alleged "acoustic tests" in corridors and stairs-halls until the whole school noticed us.

They told me about budget cuts, about some possible private donations. I had the idea to publicize what they were doing with the curriculum across disciplines so they could demonstrate what they already were doing



without much, to ask for funding to do more. I suggested involving international communications companies like Telefonica (a Spanish monopoly) with a webpage, to give visibility to their projects, including some pictures with comments showcasing the kids work, and their puppet bulls. I regretted donating only a couple of hundred pencils. I felt even worse when Luciana presented a handful of drawings from the kids to me expressing their appreciation, thanking "Senhora Isla" for the gift. I offered to do what I could. I returned the next day for the festival with my camera, to film the festival take pictures, help with the site, be in touch. Maybe some day I will go back to do a collaborative project. I understood what Cobrinha was trying to do with the quilombo. In fact, it was an example of the interchange he proposed, a culture of interdependence, so that the many foreigners who visit Cobrinha stay for days or months could contribute to

¹⁵⁹ Angulo, 1999

enrich Cobrinha's local community. All the skills and knowledge anybody has are poured into the quilombola community. An artist paints murals with the kids. Others do mosaics from recycled tiles, or planting, building an oven, helping with homework, cooking a meal. So much to be done!

The Vision of a Permanent Culture: Permangola¹⁶⁰

During the first summer studio, a group of architecture students built a bamboo structure, for the cultural center in Coutos, but even the treatment of the prime materials could not be done on time, so the provisional structure, without money for anything more stable, was expected to deteriorate rapidly. Mestre Cobra discovered soon enough that the payments for the farm, which could not be purchased with the group of non-Brazilians he had planned—investors like Meghan—had to be assumed completely by himself. In addition to the payments, he realized that if he wanted to be on top of the farm and the cultural center he had to travel back and forth and that would cost him close to 400 reais a month that he could not afford. In addition to that burden, the kind of work that he was doing, which paid well in the US and overseas, was not possible to do in Coutos; there was no market for it: “I wanted to do so many things... [to] finish the house and [I] just saw the money going and going. That's when I decided to travel for a couple



of months because all my money was going very fast.”

The house did not have the infrastructure. The construction of the cultural center would make a nice space for training, but with no training space, he could not charge for the classes: “I also had more responsibilities, because I

¹⁶⁰ Name of the latest project, the word is a hybrid from “permaculture” and “capoeira angola”

had to pay a salary to the guy who was staying full time at the farm, a salary to the guy in Coutos because the house cannot be empty. I had my little daughter to support; it was like three salaries and I had no salary!” His initial dreams and plans had to be revised and modified, since initially he thought he would be living in Brazil for eight months and traveling outside for four months: “It was a bit frustrating to realize things were not going the way I planned.” Mestre Cobrinha had several people collaborating with the organization of programs and events in the Coutos site of the quilombo. His brother Paulinho and wife Eliane were living and managing the property while Cobrinha was away on his many trips. Some artists in residence, like Japanese artist and capoeirista Borboleta (Mariko), whose artwork depicts the capoeirista’s hands playing instruments in this dissertation, lived on the premises, and did occasional beautification artwork in murals and collaborated on quilombo events. Often, Cobrinha sent emails with links to fantastic photo albums where one could appreciate the progress in the quilombo and the many activities within that community. A circus workshop, hip hop music, mural painting, health education, computer literacy, language training, tutoring, mosaic, gardening, the construction of a clay oven, and capoeira classes were some of the activities subject of Mestre Cobra’s detailed visual documentation.

Dramatic changes in the group of people working in Coutos would make Mestre Cobrinha rethink the number of projects he could take on without personal supervision. In January of 2008, with his interest in promoting the agricultural work in the farm with permaculture,¹⁶¹ he organized an international seminar under the “Permangola” label.

¹⁶¹ Meaning permanent agriculture, the concept was developed by Australian Bill Mollison in the 70’s as “the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems, which have the diverse, stability and resilience of natural systems” (Madeley 2002, 43). Made to design human settlements to “maximize and enhance human activity with the environment” (Mars & Ducker 2003, 3)

Permangola: First Agroecologic Meeting (agricultura, permacultura, ecologic constructions and capoeira angola)

The seed of Kilombo Tenonde was planted hundreds of years ago in the quilombos of Brazil. Kilombo Tenonde recognizes the existence of new forms of oppression in modern, industrial society. By promoting the re-generation of creativity, thought, and purpose, Kilombo Tenonde provides a chance to rebuild community structures that have been eroded.

And here we are today!

Permangola, “The first Agro-ecologic Meeting,” is a series of workshops that provides an introduction into alternative systems of construction, agriculture, energy and capoeira angola here in Valença, Brazil and the rest of the world. In this meeting, we will unveil the first practical steps towards achieving sustainability.



Agroforest: In agroecology, agroforest is one of the most effective methods of creating diversity in crops and green areas (i.e., forests) for food production. Topics Include: Types of agroforest; Organization and preparation of seeds and seedlings; On-site construction

Permaculture: Created in Australia during the 1970`s and presently used all over the world, permaculture combines traditional knowledge with new techniques to create permanent solutions while respecting the principles of nature. Topics Include: Design and landscaping; Water: Collection, storage, and recycling; Soil management

Bioconstruction: Using environmentally-friendly material (i.e., bamboo, adobe, recycled objects), bioconstruction combines technique with creativity in the development of homes, structures for food production, natural purification systems, plant and animal habitats, etc. Topics include: Bamboo: Use and management; Superadobe: Technique and construction; Water purification systems

What’s more. . . Come and learn how to use vegetable oil to transform your gas guzzling car!!!

When: 15 - 21 January 2008

Where: Kilombo Tenonde. Valença Road. KM 23 (Bomfim) Brazil

As we talk about the experience, I see how much this project means to him. Sixty people—half Brazilians, from all parts of the country and half foreigners—worked for a week in the many activities programmed. As in other capoeira events, the registration for Brazilians was more affordable, because of the economic differences between Brazil and other parts of the world. Community members from the small nucleus participated free of charge.¹⁶² It seems the investment to upgrade the property to be able to handle a big group of permangoleiros did not leave enough money to pay the instructors except for the transportation and maintenance expenses, “an investment” as Cobrinha sees it.

The program for the activities during the day started at 5am with the capoeira training followed by breakfast at 6am. By 7am, the morning activities would be running until lunch time: 11am. The afternoon had another three hours of programmed activities, avoiding the hours of most heat, and breaking around 5pm to do a little roda while waiting for dinner to be ready. In the evening, a discussion or a film showing were the last activities of the intense day. For Cobrinha, the most important part was the last programmed events where the Permangola celebrated a roda and a samba de roda and all the people from the community came to participate. In the harmonious integration of life into the landscape, permaculture had truly achieved the ecological atmosphere of cooperation and interaction. Permaculture is not just the design of gardens or crops, but of human settlements, considering a plan for the enhancement of human interaction with the environment in “all facets of human existence” (Mars & Ducker 2003, 3).

There are supplementary reasons for experimentation with permaculture. I learn from one of the threads in the roda virtual forum that the wood of the beriba tree, used in

¹⁶² Brazilians would pay 100 (BRL) and the rest, 100 (USD). To the actual currency exchange rate this implies a discount of 40%.

the construction of berimbau, is in danger of extinction. Mestre Cobra adds his experience in the farm to the discussion.

I would like to clarify some things with regard to the extraction of beribas [for] berimbau[s]. (I don't endorse irresponsible extraction of beribas).

1 - The capoeiristas are not the principle responsible for the extinction of berimbas; we only harvest the beribas that are in conditions to make berimbaus, the others are left [to grow and reproduce].

2 - Sticks for brooms, are made in many places of beribas.

3 - The beribas for berimbaus should be planted inside the forest (the beriba outside the forest does not serve to make berimbaus, because its voice cracks). Capoeiristas must advocate the preservation of the forest and must also encourage the planting of more native trees and the reforestation of the areas destroyed. The system of agroforestry (the technique used in Kilombo Tenondé) and with that we will have beribas for a long time. I am open to learn more about this matter. M. Cobra Mansa. (Message of June 3, 2008)

The subject becomes popular rapidly, other capoeiristas share his experiences with alternative regional and local woods like the *guivira* in the Atlantic region, the *canelinha* in Minas Gerais or the *envira* in the Amazonas and the use of other extended resources like the bamboo. The hollow bamboo does not have the desired density for the harmonics propagation as needed for the berimbau right sound (and to warrant “the *axé* that we desire in the roda”),¹⁶³ but deep in research for alternative solutions some capoeiristas are experimenting with laminated bamboo¹⁶⁴ or advising to test local woods internationally.¹⁶⁵ The preservation of the capoeira angola tradition, is a good permacultural example. For its survival, it needs to relate holistically with all aspects of the society and its environment.

Nevertheless, the addition of the spirit of community of capoeira angola is one aspect that blends with the overall design and has the trend to transform the Permangola

¹⁶³ Capoeirista Alberto-Bauru (message of June 6, 2008).

¹⁶⁴ *Idem*

¹⁶⁵ Capoeirista Teimosia reports excellend sound from an ash berimbau in Finland (message of June 6, 2008)

initiative at the Kilombo Tenondé into a permanent fair of alternative resources for social health. A small version of the January edition will take place during the summer of 2008 and people excited about what they have experienced are proposing that Mestre Cobrinha host workshops in acupuncture, iridology and Shiatsu for January of 2009. The Permangola project, a personal avenue of Mestre Cobra Mansa's interest, is already a strong and growing reality.

New Avenues for Capoeira Mestres: The Movie Consultants

As Mestre João Grande says, “Capoeira is a dance, an art, a profession and a culture.” Collaborate with scholars, journalists and cinematographers in the dissemination of the tradition is also a part of the professional scope of a fourth generation mestre of capoeira.¹⁶⁶ While Mestre Cobrinha lived in the United States, he kept in touch with the people in Brazil and never let a year pass without traveling home. These well maintained contacts, glad to know he was living in Bahia, started to invite him to participate in events and collaborate in new projects. Whereas other capoeira mestres like Camisa and Suassuna, from capoeira regional, have been prominent as consultants to big corporations like IBM and taught capoeira as a team building tool, Mestre Cobrinha has participated as a consultant in numerous documentaries about capoeira. Unfortunately, only archival copies of some of these films can be found at FICA-DC or in the Mestre's personal archives. The first film in which he participated, the short *La Capoeira: Art Martial du Brésil* (The Capoeira: Martial Art of Brazil) from French cinematographer Jean Claude Cécile, portrays Cobrinha in 1987 doing his knife ring jumping and acrobatic street work,

¹⁶⁶ See annex I for a capoeira angola family tree which highlights the line of descendants from Mestre Pastinha to João Grande, to Mestre Moraes and to Mestre Cobra Mansa.

in a Physical Education class, playing capoeira with Moraes or at home with Isabel and Makindé.

In the 1990's Cobrinha is portrayed again, this time also interviewed, along with



his sister Eliane among other people, for a final project of Rio de Janeiro cinematography students, *No Rastro da Cobra* (In the Trail of the Snake). Here the viewer has the chance to see the neighborhood of Cobrinha's childhood, Duque

de Caxias.

Other collaborations for films like *O Pulo do Gato* (The Cat's Leap) about mestres João Grande and João Pequeno—accessible in Mestre Grande's school in New York (Grande, 1998)—or *The Capoeiragem in Bahia* (Umberto, 2000) about the controversial African origins of capoeira and its relationship with candomblé for the educational TV in Bahia, have made him a person of interest for further involvement in cinematographic projects.

During his first months of residence back home in Brazil, Mestre Cobra collaborated with a new documentary about capoeira, this time about its international expansion. The documentary, directed by the well known Brazilian cinematographer Lázaro Faria, was based in an original idea by journalist Lúcia Correia Lima.¹⁶⁷ Soon enough, he would become such a valuable part of the process that he was hired as a consultant, since the many mestres interviewed for the film were much more accessible

¹⁶⁷ *Mandinga in Manhattan: How the Capoeira Spread through the World* was an original script selected by the Instituto de Radiodifusão Educativa da Bahia (IRDEB) in the 2004 program of development and production of Brazilian documentaries (DOC TV). The award consists of a contract of co-production for a total value of 100,000 R\$ and the exhibition on the public Brazilian network. http://www.abepec.com.br/noticias_materia_1.asp?ge_tex_srl_texto=1045 [accessed on march 20, 2008]

and open to talk with Cobrinha, and also his insight was very valuable into the editing process. As an unexpected outcome, Cobrinha tells me, Lázaro Faria has given him a copy of all the transcriptions from the conversations with the mestres during the filming. I whistle in admiration. What a precious treasure for the archives: fresh material from primary sources already transcribed. I wonder if a copy of the original audio files could be added to the deal. Before long, Mestre Cobra Mansa would be spending many nights in the editing room and would not be able to train in the mornings. Needless to say, Cobrinha was utterly fascinated by the process of filming a full length documentary. Following the film release in Brazil, Mestre Cobra Mansa and other people participating in the film were invited to other engagements to present the film to the broader capoeira community as part of the activities and special events.

I particularly enjoy one of the scenes where Mestre Cobra Mansa, who appears as the visual conductor of the narrative in many scenes, is shown lecturing at the University of Notre Dame.¹⁶⁸ There are several scenes covering the range of his intervention, from teaching basic movements to a group of kids to pure talk about the history of capoeira, or, one of his specialties, engaging the public in a capoeira performance after the lecture. He explains the berimbau and demonstrates his technique and sound. Next the camera shows a line of people playing the small bateria instruments while the rest clap the basic three beats and sing the call and response of a corrido in Portuguese following Cobrinha's berimbau and lead song. Many times I have heard him describe how much the public enjoys participating in these demonstrations, and how little time he needs to make the people "sound nice, for being their first time, you know, basic stuff."

¹⁶⁸ At the University of Notre Dame, Mestre Cobra Mansa was the Visiting Chair in the Study of Brazilian Culture at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies in the Spring of 2005.

Mestre Cobra continues an excellent relationship with Lázaro and is engaged in the production of a second film, *Roda do Mundo* (Roda of the World), designed “to document the expansion of capoeira around the world through a trip to more than twenty countries where capoeira won over the local population.” Intending to invite practitioners of different styles of capoeira “without discrimination,” Mestre Cobra sent a message to the capoeira forums to “show all the faces of capoeira” and the work built up in different countries.

In June 2007, Mestre Cobra participated in a full day of shooting for a documentary about Besouro of Santo Amaro.¹⁶⁹ The original production team already



had traveled to Brazil and filmed more than forty hours of video and had the footage translated and subtitled to English. After realizing that a subtitled film was hard to follow the filmmaker contacted Mestre Cobra Mansa to insert some material in English

that could help move the narrative forward. Mestre Cobrinha invited me to assist in the filming session, as the filmmaker had emailed him the questionnaire in advance and he thought my research might help. Initially, I just was observing and recording the interview for my own research, but shortly, as it is often the case with Mestre Cobra’s projects, I found myself further involved. The director asked me to work on the long questionnaire to put the questions in order with some logic, creating narrative threads that

¹⁶⁹ Also known as Besouro *Preto* (black) or Besouro *Mangangá* or Besouro *Cordao de Ouro* (golden sash) the hero is mentioned frequently in capoeira songs. He was a capoeirista tainted with mythical powers (*besouro* means beetle in Portuguese) for he was believed could transform himself in an insect and flee in front of his prosecutors. His fame was as invincible, only been defeated and killed after using treachery to undo his mandinga (magic) (Lewis 1992, 168-69).

would facilitate the telling, and eliminating redundant ones. The questioning included details of the story of Besouro and Cobrinha's opinion about the myth, general questions about the history of capoeira and the older mestres, personal questions about Mestre Cobra Mansa's involvement with capoeira, along with other musical and performance aspects of the tradition.

I also read aloud the questions to Cobrinha and positioned myself behind the camera, so when he answered, he would be looking at me, as if we were talking, so his eyes would be more connected with the camera / viewer, my suggestion. This documentary is still in production, delayed for financial reasons. The director and producer, Matthew Lockhart is still interested in having Cobrinha participate as the voice narrator for the documentary.

When I contacted Mathew to ask him about the project, he told me how much he liked Mestre Cobra's voice and explained his idea of having Cobrinha do a voice-over, asking me to pass the request along to the mestre for "whenever he is around next." These days, in the last stages of finishing my dissertation, Cobrinha and I communicate often through email and chats through Skype. In the last days of the Italian leg of his spring trip, he suddenly appeared online while I was preparing a list of quick questions, asking for details on his involvement as a consultant for the films. Our interchanges are quick, and there is a lot of joking and laughing involved; he has always something new to share, a movie, a concert, a workshop, somebody he has met... I never know if he is just hanging out online or is in between classes, but it comes in handy when, as in this case, I can get immediate answers to my questions. Often, as I spend many hours a day writing my dissertation, listening to capoeira music, transcribing and reading, I feel like I am

talking to him all the time. It is a surprise going back to a real time conversation, chat style, with him.

ISA: Hi Cobrinha!

COBRA: Hi, I just arrived from a beautiful music and dance from the south of Italy. The dance of the tarantulas. Do you know it?

ISA: I do! Very interesting the history, isn't it? I went to a conference where a professor¹⁷⁰ showed footage of a woman in the 50's in a mental hospital. Impressive!

COBRA: Very, but I didn't know they had a knife fight, two man with a lot of Malandragem. Hahahaha... With nice esquivas¹⁷¹, etc.

ISA: Really?

COBRA: I never saw it before. I was impressed. I recorded a bit.

ISA: I can imagine. Good, I want to see it. I just sent you an email with some questions (brief), about your role with the film industry...

COBRA: Hahaha... I was just talking to Lazaro... Hahaha.

ISA: I love the tarantelle... Really? This is good timing... I have news. Read my email for a minute, see if we can keep the pace of the conversation here. This is, if you have time now.

COBRA: Ok. You can contact Lazaro xxxxxxxx@hotmail.com for the images, ok?

ISA: Can I write in English?

COBRA: No, It's better in Portuguese, ok?

ISA: Ouch... Ok, I'll do my best. Portunhol is my specialty. Take your time to answer my questions. What I want is to talk with you about the guy from the Besouro's documentary. Have you been in touch with him after the filming?

COBRA: Who is he? The one who made a filming with me? No, I haven't heard from him anymore; I still have his e-mail.

ISA: Ok, I wanted to know if at the end the guy paid you for your contribution to the filming.

COBRA: Yes he did. I asked for \$1,000. But at the end we did it for \$500 with the credit to FICA and some copies when it is released.

ISA: Good. I'm happy that worked out. I wrote to him a while ago, just wanted to follow up with that project, and he just answered me back. He had to push back the project (has a first cut now) to do another paid projects first but he needs a voice over, like a narrator, to give coherence to the story. He talked about it, then, do you remember? The thing is, he asked me to ask you if you would like to do it. He would pay you. Wants to know if you have time and when you would be back around to do it. I'm just the messenger.

COBRA: Ok, would you do it?

¹⁷⁰ Giogo Adamo, archivist at the Discoteca di Stato in Roma presented images of a video recording from the archives at the IV Conference of the Spanish Ethnomusicology Society (SIBE) celebrated in Granada, 9-12 July of 1998.

¹⁷¹ Escape movement

ISA: Well, I would like to see the rough-cut first. We don't know what he filmed in Brazil and what is the angle of the story (if he has one) or who is the writer of the narrative... Don't you think these are important questions? In my opinion, when you put your voice, you are not an actor... You are Mestre Cobrinha... You give some authority to it, don't you think?

COBRA: Look, I will be back for 3 days on Monday. I will go to Japan after. He gave me his cell. We can talk more about it. On Monday, I'll be at ECAC...

ISA: Memorial Day... Raw food menu...

COBRA: Ok, we can talk. I have never done this before, hahaha... This is some kind of news! Hahaha...

ISA: You are a trouper. I'll help you get the deal, the guy already invited me to participate last year as a consultant. Don't know exactly what he needs. I'm not your manager! I just I think the story is important. I'll ask him and I'll know more details by Monday.

COBRA: Hahahahaha... You are one! [manager].

ISA: Sure I am... One of a kind!

COBRA: You want to be my manager? You'll have your cut, I don't mind... Hahahaha.

ISA: Did you know I did the management of my group of Jazz in Barcelona? In the nineties...

COBRA: Hahaha... See? You have some expertise already.

ISA: I was sick in bed (rheum) and was on the phone all day. Found a bunch of gigs!

COBRA: Hahaha... It's nice to see [all the things] you can do.

ISA: [The musicians] didn't value much my work. Now it's different. I'm older... Wiser... my Iansá has a reputation now... [It's] So much better, man... I wouldn't get back in time for nothing!

COBRA: Hahaha... Good, me neither! I can choose what I want to do on life...

One of the aspects of Mestre Cobra Mansa's personality that we have talked often about in our conversations and other people recognize as well, fruit of his *bricoleur* skill, is his openness to learn new things, his indefatigable curiosity and his adventurous spirit. I see him change from a consultant to a voice-over narrator right in front of my eyes. I am thrilled to accompany him on this part of his journey. Through our interchanges, I am learning much about his personal ethics, his love of truth, and of fairness. I have noticed how he answers some questions by sending me contact information to ask others about their point of view. Somehow, he feels uncomfortable if he only tells his side of the story.

In one of our recent conversations, I learned he is interested in writing an article about people's narratives of their lives in capoeira, the things that happened to them, and how they changed over time. "I interviewed many people, older mestres, or I was present and saw what happened, and over time, they change their story!" I told him about how we re-construct our reality almost daily. I think it must be a realignment of matching our personal stories with our developing consciousness and interactions with those around us. As I transcribe and edit our conversations, I often find myself thinking that changing that word, making it grammatically correct, I am not just sanding the corners to help the flow



of the ideas, but also changing the original thought process. But I see many expressions of Cobrinha coming from literal translations of Brazilian-Portuguese idioms. I can capture the meaning and the flavor of the expression in ways that would be difficult for a standard reader if I left them as they are. In my mind, I am constantly shifting from what I image the standard reader of my text, to Cobrinha's reading of it, to the reading of a capoeirista trained by him—closely involved with him, recognizing him (or not) in his statements—and to the eyes of a non-capoeirista, a music teacher, a sociologist or anthropologist, any everyday person. Whenever I hear him talking in a class, or in a discussion, in a documentary, I find myself recognizing Cobrinha from my interviews, from my writings, from his quotes. It is a complex relationship; I am not really a translator, not really a cultural broker (a word too charged with economical profit). Who am I, a bridge maybe? I also find remarkable Cobrinha's interest in other people's representation of truths about life—the looping drawing of my childhood Cola-Cao tin, all over again.

Reviewing his documentary collaborations, I ask him about a segment with his statement on anarchy in relation to capoeira, that appeared in a documentary about a new Brazilian “liberation therapy” called Somatherapy.¹⁷² The director, Nick Cooper, had responded very graciously to my request to use the segment for my companion DVD, but deferred giving his permission, asking me to contact Cobrinha and comply with his decision. As we talk about videos, he digs into the FICA-DC video archives, precariously balancing on top of a chair while he looks for the movies we talk about, always the facilitator, the sharer. I do not know exactly what his reservation might be about that particular statement, but I sympathize immediately with his concerns about people using his image to promote ideas or activities he does not endorse, like Soma. Mestre Cobrinha confirms he was upset when the video came out because Cooper, who had been filming a debate in a panel discussion—“I don’t even remember what the round table was about”—used the segment without asking permission or even communicating his intentions to use the footage in a documentary about Soma. He said: “I liked the context he used my statements, but I don’t like the way he did it, because I don’t agree with some of the things Soma does.” He explains how he had taught capoeira classes for a while to the Soma group, but grew disenchanted with the lack of respect the therapists had for the tradition. I think this is one of these cases where what people were doing with capoeira did not match Cobrinha’s standards of what was “good for capoeira.”

From his last trip to France, Mestre Cobra Mansa brought back another DVD. I picture him like a traveling salesman. From his bag, suitcase, backpack, or bundle come

¹⁷² Based on the work of ex-psychoanalyst and anarchist activist Roberto Freire (1927-2008), the therapy has elements of the social and corporeal psychology of Wilhelm Reich, anti-psychiatry, gestalt therapy and capoeira angola. The therapy consists of mainly are body exercises, with the goal to liberate emotionally those who have been subjected to repression (Cooper, 2006).

out all sort of things. Like a magician, he pulls out the latest interesting book, an article, a



basket made of recycled woven paper, a gift, or the magazine where his first co-authored article has been published.¹⁷³ He pulls things out according to the subject of the conversation, or the interest of his interlocutor. He is a contextual *conseguidor* (“getter”).¹⁷⁴ Borrowing the concept from Levi-Strauss (1966) again, I see how during our conversations—as

in his relationships with the world he functions as a *bricoleur* assembling the bits and pieces of symbolic and material resources to produce new structures, networks and knowledge in this case, supporting my own research *bricolage* process.

When you become a teacher you have a piece of the people you teach, you have influenced that person, even if they don't recognize it, you know your value. “I am able to teach somebody, I can teach other people and maybe they will do better than me.”

He has the pieces of every one of us, motifs and ornamentations in his composed and improvised life, and he travels with them, with us, carrying his suitcase as he carries his memory. His memory is filled with stories he will share with us, as last Thanksgiving: “I saw this guy teaching this pandeiro workshop, he was so original, I thought so much about you!” This time, the DVD is a production made in France from Mestre Manoel’s group: “[His] work with kids on the favelas [is] one the best I have see in my life with capoeira Angola.” The Centre Ypiranga de Pastinha, has produced a double case with a DVD and a CD: “It’s really cool, they filmed the roda with several cameras

¹⁷³ Assunção, Matthias Röhrig, and Cinézio Feliciano Peçanha . 2008. *A Dança da Zebra*. Revista de História da Biblioteca Nacional, March 2008, 14-21.

¹⁷⁴ Not a proper word even in Spanish, the *conseguidor* was a segment in a TV program in Spain during the 70’s. In a varieties program conducted by Jose Maria Íñigo, a character called “el *conseguidor*” the one who gets things, fulfilling the petitions and dearest wishes of the public.

simultaneously, it's beautiful!" He forgets to mention he participated in the filming and has some appearances in a small documentary piece. Indeed, the production is astonishing, the split screens with simultaneous planes of the same movement, an intriguing and excellent resource for movement analysis. We can see two different points of view at once, including the overhead—the orixás and ancestors point of view, maybe? I think about my visual texts and in no time the “capoeira nostra” machine grants permission to use any excerpts or images from the video. I enjoy immensely seeing a navigation interface designed by a capoeirista: the menu to select the different scenes/jogos is a mess of names inside a circle, where mousing over a name lights up an adjacent name and the item becomes a link to that particular jogo.

The Capoeira Scholar: Articles, Lectures and Research Trips

The further Mestre Cobrinha travels and responds the calling of the berimbau, the more he considers going back to school. At times when we talk he thinks he is too busy with capoeira, but lately it seems his decision to take on a Masters program is more prevalent. I am filming a class with high school students in the Kima school, the school founded by the Ausar Ausset Society. I have filmed classes and final performances of capoeira, berimbau band and bloco Afro (Samba Reggae) performances. Today the performance is Maculelé, an Afro-Brazilian warrior stick dance.

There has been a permanent Afro-centric performance curriculum since Mestre Cobra Mansa's first trip to Washington DC. The curriculum, maintained by Felicia and Treinel Babajan, has recently added the Maculelé and in order to teach the dance correctly, they need the mestre's expertise. I will record the class and burn a DVD so the instructors can have a record of the choreography to prepare the final performance of the

semester. We wait in the support office for the change of periods so the kids can assemble, for the class. Cobrinha is reading a newspaper he must have found laying around. He suddenly says, “Have I told you that I have definitely decided to do the master?” No, he has not, but he elaborates on how after the Brazilian Studies Association (BRASA) conference¹⁷⁵ where he went to participate in the alternative activities, he got the definite push he needed to decide: “Man, I didn’t realize how many academics I knew!” He has shared before how his partnership with Mathias Assunção, a historian in the University of Essex has motivated him to think about going back to school. He does not yet know what could be more effective for him a Master’s in history in Essex—“they call it history live, they do fieldwork like in anthropology” he explains—or in African and Ethnic Studies in Salvador.¹⁷⁶ Just recently, Mestre João Pequeno received his Doctorate “Honoris Causa” by the Universidade Federal da Bahia.¹⁷⁷ Mestre Cobrinha’s mind is decided: he will walk the academic path in his maturity, with his curiosity intact and with a clear idea of what to investigate. But he is waiting for the right discipline (and language) to be determined.

In the summer of 2006, the call of the berimbau brought Mestre Cobra Mansa to the roots of the tradition on his first research trip to Angola accompanying his friend Matthias R. Assunção. The trip fulfilled one of Cobrinha’s dreams—and a promise—“I

¹⁷⁵ Hosted by Tulane University in New Orleans, BRASA IX was celebrated in March 27-29, 2009. Capoeira Angola was present in a panel *Memory, Motivation, and Women's Leadership in Capoeira Angola* with presentations by Isabel de Souza and Mestra Paulinha

¹⁷⁶ Post graduate program directed by Dr. Lívio Samsone (Center of Afro-Oriental Studies (CEAO), Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) College of Philosophy and Humanities.

¹⁷⁷ The ceremony was held in April 23, 2008 and has received many critiques by the community of capoeira in the roda virtual, including Mestre Cobrinha’s because of the minimal presence of faculty during the ceremony. The important contribution to the preservation of the Afro-Brazilian culture of the oldest student alive of Mestre Pastinha, today in his nineties, is immense in spite of being illiterate. This lack of respect by the Brazilian institution contrasts sharply with the Upsala College, East Orange, NJ. where Mestre João Grande received a Doctorate of Humane Letters in 1995 with “presence of all Doctors to give [him] a great homage” (M. Cobra Mansa message on April 28, 2008. (my translation)

had made a promise I will not die before I go to Angola, can you understand that?” While Matthias had his own funded project, the idea was to make the first contacts with the people who could facilitate their research and work the libraries and institutions to gather all paper documentation. With the help and hospitality of a capoeirista from Angola, Macarrão Angolano (Mauro Fortes), Mestre Cobrinha and Matthias had a house to stay in, guests of Macarrão’s father, who is the Secretary of Health in charge of the Malaria program. After a week in Luanda, they traveled to the southern region to Lubango, in search of the N’Golo dance¹⁷⁸ vestiges.



During his first trip, Mestre Cobrinha engaged with local berimbau players, learning different techniques to produce the preso sound. Angolan musicians, a difference of Brazilians, use a fragment of bottleneck in their thumb or the fingernail to push the string, whereas across the Atlantic the preso sound is done by pressing a dobrão or stone as we saw in Marker One. With recordings, plans to write articles for popular and academic journals Mestre Cobrinha came home full of ideas and materials to develop complex research projects over time. “To be doing research about the N’golo is for me a great thing because I have always talked about without knowing what it is; like religion, we talk and believe without knowing what it is. [Publishing] the article¹⁷⁹ we made [together] was also a great accomplishment for me.”

¹⁷⁸ The Dance of the Zebra, an Angolan contemporary combat game, was documented in 1960 by Albano de Neves e Souza, a drawing artist from Angola. When he traveled to Brazil was struck by the similarities with capoeira. Based on his theory of the N’Golo dance being the origins of capoeira, was created one of the mythical narratives of origin of capoeira angola (Assunção 2005, 50-52).

¹⁷⁹ Assunção & Peçanha 2008.

In April 4, 2008 the results of the grant program “Capoeira Viva 2007”¹⁸⁰ from the Brazilian ministry of Culture were made public. In the category of “incentives for non-published projects of study, research, inventory and documentation about the development of capoeira,” an award of 9,000 BR\$ was made for Mestre Cobra Mansa’s project titled “Roots of the Berimbau: Hungu and M’bulumbumba.” Following the initial plan of returning to Angola to maintain the contacts they established in 2006, Matthias and Mestre Cobrinha will travel to Luanda in August of 2008. With a plan to work on a documentary with Richard Pakleppa¹⁸¹ about the N’Golo research and the goal in mind of making a comparative study between the Brazilian berimbau and its Angolan distant cousins, Mestre Cobrinha asked me to collaborate in the musical analysis. “None of us [Cobrinha and Matthias] have any knowledge about music, you and Macarrão [ethnomusicologist and capoeirista Juan Diego Díaz] could be good collaborating on this” Mestre Cobra offers. I find the perspective of such teamwork very attractive to me. We talk about a specific research design to get data for the comparison. I show him the tables of tuning tests I did with Fabio for the berimbaus. “I think you are the first one to take the musical analysis of the berimbau more deeper,” and we play for a while with an electronic tuner. I promise to have one for him when he comes back from his next tour. “So much I don’t know” Cobrinha says. I assure him “You keep teaching me capoeira, I will teach you music.” He explains his idea of bringing with him a berimbau to play with the local hungu performers to see how both instruments and toques relate—he intertwines his fingers to show me how the two relate with each other. I think of his Permangola

¹⁸⁰ Initiative of the Ministry of Culture and promoted by the Gregório de Mattos Foundation with founding by Petrobras.

¹⁸¹ Director and writer of the film *Angola: Saudades de Quem te Ama* (Angola: Longing from the One Who Loves You), award-winning of the Three Continents Film Festival in 2005, in the category of best documentary.

project, his research method—one of interchange and dialog—another dimension of community creation.

Family, Recovering the Lost Time

One of the thoughts Mestre Cobrinha entertains with his response to the call of the berimbau to go back home, is his chance to slow down from his capoeira commitments,



“let other people do” and have a chance to get closer to his sons and daughter. He is already working with Marcelo in London, traveling with him to capoeira events. I have seen in the last couple of years an increasing presence of Marcelo in rodas with his father. He enjoys doing things with his daughter Maria who loves to go with him to the farm. The longing to recover lost time with his family, also brings another sense of purpose to his vision for the future of FICA.

In the last week of April, 2008 there was a teleconference of the FICA Board of Directors. With mestre Jurandir leaving Seattle to move back to Brazil and the resignation of the treasurer, there is a need to cover the positions of president and treasurer and to plan for the general meeting in Chicago during the International Conference. I have asked to sit as a guest with Mestre Cobrinha and Sylvia Robinson, while the rest of the Board¹⁸² is responding to the call for the meeting by participating from their respective locations.

Mestre Cobrinha addressed the group with his reasons to become active on the board again. After he went back to Brazil he noticed that the board has not been as

¹⁸² Mestre Cobra Mansa, Al Lingo (phone), Willard Taylor (phone), Robert Cooper (phone), Ken Dossar (phone), Sylvia Robinson, Harry Frazier (phone).

cohesive with Mestre Jurandir in the leadership role as when he was on the board (first as president, then as secretary). One of the arguments Mestre Cobra made is that outside people are imitating the structure and operations of FICA and the organization should have better say in the direction for the future. He recognized how much he missed the advice and guidance of the board, to which other members agreed that they can function better when the board members are kept better informed of the needs of the organization. The board voted unanimously to support Cobra's candidacy for president.

Acknowledging the contributions made in the past by each board member — spiritually, educationally, and emotionally—Mestre Cobrinha made a plea that the members personally attend the conference in Chicago next September to see how much the organization has grown in the last ten years. He explained that students who began with FICA now have families and children and their needs are different than before. As a result, the organization must be renovated to accommodate the needs of the next generation better. FICA needs to change and grow as a group, as a community, as a family. Since the majority of the new members have never met the board members, the conference would provide a convenient opportunity to do that. The members and board will mutually benefit from the exchange of ideas, expertise and experience. At the same time Mestre Cobra expresses the new ideas that he would like to see implemented. After participating in the women's conference, and observing Mestre Cobrinha's participation in the discussions and his insights afterwards mentioned earlier in Marker Four, I heard in his call for involvement, his desire for renewal. Here the mestre does not sound to me like a *bricoleur*, improvising and creating without definite purpose. On the contrary, I see him closer to an “engineering” process, having “a pre-existing structure in mind” and using

the board members to implement and “to make concrete the abstract structure” (Carl 1997, 4). I have experienced first hand how the organization is changing because its members' needs are changing. I see how the mestre has matured as a leader. He comes back listening and “seeing” the new mothers’ training needs, their wishes to have their kids involved in capoeira; Cobrinha sees the response that is needed from the institution to its family. In the preface of her book “Composing a Life” Mary Bateson affirms: “We need to teach [our children] the skills for coming into a new place and quickly making it into a new home [...] they will need to reinvent themselves again and again in response to a changing environment” (Bateson 1989, 17). In his own example of a life with multiple beginnings, of constant reinvention, Mestre Cobrinha is crafting the future direction of FICA informed by personal, social and cultural factors, as its scaffolding is based in relationships that must be contextualized in terms of personal experiences, social communities and cultural membership (Duck, West, & Acitelli, 1997).

Mestre Cobra Mansa is engaged in building a model for a new society the same way he facilitates the learning of permaculture. “People criticize the things that don't work in society but they don't offer any alternatives” Cobra says. The message is clear, there is a need to meet the future of capoeira with a new sense of community: “We will continue to grow in our greatness within the same society.” It is an egalitarian group with shared leadership where everyone can play any of the instruments of the bateria and pass through all the roles once one acquires sufficient expertise and knowledge. I invite the reader to accompany me once more to the bench and relieve another musician, taking

advantage of this opportunity to look closer at another instrument used in capoeira—the atabaque.¹⁸³

Innovation in the Orchestra: The Heritage of Mestre Pastinha

While the contemporary orchestra setting with three berimbaus, two pandeiros, agogô, reco-reco and atabaque was fixated around 1960—although he at the time included also a *chocalho* (triangle)¹⁸⁴ (Pastinha 1968, 36)—Mestre Pastinha experimented with other instruments in combination, including some from his own background. The son of an Afro-Brazilian woman and a Spaniard, Pastinha tried the *castañuelas* (castanets) and the *viola de corda* (small Spanish guitar), a test which proved difficult to maintain with the berimbaus’ tuning or any of the other “unconventional instruments” he tested (Barbosa 1988, 79).

I find in my fieldwork pictures some shots with details of the atabaque head and body. The perspective does not match to create a composite overlapping both images, but I find the broken visual narrative a reminder of the original intention in the shot. I was documenting the details of its construction for my students, familiar with the Cuban congas and with the technology used in the construction of wine barrels from laminated oak. The conical shape of the barrel-like atabaque, a membranophone of European and African origin closely similar to the Afro-Cuban conga drum but of



¹⁸³ Although the atabaque is expected to be the last instrument to enter in the bateria, I have observed differences in practise among recordings, videos and personal experience in the rodas. Sometimes, I believe when the players of agogô and reco-reco are less experienced, they wait for the atabaque to enter, as this is the instrument that marks clearly the three beats they need to hear to start playing.

¹⁸⁴ Interestingly enough, in the “arranged” score of the angola rhythm, by Prof. Colmenero, there is not a written part for the triangle (Pastinha 1988, 43).

smaller diameter, often uses a full hair goat skin for its single head. The atabaque is utilized to accompany Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies in a family of three sizes, like the three atabaques—from largest to smallest—*rum*, *rumpi* and *lê*—used in candomblé.

While in candomblé they are played with sticks or with hand and stick, in capoeira the drum is played only with the hands. The playing technique includes the border of the drum for the high pitched sounds and the center, played with the palm, producing the lower sound. The experienced drummers with knowledge either of African drumming or religious Afro-Brazilian toques, can accompany with a richer density of accents, maintaining the basic pattern, while the novices stick to the basic four strokes that at different speeds serves as a basis for all the capoeira toques.

*The First Poem to my Djembé Drum*¹⁸⁵

*I am skating over the full moon
I am skimming your skin
Gliding my fingers over your body chart
I close my eyes and my mind flies
As far as where you are playing my heartbeat
Suddenly, as if by magic,
I can feel you so close to my sound,
Into the self sound
I know nothing about it
- 'never' or 'forever' are not enough words-
But I feel this is my world
I feel you are my people.
I'm just learning about you
- 'to possess', 'forever' ... are discarded words-
But I feel you are my world
I feel you are my people.*



¹⁸⁵ Sant Llorenç Savall, Barcelona August 14, 2000.

I wrote *The First Poem to my Djembé Drum* in English—which also has accompanying music—after some particular intense trance experiences in Professor Carolina Robertson’s seminar “Music and Ritual” during the 3rd Post Graduate Course in Ethnomusicology in Penyíscola (Castelló, Spain) organized by the University of Valencia in the summer of 2004. I wrote it with the help of a dictionary. At the time, I did not speak English, and the prospect of an invitation to the doctoral program at Maryland fueled my interest and willingness to start learning it. This poem is the first English text I produced in my life and I am very fond of it. Comparing it now with the hundreds of pages I have produced since, it seems very insignificant, but speaks of the many doors to the world around me/inside me that I discovered through an African drum. In time, the desire to get out of my musical comfort zone would take me also out of my cultural comfort zone to new discoveries and people’s music that will grow on me as a missing piece of my own musicality. As Mestre Cobrinha started traveling out of Brazil, he would find as well other cultures, people, opportunities, support, and an avenue for his own voice in the incipient international capoeira angola community in the making.

Coda Roda

(Washington, DC – March 7, 2008)

Gunga: Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___
Médio: Tchtch DIN-Dão___ Tchtch DIN-Dão___ Tchtch DIN-Dão___
Viola: Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___
Pandeiro: TUM-ba Tum *Trrsss* TUM-ba Tum *Trrsss* TUM-ba Tum *Trrsss*
Atabaque: DOOM-Bo Doom_da DOOM-Bo Doom_da DOOM-Bo Doom_da
Agogô: DON Din Don DON Din Don DON Din Don
Reco-reco: REC Rec Rec REC Rec Rec REC Rec Rec



Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Tchtch Din Tchtch DÃO-Din___ I'm holding the reco-reco, Reec Curreck Cu Reeck TakaKanka, the humble scrapper, while dancing in my seat. Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___ the *gunga* pushes from below. My rhythm is mischievous, teasing the *médio* Tchtch DIN-Dão___ Tchtch DIN-Dão___ Tchtch DIN-Tchtch Dão Tchtch DIN-Dão___ and playing hide and seek with the *viola* DÃODãoDão DÃODãoDão DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Tchtch Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___ . The sound comes up perfectly entwined with the bateria, compact and loud, like a block threading the rope for the call and response... TUM-ba Tum *Trrsss*, TUM-ba Tum *Trrsss*, the pandeiros clap in sync, TUM-ba Tum *Trrsss*, TumBa Tum *Trrsss*.

The singing is so energetic and brilliant!

*Paranaê, Paranaê, Paraná*¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Reference to the indigenous Tupi word for river or Brazil's war with Paraguay in 1864 (Assunção 2005; Lewis 1992). In the Paraná war, the capoeiristas "played a significant role as fighters in the Brazilian army, called the *Voluntários de la Patria*" the Fatherland Volunteers (Taylor 2005, 377).

I'm singing as enthusiastically as I am scraping my dance away from the bench REC Curreck-cu REC Taka Kan-ka REC Rec Rec. When a new *corrido* comes that I don't know, I just look at the lips of my fellow *agogô* player DON Din Don, DON Din Don. Oh, she looks puzzled, she doesn't know either... REC Curreck-cu, DON Din Don. We look around and we question somebody behind us who is singing wholehearted. She inclines her head between us and yells the words without interrupting the response:

*Minha sereia, rainha do mar
Não deixa meu barco virar*¹⁸⁷

Tall and steady DOOM-Bo Doom_da DOOM-Bo Doom___ the atabaque pounds. Summing my voice with confidence, I look around at close to hundred people in the room.

*Minha sereia, rainha do mar
Não deixa meu barco virar*

The circle is thick as three rows in some sides and a multitude walks around, watches from some chairs in the background or the floor, holding babies, taking pictures, controlling video cameras, embracing newcomers, selling T-shirts... The space broils with energy and life. It has been a long time since I saw so many people in this space, but never from the place I'm sitting now. I am sitting in the bateria, this is the first roda of the 10th International Capoeira Women's Conference held in FICA-DC, and today is my 48th birthday. REC TakaKanka REC Rec Rec I couldn't have asked for a better gift. I have joked with the group leaders, "Oh you just shouldn't have bothered to organize a whole conference just for my birthday!" The smiles, the goofing and the expansion of being the

¹⁸⁷ "My mermaid, queen of the sea, does not let my boat turn" is a reference to Yemanjá, Orixá of the waters.

hosts eases a bit the overload of work, responsibilities, coordination, last minute details and improvisations that come with the production of such an event. To complicate things more, it's raining... I must have somehow disconnected while my body is still playing, REC Rec Rec my throat singing the new corrido

Uma volta so,¹⁸⁸ uma volta so

because the players in the centre have finished. Mestre Cobrinha was playing a young woman and instead of crouching with the next player prepared in the *saída*, he walks towards my end of the bateria,

Uma volta so

I think he must need something from behind me and I'm about to duck out his way

Uma volta so

when he takes the instrument from my hands REC –oh, was I playing too many variações? I thought it sounded great and I could have more fun with the ornaments than with the dozing Reec-Reec-Reec... that constitutes what I've come to call “the curse of the reco-reco.” I have observed it in many rodas. The reco-reco is the instrument that, once you take it, nobody relieves you from it. Mestre Cobra hands the scraper to somebody behind me and I cannot yet quit my smile because he is also grinning, but the mestre takes both my hands making me stand and... Are you kidding me? Making me enter in the circle with him!

Uma Volta so, uma volta so

I hold my forehead in disbelief “What are you doing, are you crazy?” I want to decline, but he holds me firmly, dragging me to the roda and my smile must look like it's frozen in my face because my level of happiness has dropped dramatically and while I cannot, ever, say no to the mestre, I'm embarrassed, worried and shocked that he is conducting me

¹⁸⁸ “Just another turn” [at the game].

to the foot of the berimbau Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___. This only means that he is inviting me to play with him. The only problem here is that I don't "do" capoeira, I never had any training in the physical aspects and, of course, never have played in a roda of capoeira before.

Uma Volta so, uma volta so

My comfort level in the performance, slowly conquering spaces, goes through feeling utterly happy to sing the responses from the side

Uma Volta so...

while I take notes or pictures or film, to totally honored to be allowed to play the reco-reco in a roda REC rec rec. Moreover today, Mestre Janja has enticed me to "have much more fun" and to improvise some variations in the scraper REC Curreeck-cu REC Taka Kan-ka. I thought I was doing a pretty good darn job at it. Well, here we are. While the crowd is whistling and ho-hooing at the promise of a fun spectacle laughing and clapping, I crouch holding hands with Cobrinha and I notice the bateria slowing down a bit the fast pace, thank you guys.

Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din__

Tchtch DIN-Dão___ Tchtch DIN-Dão___

Tchtch DÃO-Din___ Tchtch DÃO-Din___

Uma Volta so, uma volta so

This is not a very comfortable posture for me, so I switch one of my knees to hold myself steady against the floor and I notice somebody from behind pulling the camera strap from my rear pocket while I try to grasp what is about to happen. My mind is racing frantically searching my memory bank. Could I possibly imitate any of the moves I have seen so



many times in classes, in rodas, in videos over the last seven years? I am beyond “out of shape.” I have, in fact, too much shape and in the wrong places to play capoeira. Well, you better stop being self conscious right this minute and start

thinking about what is going to happen next. Next, comes too fast right there. The corrido has stopped and over the bateria music a new song comes out from Cobrinha’s throat that extends like gunpowder among all.

Parabéns pra você

I laugh squeezing his hands, and bow my head in the quickest prayer ever, not for safety as the capoeiristas usually pray, just to overcome the immense prank and honor Cobrinha is inflicting at me. □



Nesta data querida

No more commiseration, he is extending his arms signaling the center of the circle where, God help me, I’m rising to follow because there is no escape—too many witnesses—and I’m going to play capoeira with

the mestre for the first time in my life! □

Muitas felicidades

The birthday song comes strong, “à la capoeira.” Leaving the safe, sacred place to start the jogo, I’d like to get up more gracefully, but when I see his ginga, I think I will be fine... I can ginga! Or at least I am trying... I can see a blur of the smiling faces, the sound is a surrounding effect like in a surrealist bright



movie theater with loud black and yellow speakers. I feel the flashes; I can't believe I am in the circle, premiering a ginga, swaying my body. Oh Buddha, you never thought you would be playing capoeira today, uh? I feel I could lose the pounds, the years, the stupid rules about what your *señorita* body could and couldn't do. I swing against Cobrinha's ginga hoping that it looks as it feels, just trying to be present and aware... How long can a birthday song possibly last?



Muitos anos de vida!

Oh boy, now they are going for a second round with the same style and strong will and hey, is that a *rabo de arraia*? I'd better duck that leg! I look for the name in my mind, or was it a *chapa*?

Parabéns pra você

Nesta data querida

But I am already turning to avoid another attack and this is not just a little ginga, I am so ill-prepared for this, but I can try to show some spirit here, can't I? I extend a sweeping leg on my own, no style probably, but I see Cobrinha jumping back with a yelp, big comedian...

Muitas felicidades

Going to his hands and people laughing and cheering. I'm panting now, but this is fun. I wish I'd know more so I could dialog better with our bodies while it seems impossible, I'm still smiling and oh boy, is the video camera still rolling? So many flashes!

Muitos anos de vida!

Luckily, in one of the crouched moves that he is trying to engage with me, I grab his hands and he raises with me and wraps me in an embrace that only breaks when he



stops the bateria. IÊ! He hugs me tight while I hold onto him my heart racing and pouring gratitude, can't bring to an end my swaying movement, it seems the boat floor should stop moving. Everybody is clapping and cheering the clicking on some instruments' part of the

ovation. I know what just happened and how important it is for the community to be celebrated in the circle. I have witnessed other birthday and farewell rodas, and the person who is celebrated plays, even if briefly, everybody else. They take a hug from everyone, they leave with a piece of every single member. We break our embrace and I go back to the corner behind the new reco-reco player. I see now it's Mestra Paulinha, one of the guests from Brazil smiling widely at me—as everybody else, opening her arms to hug me. Treinel Fabio, at the viola, jokes, “Now you know you have to play everybody else!” That's the tradition, but I just shake him off... Once, it's already too many occasions of embarrassment! And the joke it's really funny; there must be almost sixty people sitting around!

Mestre Cobrinha crouches again at the foot of the berimbau and the chatter, the clapping, the happy noises fade out at his attention calls. Hey... Listen! Everybody is quiet now. “I just wanted to say thank you Isa, because she has been... that's why I put her in the roda because she doesn't play capoeira...” I had to crack one for the peanut gallery “NOW, I do!” Mestre laughs “Yeah she just got started...” And everybody giggles, claps and cheers, shakes the caxixí or strikes the berimbau, roots for me, for daring to start, more flashes. God is this being recorded? But he wants to say more. And

when I see him closing his eyes, my heart skips a bit. I have seen him talk with his eyes closed before. I have observed in many circles, after the classes, in the discussion, when he closes his eyes to talk, he is going somewhere inside, reaching for a place where you don't know who is talking. Surely he speaks from his heart and his message touches every person in the room. He starts in the middle of the thick silence by acknowledging publicly my work. "I just wanted to say that many people don't play in the roda, but play capoeira in many different ways. She has been playing capoeira in many, many different ways not only here as a resource for the group but also in Brazil." I'm overwhelmed and suddenly very shy, my smile getting too shiny at my eye level. He talks from that place of transcendence and everyone of us listens intently. He explains how there are many ways of participating in capoeira and how my work has helped him not just personally, but also the organization. He tells how many people over the years have done many things for capoeira that may not be happening in the roda. He wanted to take that opportunity to make that work visible.

I don't think there is any space to talk or say anything after that sincere speech of acknowledgement, done on such a special occasion in the context of a very populated event, so I just touch my heart and give muted thanks to everybody. After that, I am walking like in a dream. I have played capoeira! The roda continues, without me. I go to the kitchen to drink some water. On my way, many people I don't know hug me and wish me happy birthday. I look at their smiles. They are welcoming, happy, glowing eyes; they look so young! Isabel catches me at the door threshold where she has been watching and gives me a long hug. I just have met her this morning. Mestre Cobrinha thinks I have to talk to her: "She knows me so well, she can help you a lot; she remembers things I have

forgotten.” In her hug, over the music that continues loud and vibrant, she tells me very close so I don’t miss a word “Don’t be embarrassed about your jogo. What you did today, was what many woman have gone through many times in the past for many years. They could not train, or they wouldn’t be accepted to train, so they only could do what you have done, just a little ginga and quickly leave the roda. You are exactly where many woman have been in capoeira before.”

Immediate relief and gratitude filled me. I don’t think I am ever going to forget her words, this day, for many reasons. They gave me an instantaneous sense of history, of experience through history. I felt at once included, as if the jogo by itself honoring my birthday was not enough tribute. I was not alone. How many women would have liked to occupy their bodies so freely, so deliberately? My last years have been tied up, seated in a classroom, in front of a computer, on top of a book, not much walking or playing or doing much else. Who knows what my future life in capoeira will bring from now on?

<i>A capoeira</i>	The capoeira
<i>Que meu mestre me ensinou</i>	That my teacher taught me
<i>Ai menino joga Angola</i>	Play Angola little boy
<i>Que eu também lhe dou valor</i>	I will also give you strength

Velha Companheira (M. Cobra Mansa, 2005)

Epilogue: Reflecting on the Process: The Birth of a Dissertation [Spring 2008]

Place: Takoma Park (USA)

Rhythm: Silent murmur of memories

Movement: Sitting still in a chair with occasional Qigong exercises

Instrument: Computer keyboard

On April 30, 2008 when I was working on the last stages of my dissertation, a press release¹⁸⁹ jumped to the immediate attention of capoeira discussion circles and virtual rodas. The coordinator of the Federal University of Bahia's (UFBA) course of medicine, Professor Antonio Dantas Natalino Manta, declared that the students were responsible for the low score received in the National Performance Review of Students in 2007 (ENADE).¹⁹⁰ For him, the low scores were due to the intellectual inferiority of the medical students of UFBA (Abrantes, 2008a). When asked for more information to clarify his assertions, Dantas did not hesitate to give concrete examples of what he thought was the real reason for the failure.¹⁹¹ As I read the news clips, I could not believe these were the opinions of an "educated" university professor. Professor Dantas claimed that one example of irrefutable proof of a low IQ was the popularity of the berimbau, a symbolic instrument for Bahia. The berimbau only has a single string, so it cannot adequately stimulate the neurons in the brain, he argued. The same result was produced in

¹⁸⁹ *A Tarde*. April 30, 2008

¹⁹⁰ The Brazilian ENADE, substituted a prior exam (the Provão who evaluated the student) and is the primary source of statistics for the Ministry of Education, is part of the National Higher Education Evaluation System. It is composed of a test, a questionnaire evaluating the knowledge of the students in their last semester, a questionnaire to be answered by the program coordinators and a socio-economic questionnaire, emphasizing the evaluation (grade varies from 1 to 5) on the institution more than the students. There are distorted results sometimes as students boycott the exams by handling them in blank. http://www.universia.com.br/html/noticia/noticia_clipping_dchgb.html [accessed on June 6, 2008]

¹⁹¹ Portal Vermelho, April 30, 2008

<http://www.vermelho.org.br/base.asp?texto=36987> [accessed on April 30, 2008]

his opinion, by the music of popular Afro-reggae groups like Olodum¹⁹² which he qualified as “tucutum- tucutum – tucutum,” or mere noise (Abrantes, 2008b).¹⁹³

“O resultado ruim (referindo-se a nota 2 obtida pelo curso no Enade) é por causa do baixo QI dos alunos. É uma coisa que precisa ser desmistificada essa suposta inteligência do baiano. Isso não existe. Um dos símbolos da Bahia é o Berimbau e não é o tipo de instrumento para pessoas inteligentes. É para o indivíduo que tem dificuldade, pois não estimula os neurônios porque tem uma corda só e não precisa de muita celebração,” declarou Dantas na entrevista. O professor culpou ainda o sistema de cotas para afro-descendentes pelo mau desempenho. “A prova foi feita com alunos do primeiro semestre e do último semestre. Pode estar havendo uma contaminação das cotas e influência da transformação curricular nesse resultado,” disse. Dantas, que é baiano, citou que tal inferioridade de inteligência justificaria, entre outras coisas, o baixo desenvolvimento sócio-econômico do Estado, “apesar das grandes riquezas naturais,” a popularidade do berimbau, “o típico instrumento de quem tem poucos neurônios,” e a música de grupos tradicionais, como o Olodum, que ele qualificou como “barulho.”

“The bad outcome (referring to the note 2 obtained by the course in the Enade) is because of the low IQ of the students. This supposed intelligence of Bahian people is one thing that needs desmystification. That does not exist. One of the symbols of Bahia is the Berimbau and is not the type of instrument for intelligent people. It is for the person who has difficulty, because it doesn’t stimulate the neurons because it has only one string and does not need much effort,” Dantas said in the interview. The professor also blamed the system of quotas for African-descendants for the bad performance. “The test was done with students of the first semester and the last semester. It can be a contamination of the quotes and its influence in the curriculum transformation in these results,” he said. Dantas, who is from Bahia, mentioned that this inferiority of intelligence would warrant, among other things, the low socio-economic development of the state, “despite the great natural wealth,” the popularity of the berimbau, “the typical instrument of those who have few neurons” and the traditional music of groups such as Olodum, which he described as “noise.”

The indignation on the forums and the volume of emails complaining of the prejudiced comments of Dantas were just an echo of the Bahian clamor in public venues.

¹⁹² The blocos Afro are constituted only by percussion instruments like in the carnival escolas de samba

¹⁹³ <http://www.atarde.com.br/fw/cp/2007/09/audio.jsf?id=875283> [accessed on April 30, 2008]

Dantas resigned five days later and submitted a public note of apology¹⁹⁴ where the most interesting paragraph for our subject refers to the berimbau.

Sobre o berimbau, por exemplo, a minha falta de familiaridade com o mesmo me levou a uma noção distorcida. Diante das explicações dadas nos últimos dias pelos experts, contudo, passei a concebê-lo como um instrumento musical complexo e de difícil execução.

About the berimbau, for example, my lack of familiarity with it brought me to have a distorted notion. Given the explanations given by experts in recent days, however, I arrived to conceptualize it as a complex musical instrument of difficult execution.

I became a sort of junk reader of “all things Dantas” for a week, sharing my link collection with Cobrinha in one of our chats. The capoeira forums were broiling over the direct allusion, and soon they started to produce comments and responses of different tone and scope. There was a piece in particular by Bahian André Carvalho that Cobrinha forwarded to the roda virtual that caught my attention for its wittiness and its musical symbolic references:

THE BERIMBAU IQ¹⁹⁵
For André Carvalho
Wednesday, May 14, 2008
btreina@yahoo.com.br

Although I am from the heart of Bahia, I just bought a harp. I did so because I wanted.¹⁹⁶ It was difficult to find a harp to buy here in the blessed city of Salvador. The Bahian does not reach for these things much. The few that exist are in museums, and it is known, in the home of a teacher, doctor, university coordinator.

My harp has forty-six strings and seven pedals and its design is similar to that used in the harps of Caldeans in 600 BC. I had some difficulty in counting all

¹⁹⁴ A Tarde 04/05/2008

¹⁹⁵ Translated with permission from <http://ctecapoeiragem.blogspot.com/2008/05/qi-do-berimbau.html> [accessed on May 20, 2008].

¹⁹⁶ In the original text in Portuguese the author uses a popular expression “Filo porque Quilo” (Fiz porque quis) used by populist Brazilian president from Mato Grosso Jânio Quadros. I have omitted the phrase with the benevolent permission of the author because it made cumbersome the translation.

its strings. I confess, I was so upset that I got confused about three or four times and I needed the help of a friend, Antônio, much more quick witted than myself, to achieve the task. Despite my passage through the Federal University of Bahia, in the 70s, I get stuck in things which concern the arithmetic. The UFBA is not at fault, because the issue is the IQ. It may be that accustomed as I am to the berimbau monochord, I could not be any different.

I opted for the harp in the hope of raising my IQ to stratospheric numbers, following a new evolutionary theory that is being drafted and developed by doctors here in Bahia. Never before has anything similar been seen. The theory is: the more strings you play, the more intelligent you are. So the guitarist who plays a guitar of twelve strings is smarter than the mandolin player with its eight strings, which in turn is smarter than the bass player that is as intelligent as the cavaquinho¹⁹⁷ player, and so forth. As you may have noticed, at the base of the pyramid of intellect are the berimbau players.

What amazes me in scientific studies is the profusion of new and revolutionary ideas. Research is precisely for this. It is a pity that Brazil has to refurbish the deans' magnificent apartments and so little is left over for research. With more money, we could study the influence of percussion on the results of vestibular exams, for example. Will the *bum, bum, bum, bum, bum* help or prevent the drummer to join the university? If it helps, does help more in medicine or engineering? Another interesting research project would be to relate musical instruments to specific courses. For law, is better suited to playing a wind instrument, a clarinet, perhaps. Do you want success in economic sciences? Then play oboe, and so on. Once these hypotheses are proven, it would improve much the performance of students in evaluating examinations, type ENADE¹⁹⁸ and OAB¹⁹⁹. There is only one small thing that intrigues me about the outcome of all this. It is that among the instruments that I know, the one most similar to the harp is the berimbau. Indeed the berimbau is a one string harp. It is a proof of intelligence of its inventors; they replaced forty-five strings and seven pedals with a gourd, a rod, a caxixí and a stone, building a fantastic instrument that produces the sounds needed for a happy existence. The berimbau is cheaper, lightweight, more portable, easy to maintain and more sought after in the market. Apart from myself or any other fool, nobody buys a harp, but the whole world buys a berimbau to take home, right?

Playing the berimbau is not for anyone. They say a gift from God. Extract from a single string the profusion of sounds that the players are able to it must be work of the same gods. I imagine a berimbau playing the famous harmonic themes of Christmas! Wonderful! Eagerly, I await the progress of the new stages of research.

¹⁹⁷ The cavaquinho is a small steel-stringed four-string guitar, related to the ukelele, descendant from an old Portuguese instrument called machete. (Crook 2005, 43)

¹⁹⁸ The Brazilian National Student Performance Exam (ENADE) is part of the National Higher Education Evaluation System

¹⁹⁹ The Brazilian Bar Association

The more I heard the seventy year old doctor explain and justify his opinions based on his “cultivated” musical sensibility, the more I understood the urgency to educate the general population about the biases and preconceptions attached to any aspect of culture, including the performance of an instrument. Mestre Cobra Mansa’s fervor to actively claim credit for the contributions of people from African descent to Brazilian culture, through the multi-art form of capoeira, is more justified than ever.²⁰⁰ In one of his radio interviews, I learned that Dantas has been learning to play the piano, and his musical education has made him more in tune with multiple string instruments like the violin and harp. I cannot help feeling some sympathy for Dantas. His limited vision of the world—it could have been me—led to irrevocably damaging the last years of his teaching career, condemning him to be the public image of Brazilian society’s need for change. To the Dantas of this world, I can offer my insights after twenty-five years of being freed from a musical tradition that oppressed my creativity and tainted my perception of the world around me. I do not deny the tradition’s contribution to who I am today, but I am very glad I had the courage to depart from it in search of new musicalities.

I wrote the poem *Learning, Daring* during one of my phenomenological raptures of comprehension. I realized what the piano as an instrument had symbolized in my life—as in many people’s lives like Dantas, who have not discovered yet how cultural values attach to things, to instruments. The piano represented my disconnection with an intimate desire to “know” and “be” in the world that only knowing other instruments from different cultures would satisfy. These instruments allowed me to participate in the

²⁰⁰ I am using the word “contribution” here with great care for when the Africans arrived to Brazil there was not a unique culture in place less something than could be called Brazilian. What today is Brazilian culture is the result of the encounters many different cultural groups (Portuguese and other European countries, Native Indian and a variety of cultural groups from Africa).

music in an embodied and creative way that could not occur from the fixity of my piano bench and with my eyes glued to the scores.

LEARNING, DARING
(Isa Angulo, Washington D.C., Fall 2004)

When I learned to touch ivory and ebony keys
I did not touch elephants or trees.
When I dare instead to touch skin
I do touch goats, cows, me.
When I learned to play paper, norm, or skills,
I did not play life, freedom, or gifts.
When I dare instead to play air, world, dreams,
I do play earth, you, me.
When I sat obedient and still
I could not breathe or expand to be.
When I dance instead, rebel and spark,
I can flow and become me.

Since the day I decided to write my dissertation about Mestre Cobra Mansa²⁰¹ using a life history approach, I have received many notes of advice from the capoeira community: “You will write about the spirituality in capoeira, won’t you?”—and from the academic community: “You will put the art form in its historical context, won’t you?” There are a lot of anxiety and power struggles involved in the research process. In my case, I was anxious to satisfy the maximum number of people who had a stake in the topic while meeting all academic standards and expectations. Noy, a young scholar, describes the same anguish writing her dissertation with the challenges of translating into narrative the oral accounts of backpackers in Jerusalem. She qualifies these academic

²⁰¹ This was my first dissertation topic, although I entertained over a year the possibility of writing a phenomenological account of how one learns a culture through the process of learning to play an instrument like the berimbau. The reader will find many references to the original draft “Music in the Bones” and in my personal journals. It was a heartbreaking decision to put that project aside for the future, but the encounter with phenomenological writing enhanced my sensitivity for experimentation with new writing techniques. Without them, this dissertation would not be as engaging in performance as it is.

endeavors as “rites of passage,” recognizing a new model of academic practice with different moral codes:

[...] Post-modern and post-structural dissertation endeavors—where the research structure is negotiable and is as much a process as it is a form and where reflexivity is central—a different morale is bestowed. Here, improvisation, intuition, candidness, and personal as well as social and cultural sensitivities, are sought after and valued. The different narratives of rites of passage educate the young scholar along different avenues and endow him or her with a different moral code: One more conservative and one more liberal, one more ‘serious’ (Gurevitch, 2000), and the other more playful, one more abstract, the other more embodied. Neutrality is exchanged for involvement, passivity for agency. (Noy 2005, 373)

As Noy outlines the characteristics of a new paradigm of dissertation writing, I recognize that my own academic project is an experiment in translating multi-channeled real life experiences into the medium of linear writing. In the process of writing this dissertation, I am simultaneously engaging in self-reflexivity along with my journaling, with the ethnographic writing itself, and with my phenomenological excursions into performance. These threads of real life experiences have helped me to negotiate the multidisciplinary aspects that this research exercise develops at the intersection of several areas of study.

Scholarly Work in Capoeira Studies

This dissertation is the first biographical study, in the field of studies of capoeira, made of a mestre of the capoeira angola tradition. Furthermore, it is the first time that the direct opinions, stories, and experiences of a mestre are included in an academic text. The voice of Mestre Cobra Mansa and through him—the voice of his mestres—carries the influence of a community repeatedly made invisible by society and institutions alike, historically and contemporarily, as we saw in the Dantas example. Even though Professor

Dantas made the berimbau visible by effect of a reverse negativity, the cultural values he attached publically to it, the historical disadvantage and cultural exploitation of Afro-Bahian working and impoverished classes (Ickes 2003) is still pervasive in Brazilian society, much like negative cultural values about jazz were for my conservatory professor in Spain.

I discussed the roles of the mestre in the capoeira tradition, deepening in understanding of previous sketches, where no full studies of individual mestres existed (D'Aquino 1983; Assunção 2005), stressing how they change in contemporary globalized settings (Campos 2001; Assunção 2005). The mestre is always a disciple, a continuous practitioner and comrade at the same time that he is a teacher as we have seen in Markers One through Three by following the different stages of apprenticeship in Cobrinha's life. In addition to being the repository of knowledge acting as paladin of the angola style and main agent of documenting its preservation discussed in Marker Three, there are other recognized roles within the tradition today such as ambassador of Afro-Brazilian culture and expert consultant along with the roles of researcher and innovator as revealed in Markers Four and Five. Specifically, my dissertation has shown how aspects of the mestre's individuality affects change in the transmission of the art form, comparing Mestre Cobrinha with earlier mestres like Moraes, in his availability to travel, with João Grande in developing his English communication skills or with Pastinha himself, by developing his capoeira skills as an exceptional fighter (Rego 1968, 270). The life of Mestre Cobrinha enlightens us as to how the visible traditional roles of the mestre evolve and adapt to new needs within the capoeira community and with the larger society as well.

In terms of the political commitment of Mestre Cobrinha, we have had a chance to understand how the advancement of capoeira relates directly with the advancement of black people. Being an angoleiro may not necessarily be related to the practitioner's skin color, but it certainly is related to his/her political thoughts: "To be an angoleiro is a way of living, thinking and acting."²⁰² We have seen through the life history of Cobrinha exactly how a mestre applies this angolero way today and how deep the commitment is to transmit the tradition. It has taken him around the world.

The "elaborated structure of apprenticeship" (Downey 2005, 38) one encounters today in capoeira is illustrated in Cobrinha's experiences as a learner (Marker One through Three), as well as in his creation of new contexts of teaching as a mestre (Markers Four and Five). Compared to other systems of discipleship already investigated and documented in detail like the *shagirdi* (Hindustani discipleship) described by Regula Qureshi (2007) about her experience learning the *sarangi*²⁰³ between the *ustad* (teacher) and the *shagird* (student), there are several common threads as well as differences. In the Indian tradition, the relationship between teacher and student is often regarded as between a guru and his disciple with all the devotion that this implies of spiritual leadership. I have often heard to Cobrinha deny a similar role for him, even when he is sought after by his students with many requests: from marriage counseling to health remedies, or as *padrinho* (godfather) to their children. On the other hand, the ties symbolized by the formalized ritual of acceptance of the student for life by the Indian *ustad* has a similar acknowledgment in capoeiristas,

²⁰² Mestre Cobra Mansa in ICAF News, Sept. 1998:3

²⁰³ North Indian bowed instrument with 3 playing strings and 35 sympathetic strings without fret or fingerboard.

once student of a mestre always his disciple maintaining that respect beyond personal or philosophical differences; there are innumerable accounts of how badly is regarded “changing mestres” for a capoeirista. If the culture of patronage is indeed different for the maintenance of capoeira and their leaders, as their Indian counterpart, I find some convergences, more so in contemporary times of what could be compared to the “hereditary professional musicianship” observed in the Hindustani musical lineages. As the sons of Mestre Cobrinha’s generation, (Cobrinha’s sons Marcelo and Makindé or Mestre Jurandir and Valmir sons) take a more active role in the rodas we could see a similar lineage from the mestre’s family members. However, as skilled and naturally talented players they may be, it is only through dedication to the other aspects of capoeira transmission they will in turn had their acknowledgement—and their mastery—by the capoeira community. It is only in recent years that being a mestre of the tradition has acquired some acknowledgement and social acceptance, not comparable with the prestige that classical Indian musicians have had for generations.

In contrast with the structured teaching and learning, the practice of learning by imitation directly as in the old times is seen in street rodas (D’Aquino 1983, Abreu 2003, Caxias 2005). Downey discusses how the capoeiristas borrow historical explanations from academic discussions of capoeira in a two-way traffic: “The voracious imaginations of capoeiristas follow close on the heels of historians, quickly incorporating their readings into poetic readings of the rhythms, textures and gestures of the game” (Downey 2005,

56). I, in contrast, propose to give back to the academic literature borrowed ideas from native capoeira discourses such as Mestre Cobrinha's.

A cultural biography of a mestre of capoeira adds to the current literature for the very first time an understanding of how contemporary history occurs through the eyes of the people who make contributions to the preservation and advancement of the traditional art form. The readers have heard in Mestre Cobrinha's own words his experience of contemporary capoeira history through the ethnographic work in Markers One to Five. History based on ethnography adds to initiatives of facilitating dialog between disciplines—ethnomusicology and musicology or anthropology and history—(Qureshi 2007, 3) and now scholarly studies of capoeira.

My dissertation also showcases the values transmitted through capoeira, the philosophical and spiritual principles giving an additional weight to what it means to be a capoeirista today beyond the adequate practice of physical and musical skills. "Different ideas or priorities of knowledge (epistemology) are often dismissed given the nature of who is in control politically or ideologically" (Meyer 2008, 230). In this case, Mestre Cobrinha has shown where he stands and what the agency is in his work. As we have seen in Marker Three, the revival of capoeira was in part due to the use of Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions by the Black Movement "in their search for a black alternative to hegemonic Western, Eurocentric values" (Assunção 2005, 24), while the capoeira angola tradition benefited from connecting and embracing its Africaness and political consciousness, its Kongo/Angola and Diaspora aesthetic and philosophical message (Dossar 1994; Tavares 1998). In turn, connection with foreign scholars and visitors propitiated the art form expansion worldwide as we explored in Marker Four. It also

shows the innovations Mestre Cobrinha introduced in the practice—fruit of organizational adaptation—like the certification of treinels to teach in absence of the mestre, changes that keep the tradition organically alive and evolving under the needs of the times and circumstances.

My study also opens new avenues for future research in the capoeira studies. We have seen how male leadership positions have developed in contemporary capoeira, but where are the women leaders and what are their life stories, their struggles and accomplishments? Even though the practice has been open to women for the last two decades and women have claimed their own space to discuss and bring forth their needs, only in recent years have a few women become recognized in leadership positions. Mestra Janja and Mestra Paulinha were the two first female students of Mestres Moares and Cobrinha in the GCAP. Their lives are also lives of struggle to be visible and equal, to access enough power to make changes and sensitize the community about the female needs, visions and ways of doing. In the same fashion, the role of the “leaders in process,” the treinels, their responsibilities, dreams and expectations have not yet been adequately documented or studied.

Lastly, in the intersection of capoeira studies and ethnomusicology there is room and interest for more detailed study of the characteristics of the musical instruments, especially the berimbau, its tuning system and methods of transcription and notation for further analysis. Systematization and revision of previously used methods are also necessary. I have shown an example of analyzing tuning systems that will benefit further research as well as crosscultural notation experimentation. If the field of the scholarly

work is not accessible to the general public there are other themes that can be highlighted for the capoeira community.

Community Produced Studies

This dissertation adds to the personal written and published narratives made by other capoeira regional mestres in English such as Néstor Capoeira (2002, 2003, 2005) and Mestre Acordeon (Bira Almeida, 1986).²⁰⁴ Although this work may not be considered as “author-ized”—written by Mestre Cobra Mansa’s hand directly—in the sense of how much of his direct voice is included in the narrative, along with experiences and insights by students and close related capoeiristas fruit of an oral historicity, I consider him as the co-author all along. His story brings a contemporary “history of musics embedded within a family group and repertory stored not in a library with a text but in a brain with a context” (Qureshi 2007, 3). This dissertation provides a vehicle to do so also in a text. While Néstor Capoeira updated in 2003 an earlier version of his widely known “The Little Capoeira Book” with a section on new trends in capoeira, the absence is notable of any mention of the work realized by an international organization like FICA in the United States and beyond. In this sense, this dissertation—without pretending to provide the institutional memory of the organization—adds valuable information to the survey of groups operating in and outside Brazil disseminating capoeira.

Additionally, in view of how popular videos about legendary mestres of capoeira such Pastinha (Muricy 1999), Leopoldina (Lacreta, 2005) and Bimba (Goulart 2008) have become among capoeiristas in Brazil and abroad, this dissertation offers primary source material for future research projects. Even though Mestre Cobra Mansa belongs

²⁰⁴ I want to acknowledge Mestre Russo’s book, where he writes about his experience and memories of the Roda Livre de Caxias in Portuguese (Caxias 2005).

still to the category of “young” mestres, given his openness and familiarity with filmmaking, I see a growing interest to tap into the vast resources of his personal and FICA archival material to undertake any biographic or autobiographic project in the near future.

Life History

I believe the life history approach used in this study to understand how the mestre of capoeira engages with multiple cultural traditions during a life time, and how his understanding of these traditions impacts the way he modifies, preserves and teaches the capoeira angola art form, are helpful contributions to the discipline of ethnomusicology, both in the content and in the form of the ethnographical writing. I have discussed how Mestre Cobra engaged with other kinds of cultural traditions outside capoeira like the street culture presented in Markers One through Three, or the spirituality of Afro-Brazilian religion and political orientations introduced in Marker Two which affected his life during the formative years. He talks of how his spiritual path and his capoeira path “became one” in Bahia, but we have seen how his political and social consciousness would also become merged in his dedication to capoeira. Additional cultural traditions and encounters outside Brazil during his traveling—the acquisition of English as a second language—had an additional effect, especially in his engagement with capoeira and the ways in which he has developed it worldwide. In composing his life, Mestre Cobrinha as a good jazz musician with his improvisation, used the “existential motifs” that life brought to him in a very creative way:

We are engaged in a day-by-day process of self-invention—not discovery for what we search for does not exist while we find it—both the past and the future are raw material shaped and reshaped by each individual. (Bateson 1989, 28)

Following this reshaping, another area of questioning in my work concerns how other kinds of social relationships outside capoeira affect the way in which the mestres of the tradition, and Cobra in particular, play their role within capoeira. We have seen Mestre Cobra developing kinship ties between birth, social and capoeira families with childhood friends becoming capoeira comrades, spiritual leaders becoming mothers, lovers becoming sponsors and researchers becoming mentors. Of cultural value but also of social value is this last relationship. With Cobra's personal penetration into academic realms through his interaction with scholars and the pursuit of his research interests, we can anticipate these relationships will bring him into new areas of expertise and cultural fluency in the future. On the back side of these social interactions we have seen how the priority of his commitment to capoeira "fell through" the relationships with lovers and partners, even disciples who did not understand, respect or support his priority engagement with capoeira in his own terms.

His personal value system—spiritual, moral, political, social and ethical—moves his act in the world, embedded deeply in capoeira philosophy. We have followed how his sense of freedom dictates moves and decisions inside and outside the capoeira tradition through all sections of this dissertation. Once developed, his sense of struggle for liberation of oppressed people and for racial and social equality (Marker Two and beyond) we have observed his sense of shared power and leadership (in Markers Three through Five), his sense of responsibility and commitment (in Markers Four and Five) and his ultimate sense of transcendence—in the preservation of the tradition mission statement of FICA and what is "good for capoeira" and his legacy "for the future" (Marker Five).

In the interest of politics of representation, one of my initial research concerns was how the academic writing of a dissertation—as the performance of a *roda* of capoeira—might serve as an ethnographic writing model in support of the representation of a life history narrative in its cultural context, being respectful of the performative aspects of the tradition. Taking advantage of Caughey’s invitation to consider the life history narrative a “relatively open genre” (Caughey 2005, 77), all sections in the architectural making of my dissertation followed the structure of the *roda*. Especially in Marker One, in the beginning of each chapter-jogo with their changes of *toques*, the musical interludes supported the narrative as life in the context of performance, acting as markers for the unveiling of the performance itself and providing a metaphor for human development since childhood.

In each section, I have used literary strategies of engagement to draw the reader into the performance—the act of getting closer to the instruments in the *bateria*, to invite a look at them from the performer’s point of view (Cobrinha’s, other capoeiristas, the author). These micro-organological studies served as a vehicle to stress the importance of music in capoeira, in Mestre Cobra’s life, and the essential role that music plays in the shared leadership to maintain the energy of the *roda*. Similarly, the multi-textured techniques of inserting visual and aural texts in the narrative have played an important role helping me with the representation of Cobrinha’s life inside and outside capoeira. These literary techniques make the account of Mestre Cobra Mansa’s life an interpretation from a particular point of view—mine as researcher and author—very much “a construction composed and rhetorical” without precluding the veracity of the

account of a real mestre of capoeira “filtered through” my particular relationship with my research partner (Caughey 2006, 83-4).

I have used “frozen images” like stage pictures of the live performance or life occasion; they are “simply the starting point for a prelude to the action,” and my support following Caughey’s advice to “show and tell” the reader progressively about particular aspects of Cobrinha’s life or capoeira, working across language and culture barriers (Jackson 2002, xix). According to visual ethnographer Sarah Pink, these images become “ethnographic” without conforming to specific conventions or styles just by being used as such and justify its use to “understand how knowledge was produced through video recording” which the reader has experience in the sequences of symbolic capoeira moves, especially in Markers One and Two (Pink 2001, 139-41).

In addition, it might be fruitful to use the application of my ethnographic model to other cultures, other structures of performance, highlighting the nuances of different performance styles and genres. If the technologies of writing ethnography are not just enhanced but multi-dimensionalized with the inclusion of visual and aural texts as I have demonstrated, it is yet to be explored how to integrate new technologies to present our work multidimensionally.

Biographies for Mentoring: The Journey of the Hero

It does not take long in reading my ethnographical account of Mestre Cobra Mansa’s life to see the journey of the hero in the narrative of Cobrinha’s life history. When I asked him what his agenda was in collaborating in my research project, he just said, “I want to inspire other people, like a role model, for people who go through

difficulties. If you believe in what you are doing and just keep going, you can do well.”

Joseph Campbell defines the hero as:

The champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo. The hero's task always has been and always will be to bring new life to a dying culture. (Campbell 1949, 20)

For Campbell, the heroic victory lays in the courage to act in the vision of the new truth. Mestre Cobra found in capoeira a tool for personal transformation and acted on it, and then dedicated his life to the transmission of the tradition worldwide at great personal cost. “I tell my students don't do it, the price is too high” he confesses. He has to recover the lost time he could not dedicate to his children and family: “I was a bad father and a bad husband.” I believe that no matter what our occupation is, reading Cobrinha's life is an inspiration not to emulate the American Dream of what “everyone can do,” but to “go with the same sort of spirit about our everyday life affairs” (Roth 2005, 15).

Although the exploration of empowerment through capoeira has been suggested in previous research (Ottier 2005), counselors, mentors and social justice activists will find in this cultural biography an interesting example of how social changes are made through community activism in performance driven by individual and shared leadership. Certainly, this is a topic that interests Mestre Cobra, for he has been collecting papers from attendants to his workshops for more than ten years about how capoeira has transformed their lives. These papers in English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Swedish, Italian... are raw data that any historian or sociologist would have to put to work to further illuminate what capoeira means to people worldwide.

Ethnomusicology

This dissertation is a research exercise to explore what a life history approach can tell us about a musician—a multi art performer—and his relationship to his musical and performance traditions. As a contribution to the growing literature in individual studies, my work echoes the concerns of other ethnomusicologists about the lack of information about teachers/performers in the field (Nettl 1983, 278), and it gives space to the up till now “voiceless” mestres of capoeira (Bohlman 1988, 69).

In discussing what a life history approach of Cobra Mansa can tell us about his relationship with the capoeira tradition, his attraction to the calling of capoeira and his dedication to its practice, we have seen the contemporary history of capoeira unfolding hand and hand with his biography, “becoming inseparable,” and the meaning that this practice has to him, heard in his own words, a sample of the researcher’s concern for voice going “beyond speaking for someone else” (Stock 2001, 6).

Uncovering how Mestre Cobra Mansa develops the art form of capoeira angola and transmits it in ways that relate to his life and experience with cultural traditions outside of capoeira, relates with issues of broader concern to ethnomusicologists such as cross cultural musical transmission or useful insights into subjectivity. Some of the themes discussed though Cobrinha’s life history that relate specifically to the capoeira angola art form and to the larger theme of orally transmitted musical traditions are addressed as follows: aspects of apprenticeship in Markers One and Two, mastery in Marker Three, innovation and development of new knowledge in Markers Four and Five, and his personal footprint on the tradition and in the world as discussed in Marker Five.

In the specific area of studies of transmission, my study documents how contemporary changes in the traditions occur when they leave the original contexts of performance to travel to distant, removed, new cultures and contexts. We learned how these changes occur by talking with the principal agents responsible for its transmission, hence the need for in-depth studies of individuals. The dynamics of change, the process of dissemination in globalized societies of traditional community based performances are exemplified in the case of Mestre Cobra Mansa's contributions to the preservation and transmission of the capoeira angola tradition worldwide. In the discussions of globalization, more the circulation of commodities and capital than people's mobility, the capoeirista—epitomized by Cobra Mansa—shows resistance to further cultural and economical exploitation and self determination in their networking abilities. It crosses areas of control of cultural production—recordings, videos, tourism and teaching contexts (Slobin 2003).

Of special interest for the “new ways of writing” ethnomusicology is my contribution to the monographs of individuals (Stock 2001, 6). My research experiment has not delivered the only possible cultural biography of Mestre Cobrinha and never has claimed to do so. The particular application of Caughey's methodology to the study of performance in the reflexive, auto-ethnographic, dialogical approach, allows infinite variations of design and execution of research projects and hopefully will encourage other scholars in the field to experiment with its endless possibilities. Additionally, the architecture and form of my ethnographic study might constitute a model, a sub-genre of ethnographic methodologies, for further experimentation and development, not just by ethnomusicologists, but also by other ethnographers in education, communication studies,

women studies, indigenous critical methodologies or anthropology (Denzin & Lincoln 2008). I found it challenging, but possible, to “perform” the academic dissertation as a roda of capoeira. By including the many voices of the interactions between the scholar as a student and the community, I tried to convey that crossing the borders of disciplines and bridging traditional avenues of practice to re-present the cultures we study are not just possible, but an engaging avenue for future exploration.

In the intersection of studies of capoeira and ethnomusicology as my exploration of the tuning systems of the berimbau has shown in Marker One, I acknowledge how further research will be needed to systematize a more extensive investigative design in order to draw more informed conclusions in that area, something that was beyond the scope of this project, but one which I will gladly undertake in my future research.

On this note, another aspect that my research process has revealed is the need for close collaboration with the mestres of capoeira, the cultural bearers, not just during the research process, but also in the writing of the findings. During the development of my writing, besides checking often with the mestre to validate that my conceptualization was going in the right direction, as soon as I finished a section I would send it to him for his feedback. If our first loyalty is to our research partners (Caughey 2006, 32), I needed to know that everything I wrote was correct in terms of data and cultural appropriateness. Part of the ethnographer’s discipleship (Qureshi 2007, 5), I thought of myself as the hand writing the Mestre’s voice. I was committed to let his own voice come into the narrative as often as possible without “excess of interpretation” (Tedlock & Mannheim 1995, 257). Whether the collaboration is in the publication of general knowledge articles, or in

academic journalism, or to invite them to be part of our institutions,²⁰⁵ it is not just an improvement over prior practices, but what I believe is our duty as applied ethnomusicologists to open the spaces of visibility and dialog in scholarly circles for the bearers and experts of the cultures we study, even if we have to redefine what scholarship means.²⁰⁶ From our interaction, we are making mutual growth accessible. We are crossing academic borders as we search the archives of capoeira institutions for academic knowledge and as we produce new scholarly works that nurture the capoeira community. “In the last conference,” Cobrinha confesses “I realized how many [academic] people I know, I’m reconsidering getting my masters degree.” Our desire to know may be infectious.

It was my (challenging) goal from the first steps in my academic life to produce articles and ultimately a dissertation that could be read—without additional watering down—by both the capoeira and academic communities, and also by my family and friends. The capoeiristas are avid readers; they have grown up in communities that discuss and talk in their circles of reflexivity and use extensively the new communication technologies to spread knowledge and information. They are fierce critics and loyal participants; they commute, travel and do unimaginable things like selling their houses,²⁰⁷ to be able to gather and share experiences. While the original vehicular language is English, as almost all communications with Mestre Cobra Mansa and guests

²⁰⁵ Pioneer work on this area have been materialized through the collaboration of Professor Matthias Röhrig Assunção and Mestre Cobra Mansa in the recent article published by the History Magazine of the Brazilian National Library (Assunção, 2008)

²⁰⁶ At the time of finishing this manuscript I receive a ballot to vote on the proposed amendments to the SEM constitution and By-Laws. One of the changes of wording is in Article IV of Council constitution. The proposed amend is to delete the need of being a scholar and “have contributed to the object of the society” to form part of the council. (SEM, membership correspondence received on May 28, 2008)

²⁰⁷ Sergio Ricardo Assis Silva sold his house in Brazil to attend the VI International Encounter of Capoeira Angola celebrated in Washington DC in 2000. “I sold my home to come here, but now I am at home, O quilombo da FICA” (Caxambu 2000, 6).

occurred in this language, it is my intention to secure translation to other languages like Portuguese and Spanish to increase the accessibility of this material to capoeiristas from other countries. Even if I am content with the results of the linear narrative, I still have the dream of producing a more interactive flexible and circular performance of the dissertation using electronic media. Since Mestre Cobrinha is a truth seeker, a great enhancement will be to open the storytelling space for contributions from other people who have encountered and witnessed Cobrinha's life and events. A blogging tool of sorts linked to an electronically accessible shell worldwide, a video buzz in conferences, video blogs' submissions or any other collaborative electronic tool would be great ways to add layers of telling and meaning to this work.

Music Education

My dissertation shows how the practice of contemporary capoeira angola has created new contexts of musical teaching and learning. The collective repetitive movements established in the 80s after Bimba's systematization was a new venue for learning in the academic settings, a change from the roda, preferred moment for training, during the 40-50s (Abreu 2003). The workshop, created to entice audiences in the format of lecture-demonstration facilitated the interchange of instructors during the international encounters, augmenting the possibilities of learning from different instructors instead of having the experience of only one single mestre. The interest of Mestre Cobrinha in learning is an inspiring example of how our classrooms could gain from inviting community performers to share their knowledge in an inter-generational setting since "ensembles providing performance opportunities in the music of another culture are scarce in academia, although they abound in the community" (Volk 1998, 187). This also

could be an integrative part of the community in the curriculum, engaging the students in learning from their elders and closing the gap from uprooting family and culture that many young people from migrant communities have experienced.

As I have spent many more years of my life as an educator than as an ethnomusicologist or as a capoeirista, I have many more stories and experiences in this area, and I think that my view of the world is filtered by a burning desire to share. My research in capoeira has confirmed something I already sensed the first time attending a roda. Musical participation can be open to all levels of expertise when it happens in a community of practice and stays open to the communities of learners who seek to build bridges of cultural understanding.

The big challenge for music educators today seems to be not how to produce more skilled professional musicians but how to provide that kind of social context for informal as well as formal musical interaction that leads to real development and to the musicalizing of the society as a whole. (Small 1988, 208)

In order to “musicalize” society one needs to start by recognizing individuals as musical. The most repeated phrase I have heard in my life of musician and music educator has been, “Oh, I wish I had learned to play the piano (or the guitar, drums, voice, you name it...) when I was a child.” This spontaneous desire often times came with a hooked story: “My mother/father didn’t push me to stay with the piano,” or “I was bored with the classical repertoire and I quit,” or “I was told I didn’t have enough talent.” Any of these statements would make my teaching bones itch. When we cannot make any emotional connection to the instrument, the repertoire, or the tradition, making music becomes a chore, a hard one to maintain. Under the invisible pressure of a hidden curriculum (Kingsbury 1988) either you have talent and deserve education, or you do not and have to accept joining the masses of mere consumers, the audience. I have heard too

many stories, the “evoked understandings” (Van Manen, 1997), from people who wanted to participate in music from their hearts, who even asked for the opportunity to study music, but who found little or no support for their longing.

My dissertation shows how Cobrinha, despite his statements about his lack of musical knowledge, “knows” music in his body (the mute hands playing the invisible berimbau, the deaf ear hearing any mistakes in the bateria, the wrong Afro-reggae rhythm in his chest). “You can play all the movements perfectly, if you don’t play the instruments and cannot sing you are not going to be taken seriously,” he often says to his students. To earn respect is to be holistic in the practice. I believe the school system needs to look towards traditional practices like capoeira as a model of what shared leadership means, what new contexts for learning can be created, how to effectively involve our students in learning partnerships and community performances (Shimshon-Santo 2003; Ottier 2005; Joseph 2006).

All the musical experiences can be othered or owned. What is culture for a newborn, anyway? Plenty of times, I met other musicians, other educators who had a hard time coping with important aspects of performance that have been taken from human hands and left in institutional hands. They may have found it hard playing in public venues, reading at first sight, creating music, or freeing the drummer inside. If we listen carefully to their stories, their frustrated experiences, we can reach that child that could not play, reach her music, find his voice. If we listen again, maybe in another conversation, digging deeper into their life history, we will find all the children who become adults and decided to facilitate their children to have an experience based on their

own missing piece. These adults were living vicarious experiences: from their own necessity, through their progeny. Denial of intimate desires also can hurt.

Laura is nine-years tall and slim. She has long fingers and hates to play the piano. Laura draws unicorns for me with stars in their brows and princesses lying over their napes. Laura likes skating. She rides horses and dances. Laura has been passed through the hands of all the piano teachers in the school for five years — this is a great school for early stimulation of the arts. Finally she arrives at me. I teach on the last floor. I am the last resort: something euphemistically called the *Modern Music Department*. I call my room “the ICU of lost vocations.” Evicted music students come in as corpses. Sometimes, they leave with a new light in their eyes, and some pink in their cheeks...

I welcome Laura. She’s mad! We measure her height once a month tracing a discrete line on the wall by the window including a minuscule date notation. She is growing so fast... We play some, but mostly we talk. I want to hear her discomfort, why she doesn’t like to play music? It’s TO-tally her father’s fault, I learn. She doesn’t know why her brother doesn’t “have to” do music. Why he can do whatever he wants? Laura is nine and already feels that her voice is not heard. I can show her how to improvise; nah... We play Rock’n Roll and Blues. Laura is and sounds tired... She is growing so fast! Her long fingers are like sloppy spiders crawling over the black and white keys with fragile legs. She comes excited to be measured by the window and brings a new drawing for me. We play some and talk some more. She doesn’t want to perform at the final recital. I have a plan: she shrugs, sighs, and picks a boogie-woogie to play. I tell her how important it is that her father makes it to the concert. The obedient spiders exercise some more, they sound like dancing now. I use the computer to generate a canned jazz band for her practice. Laura has learned the piece by heart and smiles a bit. We have a plan.

Recital Day: Laura shines, her spiders roll, the audience claps, there is a man with sparkling eyes that comes afterwards to greet us. We explain to him our deal. Laura will come to play the piano just one more year “only if” her father comes to my classes too. Ramón López de Mántaras is a really busy guy. A highly reputed scientist in artificial intelligence who doesn’t miss a jazz performance wherever around the world he travels —and he travels a lot! Ramón one day would confess to me what happened in his first music class thirty-some years ago. Reluctantly, he accepts: an open schedule, only jazz repertory, special theory classes, etc. I have been selling this package for so many years... I am good: he buys the deal. I wink to the girl; through her, I wink to the little boy yearning to break out from the man and play.

Recital Day a year later: Laura and her father are playing together a bouncy Blues. Her fierce spiders care for the bass line and the rhythm like marines in combat for freedom, her tall body encouraging them with zeal. This is her last

class! Ramón runs a nervous, frantic, improvised melodic line, his right foot drumming the floor, his smile as the happiest, his head banging the beat with amazing precision. The playful boy is out and he loves to play. They share a narrowed space of the piano bench. They look great together conspiring accomplices for a blues. Their music is alive and the public claps with them, their performance becomes the whole room performance. They become a postcard treat that reaches and hugs many dreams from the audience. Mine too. There is a young woman in the audience with sparkling eyes —"I told you so!" that greets Laura saying goodbye. She is happily free to play with her father whenever she wants. Ramón will continue the piano lessons for a while. The little boy has turned out to be a man that is not going to let go of the keyboard any more. I'm not going to add any more marks to Laura's wall. The world has gained a fine horse rider, today a lawyer, and a soulful piano player.

Ramón confesses over coffee some years later: "I would give my name, my prestige and all the things I have got from it, even half of my salary... to live a musician's life"

A princess lays back in a unicorn with a star in her front. The world has become a better place for now. (I. Angulo, *Music in the Bones*, September 2004)

Ramon and Laura's story is an example of how a close look at the individuals who sit in our classrooms necessarily brings their families, their cultures, their ancestries to the classroom to be integrated "à la capoeira" into our curricula and musical interchanges. One of the venues I suggest for further research in music education is the study of the children in capoeira. As the new generations of children born from the first practitioners in the United States are growing inside the capoeira community, there is a need to document and investigate how the insertion of a child in a natural environment of performance enhances their socialization skills, musical aptitudes, and physical expression. Children's music also constitutes an important gap in ethnomusicological literature that should be of interest to ethnomusicologists "whose fundamental assumptions are that in order to understand the character of a musical culture, one must understand its subcultures—such as that of children—and the way it is transmitted" (Nettl in Campbell 1998, viii). We know from their mother's testimonies how they sing a

corrido before they start talking. A systematic observation of their environment and practices will illuminate the aspects we could improve in our musical curricula.²⁰⁸

Mestre Cobrinha travels the world telling the story of capoeira and facilitating the audience's first contact with a collective capoeira musical experience. So too, we as music educators and facilitators of musical experiences, need to listen to the deeply dormant creative needs of human beings. Music teachers, as community leaders need to open their eyes and ears, because like the capoeira community, there are many other communities that make music together and embrace the sense of wholeness that is music. There are many ways to be musical together and alone. Instruments and performances, like languages, make one know new people, make one's house bigger and make our world richer.

<i>Nasci no mundo</i>	I was born in the world
<i>Dentro dele eu me criei</i>	I grew up inside it
<i>Aprendi a capoeira,</i>	I learned capoeira,
<i>Ai meu Deus,</i>	Oh my God,
<i>Dentro dela eu morrerei</i>	I will die inside her

Nasci no Mundo (M. Cobra Mansa, 2007)

²⁰⁸ In an unpublished paper, *Expanding the Curriculum: The Transmission of Capoeira Angola as a Model for Music Education* (Spring 2005), I compare in a dialogical form the standards for music (from the US National Standards for the Arts Education) showing how capoeira, as a musical curriculum alone, covers all the 9 standards resulting in the most complete curriculum, since it intersects with dance, history, geography, language among other interdisciplinary subjects.

Capoeira Moments²⁰⁹

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²⁰⁹ All transcriptions, photos and graphic design by the author except otherwise noted.

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Glossary

Afoxé: Traditional Afro-Brazilian carnival group

Agogô: Afro-Brazilian percussion instrument consisting of two steel bells of different size mounted in a loop and strung with a metal or wooden stick.

Angola, toque de: Slowest rhythm used in capoeira angola to start the roda

Angoleiro-a: Practitioner of capoeira angola

Arame: Wire used in the berimbau today extracted from recycled tires

Armada: Movement of attack

Atabaque: Conical single-headed drum, similar to the Afro-Cuban conga drum, played in *capoeira* with the hands while resting in a stand. In other ceremonial and religious ceremonies is played using sticks.

Bateria: Orchestra accompanying the capoeira roda and composed of eight instruments, located from left to right in the following order: reco-reco, agogô, pandeiro1, gunga berimbau, médio berimbau, viola berimbau, pandeiro2 and atabaque.

Beriba: Brazilian tree which wood is used to make the verga of the berimbau

Berimbau: Brazilian musical bow of African origin with a gourd resonator called *cabaça*. The string is in actuality made of wire from recycled tires and the flexible wood comes from branches of the beriba tree. The player holds it balancing it over the little finger of the left hand while holding a coin (*dobrão*) between the thumb and index to

push the string and changing the pitch. With the right hand, the player holds a rattle (caxixí) and a fine stick (vaqueta).

Bloco-Afro: African block, modern carnival parade sought to create a self consciously black music

Bumba Meu Boi: An expression of resistance of African slaves in Brazil ridiculing and satirizing their masters. The dramatization of a danced story with costumes, and accompaniment of musical instruments changes from cities but is performed mostly in the north-east.

Cabaça: Resonator body for the *berimbau* made from a calabash or gourd. Once opened and cleaned of seeds, the interior is sanded to slim the walls and produce an enhanced brilliant sound richer in harmonics. The *cabaça* rest usually against the player's belly during the buzzing and lower pitches (the *berimbau* is also known as *berimbau de barriga* for this reason) and when moved quickly away while the string is still vibrating makes a wah-wah effect.

Caboclo: Mix of Indian and African descent

Candomblé: The syncretism of African religions and Roman Catholicism practiced by many Brazilians of African descent in the cities and the Northeast of Brazil

Capoeira Angola: Slow, ground level style of capoeira tied to traditional African roots

Capoeira Regional: Fast, higher level acrobatic style of capoeira mixed with techniques from other martial arts. Developed by Mestre Bimba.

Capoeirista: Person who practices capoeira

Castañuelas: Castanets, traditional Spanish percussion instrument

Cavalaria: Toque de berimbau, in disuse today, utilized to give signal of approaching police and to dismantle the roda

Caxixí: Small wicker basket-like rattle with a base made of a piece of gourd (usually the piece cut off to make the *berimbau* mouth). Contains small seeds that are shaken when the *berimbau* player strikes the string with the *vaqueta*.

Chamada de berimbau: Call made by repeated strokes in the solto (lower sound) accented every three. If the call is in the berimbau gunga, it is a signal of attention.

Chamada: Ritualistic movement of impasse in the game that also hides lots of malícia (cunning). It has diverse forms the head of one player in the belly of the other, arms high a player on the back of the other or palms facing each other. During the chamada, the players walk three steps forward and three backwards, until one player breaks the “waltz like” dance and does a movement of attack

Chiado: Buzz sound of the berimbau made by touching slightly the dobrão against the arame

Chocalho: Metal tube shaker filled with stones or pellets, often for loder sound two or three tubes may be connected together, especially in the escolas de samba

Chula: First call and response song after the ladainha where the chorus repeats the line adding the word “camará” (comrade)

Comissoes de Trabalho: Work commissions to care for different areas of the capoeira group (public relations, financials, instruments, archives, photograph & video, etc.) Initiated by GCAP today is practice also in FICA worldwide.

Contra-Mestre: Last stage of expertise before becoming a mestre

Cordões: String belts used in capoeira Regional and Contemporanea to indicate status and level of expertise like in the eastern martial arts

Corridos: Call and response where the chorus sings the same lines and the soloist sings known verses or improvises in real time according to the circumstances of the game

Djembé: Hourglass shaped drum of West-African origin

Dobrão: Antique Portuguese coin used by the capoeirista (or in its default a small flat stone) to push the wire changing the pitch of the string by around half of a tone, or by just touching the wire to produce the characteristic buzzing effect.

Empanadillas: Spanish dish made of round patches of thin pastry usually filled with tuna or meat

Favelas: Shantytowns

Floreios or variações: Ornaments more than improvisations in the berimbau or other bateria instrument, applied also to movements

Gavião: Sparrow, capoeira name given by Mestre Pastinha to João Grande.

Ginga: Basic swaying movement of capoeira

Gunga: The lowest pitch *berimbau* (bigger *cabaça*) and main conductor of the rhythm during the roda. Has the highest hierarchical status and is usually played by the *mestre* in charge, or host of the roda.

Jogo: Game between two players in the roda

Jogo de búzios: Candomblé divination method using cowrie shells

Jogo de Dentro: “Inside game” One of the fastest toques in capoeira that also indicates the game has to be with the players closer to each other, with small room to move

Kilombo Tenondé: Project of Mestre Cobra Mansa in Bahia to organize cultural and educational activities in the community. Urban center in the neighborhood of Coutos and the rural center in Valença.

Ladainha: Litany, introductory solo song in the *roda* of *capoeira*

Maculelé: Stick dance, a warrior dance

Macumbeiro: Practitioner of Macumba, religion close to Quimbanda and Umbanda, in and around Rio de Janeiro state

Mãe de Santo: Priestess of Candomblé

Malandragem: Lifestyle of idleness and roguery

Malandro: Trickster, bohemian person often associated to marginal and dangerous lifestyle

Malícia: Cunning, trickery

Mandinga: Sorcery

Médio: The medium pitch *berimbau* (medium size *cabaça*).

Meia lua de costa: Half moon backways or from the back, spinning kick

Meia lua de frente: Half moon in front, straight kick

Mestre: Maxim level of expertise in capoeira

Negativa: “negation,” defense movement

Ogún: Orixá of war

Orixás: Deities, forces of nature

Oxúm: Orixá of the rivers, love, creativity and fertility

Pandeiro: Hand drum tambourine with jingles. In the bateria are used two pandeiros one on each side of the *berimbaus*.

Pandereta: Spanish hand drum with jingles

Pelourinho: Pilory, the slave auction post and the name of the neighborhood in Salvador today commodified for tourists

Permaculture: Design of productive and sustainable ecosystems

Permangola: Name of the project Mestre Cobra Mansa initiated in Salvador to offer intensive workshops of Permaculture and other alternative techniques, along with cultural and educational programs, including capoeira angola in the community of Valença

Ponte: “Bridge,” transition escape movement of capoeira

Portuñol: Informal slang for the hybridation of Spanish and Portuguese.

Quilombistas: Participants of quilombo activities or residents in the quilombo

Quilombo: Community of runaway slaves, free African, indians and other European origin before the abolition of slavery in Brazil

Rabo de arraia: Stingray tail, attack movement

Rancheras: Mexican traditional music

Rasteira: Move made by sweeping the feet of the other player, usually when is only one in the ground when he/she is kicking. One of the definite moves to make the other player touch the ground with his but and making him “loose” the jogo.

Real (reais): Brazilian currency

Reco-reco: A tubular scraper made contemporarily of bamboo. It has two wide slits in the sides to amplify the sound.

Roda: Name of both the event, principal context of performance of capoeira, and the circle where the game takes place

Rodathon: Extensive roda organized with fundraising purposes

Rolê: Rolling away to either side, movement of defense

Samba de Roda: Samba played in a circle with dancers taking turns in the center.

Samba Reggae: Style of music performed by the Bloco-Afros in Salvador.

São Bento Pequeno: Toque of berimbau, medium tempo

São Bento Grande: Toque of berimbau, fast tempo

Senzala: House of slaves

Toque: Rhythm of the berimbau

Treinel: Trainer, level intermediate in capoeira Angola. Instituted by Mestre Pastinha was in desuse until FICA revisited it in The International Conference of 2003.

Umbanda: Afro-Brazilian syncretic religion with influences of Catholicism and Spiritism (Alan Kardec Spiritualism)

Vaqueta: Thin stick used to stroke the berimabu string.

Verga: Wooden body of the berimbau

Viola de corda: Small guitar

Viola: The highest pitch *berimbau* (small size *cabaça*).

Volta ao mundo: Circular movement contra clockwise were the players take a rest without stopping their movement

Zumbi: Last king of the republic of Palmares and symbol of Afro-Brazilian resistance

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Contents of Companion DVD-Rom²¹⁰

Self Ejecutable DVD:

Menu 1: Toques and Moves

Recorded in FICA-DC March 14, 2008. Mestre Cobra Mansa, Treinel Baba and Felicia Ross

Toques:

- Angola
- São Bento Pequeno
- São Bento Grande
- Jogo de Dentro
- The Berimbau Call

Movements:

- Ginga
- Rolê
- Rabo de Arraia
- Chamada
- Volta ao Mundo

Menu 2: Instruments and Jogos

Recorded in FICA-Bahia January 6, 2001. Jogo between Mestre Cobra Mansa and Contra-Mestre Boca do Rio.

- Bateria
- Jogo

Menu 3: Isa Birthday Jogo

Recorded in FICA-DC March 7, 2008. Jogo between Mestre Cobra Mansa and author. Courtesy of FICA Archives.

²¹⁰ All videos, audio and text by the author except otherwise noted.

DVD-Rom Folders:

Audio Folder

Ladainha: “Velha Companheira” Minutes 0 through 3:38 of Track 5 in FICA. 2005. *Das Voltas que o Mundo Deu: As Voltas que o Mundo Da*. Bahia: Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola. CD. Courtesy of FICA.

Ladainha: “Nasci no Mundo” Minutes 0 through 2:21 of Track 2 in Langlois, Valentin. 2007. *Capoeira un Art de Vivre*. France: Helico. DVD. Courtesy of Valentin Langlois.

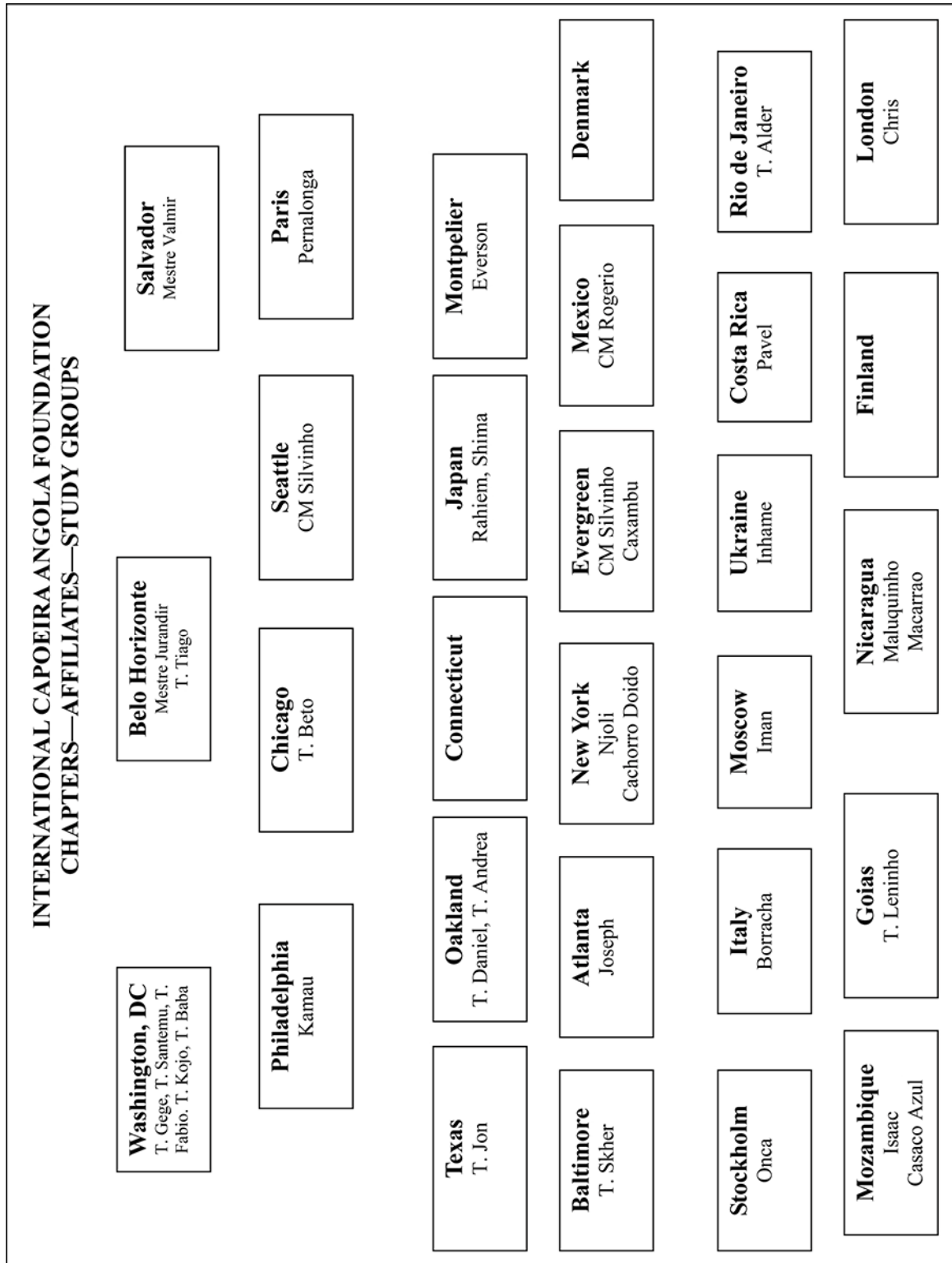
Chula: Minutes 2:21 through 3:55 of Track 2 in Langlois, Valentin. 2007. *Capoeira un Art de Vivre*. France: Helico. DVD. Courtesy of Valentin Langlois.

Corrido: “Menino Preste Atenção” Track 1 in VVAA. 2003. *Nzinga Capoeira Angola*. São Paulo, Brazil: Pôr do Som. CD. Courtesy of Grupo Nzinga.

Text Folder

Angulo, Isabel. 2008. *Following the Trail of the Snake: A Life History of Cobra Mansa “Cobrinha,” Mestre of Capoeira*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland.

Annex II: FICA Family Tree



Annex III: Encounters and Conferences

FICA International Women's Conferences in the US

“Women's in Movement”
August 1-3 1997, Washington DC (USA)

“Sistahs Inside Afrikan Liberation”
May 14-16 1999, Philadelphia (USA)

“Voices of Women”
March 2001, Oakland (USA)

“Women's Strength in Capoeira Angola”
March 8-10 2002, Seattle (USA)

“Power & Politics in the Roda of Capoeira Angola”
March 2005, Seattle (USA)

“FICA Women's Capoeira”
March 2006, Oakland (USA)

“Birthing a Culture of Ethical Education”
March 2007, Atlanta (USA)

“I Came Here to Play”
March 2008, Washington DC (USA)

GCAP International Encounters (organized by M. Cobra Mansa)

1st Annual International Capoeira Angola Encounter GCAP
August 1994, Salvador, Bahia (Brazil)

2nd Annual International Capoeira Angola Encounter GCAP
1995 University of the District of Columbia, Washington, DC (USA)

FICA International Encounters

1st Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter
1996 University of the District of Columbia, Washington DC (USA)

2nd Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter
Spring 1997 Georges Washington University, Washington DC (USA)

3rd Annual FICA International Capoeira Angola Encounter
1997 August, Salvador-Belo Horizonte (Brazil)

4th Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter
May 16-18, 1998, George Washington University, Washington DC (USA)

5th Annual FICA International Capoeira Angola Encounter
15-20 August, 1999 Salvador, Bahia (Brazil)

6th Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter “O Quilombo da FICA”
June 1-4, 2000 Cesar Chaves - Washington DC, (USA)

7th Annual FICA International Capoeira Angola Encounter
9-12 August, 2001- Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)

8th Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter
July 18 - 21, 2002 Prince William Forest Park, Virginia (USA)

9th Annual FICA International Capoeira Angola Encounter
“Actions and Reflections in Education”
July 17-20, 2003 Sarzedo & Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (Brazil)

10th Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter
October 28–31, 2004 Oakland, CA, (USA)

11th Annual FICA International Capoeira Angola Encounter
2005 July, Salvador, Bahia (Brazil)

12th Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter
2006 Prince William Forrest Park, VA (USA)

13th Annual FICA International Capoeira Angola Encounter
2007 Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)

14th Annual ICAF International Capoeira Angola Encounter
“Roots and Branches: Globalization and Capoeira Angola”
September 4-7, 2008 Chicago, IL (USA)