Capoeira: From Slave Combat Game to Immaterial Heritage of Humanity

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Introduction

Capoeira is a martial art that developed from combat games enslaved Africans brought to Brazil. It is documented since the beginning of the 19th century. Over the last two hundred years, capoeira has significantly evolved: its practice expanded to free lower class males, then to the Brazilian population more generally and since the 1970s to young men and women around the world. This shift of its social context was accompanied by significant change in bodily techniques, rituals and cultural meanings. Yet, unlike taekwondo, judo or aikido, which designate the modern styles based on older traditions with different denominations, the term capoeira is used indistinctively for both historical and contemporary forms. In this paper I will attempt to provide an overview of the different phases of capoeira's history and comment briefly on its inscription as immaterial heritage.

1. Slave Capoeira, 1800-1850

The first systematic references to a combat game called capoeira started to appear in 1810 in Rio de Janeiro. Contrary to the widespread myth among today's practitioners that capoeira was a fight disguised as a dance, the very first reports by the newly created, professional Royal Police Guard left no doubt that capoeira was a dangerous activity and needed to be repressed. At this time Rio de Janeiro had just become the capital of the Portuguese empire due to the transfer of the Portuguese king and court. During the nineteenth century, the city grew due to the economic expansion of sugar and above all coffee plantations in the nearby Parnaíba valley. The growth of coffee plantations fuelled a massive increase in the transatlantic slave trade, with more than a million enslaved Africans being disembarked on the shores of Rio de Janeiro province. Although most slaves were sold to plantations, an important number did remain in the city. In 1849 Rio counted almost 80,000 enslaved people, or 40% of the population. Free black and people of colour represented at least another 20 percent, so it is no wonder many travellers likened Rio de Janeiro to an African city.[1]

Capoeira developed in this period when thousands of enslaved Africans populated the streets of Rio de Janeiro. In contrast to plantation slaves, many urban slaves did not work under the permanent surveillance of an overseer. They were street vendors, or their owner made them rent out their labour as porters. These slaves "for hire" enjoyed thus a relative autonomy of movement, which allowed capoeira to develop. Maintaining law and order, in particular controlling the masses of enslaved urban workers, became an obsession of the white elites, especially in the decades after the Haitian Revolution. The Police Intendant was granted authority to punish minor offenses on the spot, through immediate "correction," combined with imprisonment.<Fig 01 Briggs> In 1817 the Intendant announced that slaves found with knives were to be punished with 300 lashes of the whip and three months of forced labour and that "the same penalty will apply to all those who roam around the city, whistling and with sticks, committing disorder most of the times with no aim, and which are well known by the name of capoeiras, even if they do not provoke any injuries or death or any other crime."[2] This announcement reflects the standard attitude of legislators and police chiefs throughout the empire at the time: capoeira was to be repressed by all means, even if its practitioners had not committed any crime according to Western legal traditions—and for that reason capoeira was not formally included in the first Brazilian Criminal Code (1831). In the years 1810–1820, capoeira accounted for 438 arrests in Rio de Janeiro, or 9 percent of the total, second only to escapes of slaves.[3]

Unfortunately, police sources rarely provided detailed descriptions of capoeira practice beyond the explicit mention that individuals were arrested for "playing capoeira." This is a crucial detail, insofar

[1] For an analysis of Rio's African population, see Karasch, M. *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850*. Princeton, 1987.
[2] Quoted in Soares, C. E. L. *A capoeira escrava e outras tradições rebeldes no Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850*. Campinas, 2001: 557.
[3] Leila M. Algranti, L. M. *O feitor ausente: Estudo sobre a escravidão urbana no Rio de Janeiro*. Petrópolis, 1988: 209.

as some masters and writers have suggested the practice acquired a playful character only at a later stage. A game—and that is also clear from police records—could easily become a brawl, resulting in injuries such as broken legs. Earle's watercolour "Negros fighting, Brazil"(1820–1824) <Fig 02> shows that kicks were used and suggests it was indeed a game, also played in backyards – which did not prevent the police to go after capoeiras.

Since slaves arrested for capoeira often carried musical instruments with them—drums, violas, tambourines, and bells—one can safely assume that they used them for the game. Iconography confirms that capoeira was a leisure activity, already referred to as a game, often accompanied by musical instruments and carried out in a circle surrounded by participants and bystanders. The iconic engraving (1835) based on a painting by Johann Moritz Rugendas, the first explicit representation of "Playing Capoëra or war dance,"<Fig 03> shows it accompanied by a drum. The two men facing each other seem to perform a basic step quite close to what is known today as the *ginga*, or basic movement from which all attacks and defences originate. Police sources also mention frequently head butts (*cabeçadas*), but otherwise there is very little information on specific corporal techniques.

The police records also provide us with an idea of the background of the arrested *capoeiras* (the term used at the time for practitioners). Ninety-one percent of those arrested were enslaved, 77 percent of the same total were Africans, and just 10 percent were creoles. In other words, capoeira then was, above all, a practice of enslaved Africans. This raises the question of what combat traditions these men brought with them and how pre-existing forms and techniques eventually did or did not combine.

Although combat games are widespread in Africa today, much less is known from the time of the Transatlantic slave trade. In terms of bodily techniques one can differentiate six types that African combat games employed before the 1900s. In the agricultural societies in the rainforest of West and West Central Africa, wrestling was the most common form, while pastoral societies in the savannahs of central and southern Africa excelled in stick fighting. Fist fighting, slap boxing, kicking and headbutting also constituted the base of combat games in some locations.

The problem is that sources are scarce and patchy. Many combat games may have disappeared without leaving any written evidence. Our own research identified two combat games in Southwest Angola, whose older forms may have contributed to slave capoeira.[4] Engolo <Fig 04> practiced by the Nkhumbe has bodily techniques that resemble capoeira and two other diasporic combat games, ladjia/damnié in Martinique and moringue in Réunion island. Moringue, however, is also closely related to combat games on the Comoros and Madagascar.

It is therefore worth looking at the more specific geographic and ethnic origins of the enslaved Africans caught playing capoeira in Rio de Janeiro (no similar sources exist for other cities). Based on early police records from the 1810s, Carlos Eugênio Soares has calculated that 84 percent of the Africans came from West-Central Africa (Kongo and Angola) and the rest from Mozambique and West Africa, which more or less reflects the overall proportions of these groups in the city.[5] Thus participation in capoeira reflected to a large extent the ethnic composition of the enslaved population. <Fig 05 TST> Within the west-central Africans, arrested capoeiras came often from the Kongo region but also from northern Angola and southern Angola (Benguela), making it again difficult to trace any particular region or ethnicity as responsible for the core input of what became capoeira. That made Soares concludes that the art "was the fruit of a combination of dispersed African traditions and creole cultural 'inventions.'"[6]

So do we need to think capoeira like an eclectic mixture of all the combat games that existed in African societies from where the enslaved where abducted, as many practitioners believe? We need to acknowledge that wrestling didn't enter slave capoeira, and that not all bodily techniques and cultural meanings can merge. This suggests that some specific martial cultures became dominant in the

[4] Assuncão, M. R. 'Engolo and Capoeira: From Ethnic to Diasporic Combat Games in the Southern Atlantic'. *Martial Arts Studies* 13: 6-26, 2023.
[5] Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, 599.
[6] Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, 125.

diaspora, in Brazil and elsewhere. It is often stated that capoeira exists since the 16th century, but not one source confirms this. I therefore would argue that we should relate the late colonial appearance of capoeira to the changing routes of the transatlantic slave trade. The three latecomers in this trade were the Benguelas, the Moçambiques and a small number of Madagascans. Kicking combined with stickfighting and other techniques were prominent in Southwest Angola and Madagascar. This suggests minority ethnic groups may have provided the basis for the overarching slave capoeira.

Since capoeira also appears occasionally in 19th-century records of other Brazilian port cities such as Recife, Salvador, and São Luís, where the African population consisted of different ethnic mixtures, it is better to conceive of "slave capoeira" as a generic term ascribed to quite distinct practices in those various places, depending on the specific African input and local circumstances.

2. Capoeira and Gangs in Imperial Brazil, 1850-1889

The decrease of the proportion of Africans and the growing importance of a population of mixed ancestry as well as of European, mainly Portuguese, immigrants after the end of the transatlantic slave trade in 1850 also had an impact on the capoeira universe. By 1881, free men constituted 60 percent of those arrested for capoeira in Rio, and in 1885, whites represented at least 22 percent of arrests. Capoeira expanded into all lower classes—sailors, port workers, artisans, and vagrants but also soldiers and policemen. This was facilitated not only by enslaved and free, blacks, browns (*pardos*), and poor whites working increasingly side by side, but also living in the same squalid, overcrowded tenements.

Capoeira practice and its cultural meaning changed accordingly. The enslaved Africans and their descendants had been relegated since colonial times to the very bottom of the official social hierarchy, but even that did not prevent them from inserting themselves into urban social life. Capoeiras hence participated not only in African-inspired street celebrations (*batuques*) but also joined processions for patron saints and even military parades. They did so by imposing their presence, for example ringing the church bells or exhibiting their skills at the head of processions or parades. This often ended in confusion, with the capoeiras running and yelling "Shut down" to close an event, followed by street battles with the police.

Since the late colonial period practitioners assembled in groups to practice, relax, or fight—not only against the police but also among themselves. <Fig NN Stickfighting> After the 1850s, though, capoeira in Rio was increasingly dominated by *maltas* or gangs, who divided the city's territory among themselves. A malta was comprised of between half a dozen and a hundred individuals, from adolescent boys to mature adults. They practiced and instructed younger adherents on hills or on the beaches. Each gang established around a parish church, its square, and the surrounding neighbourhood, which also became the symbol of their identity. Hence the malta that assembled in the proximity of the Saint Joseph parish church was called the "Carpenters," and the name of the "Spear" gang was an allusion to the lance of their patron Saint George, used to kill the dragon.

If African secret societies may have initially contributed to malta formation (for which we still have no evidence), later developments therefore show the importance of popular Catholicism in gang culture. The influence of military organization and hierarchy is also apparent and can be explained by the fact that a number of capoeiras had been in the army or were enrolled in militias such as the National Guard. Gang members identified through attire, ribbons, colours, and, increasingly, political affiliation. The two main political parties of the Brazilian empire (conservatives and liberals), recognizing the potential of capoeira gangs, started to hire their services during election times to intimidate voters and make sure they voted for the right party. This contributed to the emergence of two overarching federations of maltas, the Nagoas and the Guaiamus <Fig NN N&G>.

While patterns of residence and gang membership reveal that indeed some gangs had higher proportions of Africans than others, these are at best broad trends, as all maltas in the 1880s consisted of African and Creole blacks, pardos, and white men. It is precisely capoeira's capacity to recruit beyond its original constituency that allowed the art to survive and expand.

The alliance with politicians on the other hand meant that repression of capoeiras by authorities was usually partial (restricted to the gangs affiliated with the politicians in opposition) and therefore ineffective. The abolition of slavery, in May 1888, even though it raised support for the royal family among the ex-slaves, let to the overthrow, in November 1889, of the empire, no longer endorsed by the majority of planters. Republican planters and the military, influenced by positivism, increasingly viewed the empire as a symbol of archaism and an obstacle to progress, and even more so as the monarchy was defended by a "Black Guard" of ex-slaves and capoeiras. Capoeira and more generally any form of Afro-Brazilian culture was seen as barbarism, which the Republic needed to extirpate. The first republican police chief of Rio de Janeiro nominated by the provisional government, no longer bound by imperial party-political allegiances, organized a systematic clampdown against capoeiras in the city. In December 1889 hundreds of capoeiras were detained at home according to lists drawn up by the police. Without trial or right to defence, at least 162 of them were deported to the distant Atlantic island Fernando de Noronha.[7]

The Republican Criminal Code, issued by the Provisional Government in 1890, sought to maintain the harsh repression against the practice. The Code qualified capoeira as a crime in its chapter dedicated to vagrants. Articles 402–404 threatened two to six months of jail for anyone found doing "exercises of physical agility and dexterity, known by the denomination capoeiragem, in the streets and public squares; to run amok, provoking disorder and mayhem, and threatening, frightening or injuring specific or unspecified individuals."

3. Capoeira in the First Republic, 1890-1930

The Republican purge put an end to the hitherto powerful maltas, and capoeira disappeared from the streets of Rio de Janeiro. It is not entirely clear how much of it survived in more discrete locations, such as backyards and shantytowns. No doubt some capoeira skills went into more dance-like forms such as the *pernada*.[8]

Capoeira survived better in other surroundings, in particular in Bahia around the Bay of All Saints and in its capital and main port, Salvador, but also in the south of the state, making Bahian capoeira less exclusively urban. <Fig NN Harbour game> Although there is mention of some gangs in the city of Salvador during the empire, they never became as powerful as the Cariocan maltas. Unfortunately this also means there is very little information on 19th-century capoeira here.[9] The absence of significant European migration and the economic decline of Bahia resulted in capoeira remaining more closely associated with other Afro-Bahian forms such as samba-de-roda and candomblé. Black or *pardo* workers in the port area played it to relax while waiting for work in between tides.[10]

On Sundays, informal capoeira circles *(rodas*) also took place in poor neighbourhoods. <Fig NN Sunday roda> This again was a purely leisure activity, but here participants played in Sunday attire instead of working clothes, in front of families, and more musical instruments and people to play them were available. Since this was very different from former gang mayhem in Rio, it did not provoke the same kind of repression. Republican police chiefs were more worried about evidence of gang activity rather than mere "exercises of physical dexterity." The annual cycle of celebrations of port gangways and patron saints provided a third important social context for Bahian capoeira rodas. Each gangway along the quayside in the harbour organized its own commemoration, usually taking place between August and November, aggregating port workers, sailors, boat owners, and tradesmen. It was sponsored by a wealthier merchant house and entailed a pilgrimage to one of the churches on the waterfront. Playing capoeira intermingled with other Afro-Bahian music and dance. The festas de largo started in November and went until carnival, in February. Almost every week some church would celebrate its patron saint, all of which were syncretized with African orixás (spiritual entities) worshipped by the various nations of candomblé. After the Catholic mass and processions,

[7] Bretas, M. L. "A queda do império da navalha e da rasteira". *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 20: 249–252, 1991.
[8] Dias, L. S. "Da Turma do Lira ao cafajeste: A sobrevivência da capoeira no Rio de Janeiro," PhD, Rio de Janeiro, 2000.
[9] Abreu, F. J. de. *Capoeiras: Bahia, século XIX: imaginário e documentação*. Salvador, 2005.
[10] For descriptions of early-20th-century capoeira, see Vianna, *A. Quintal de Nagô e outras crônicas*. Salvador, 1979.

celebrations continued on the square next to the parish church, where capoeira, batuque, and samba-de-roda circles provided again the key performative attractions. It was here that good capoeira players could exhibit their skills to a wider audience and poorer young males could impress their peers. Yet it was also the situation where repression was the most likely. One subchief of police, Pedro Gordilho, carved himself a reputation during the 1920s for having his subordinates break up capoeira rodas. This was part of a wider campaign, particularly in the press, stigmatizing all Afro-Brazilian forms as barbarous.

It is in this ambivalent context of post-emancipation that Bahian capoeira evolved and acquired what can be considered its classical form during the first decades of the 20th century. Ethnographic accounts, newspaper reports, and oral history facilitate a more accurate and detailed picture of Bahian capoeira during the post-emancipation period.[11] Capoeira took place in an imaginary circle formed by the orchestra (*bateria*) and the other participants or spectators. Two players kneeled down in front of each other and next to the orchestra, at the "foot" of the berimbau. They listened to a preliminary song, called "litany" (*ladainha*) and waited for subsequent "praise" (*reza* or *canto de entrada*), when some of the standard phrases such as "turn around the world" from the lead singer, repeated by the chorus, indicated that the game could begin. Players crossed themselves, drew signs on the ground, and started their game. Many capoeira groups today still comply with this basic structure and ritual.

The movements were less standardized than those used today in Contemporary Capoeira or the Angola style. All kicks developed from the syncopated basic step or sway (*ginga*) that kept players in permanent movement and always in tune to the rhythm played by the orchestra. Movements required good balance and flexibility, as well as strength, since players often equilibrated themselves on their arms or their head while executing a kick. There is some controversy regarding the instruments used in the former rodas, in particular regarding the berimbau and the drum. All sources suggest that the *berimbau* (musical bow) might only have been incorporated into capoeira at the beginning of the century.[12] Furthermore, all early-20th-century sources seem to agree that no drum (atabaque) was employed but only berimbaus and tambourines (pandeiros). They were eventually complemented by some other percussion instruments, such as the *chocalho* (metal rattle), the *reco-reco* (scraper), and the *agogô* (metal bell). Early photographs and drawings of capoeira orchestras confirm the flexibility of the number of berimbaus and tambourines. As in Rio de Janeiro, the "professional" Bahian practitioner developed an idiosyncratic way of dressing (consisting of scarf, trousers with a big hem, golden earrings, and pointed boots) and walking, derived from the ginga. In other words he represented a social type and a whole subculture.

The game consisted of avoiding the other player's attack through an acrobatic escape movement such as the "negation" (*negativa*) and riposting with a counterattack. The game became therefore a sort of dialogue, where each movement provided a reply to the other player's previous one. Players could show off through particularly acrobatic movements but also through malice (*malícia*). Malice or deception—also a key concept in modern capoeira—was meant to lull the other player into a false sense of security, only to surprise him with a move he was not expecting. However, respect for the other player usually meant the attack was not carried out; it was only to show him what one could have done. This was enough to score points in front of an initiated public. A carefully executed *rasteira* or a soft head-butt that threw the other off balance was equally acceptable, although it raised the stake of the game. Full contact was therefore unusual and almost proscribed and, when it happened—due to inattention or provocation—could lead to retaliation and the outbreak of violence. The employment of malícia meant that the game did not just represent an athletic competition, where the youngest and strongest could show off. Experience was paramount for a skilful game, and for that reason older mestres were able to keep in control even when playing with much younger practitioners.[13]

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11 Pires, A. L. C. S. *A capoeira na Bahia de todos os Santos: Um estudo sobre cultura e classes trabalhadoras, 1890–1937*. Porto Nacional, 2004;
12 Carneiro, E. "Capoeira," *Cadernos de Folclore*, no. 1. Rio de Janeiro, 1977.
13 Amado, J. *Bahia de Todos os Santos*. Rio de Janeiro,1977, 239–240.

The capoeira orchestra (bateria) played a range of rhythms (*toques*) during a roda. Each toque consisted of a basic rhythmic-melodic pattern and its variations. The berimbau with the deepest sound took the lead, and the others instruments followed, countermarking or varying the basic pattern.[14]

Most testimonies agree that games in this period could be tough but usually did not cross the borderline into real fights. Capoeira players called each other "comrades", not opponents or fighters. Old mestres also insist that players were well aware of the different types of games, which varied according to the toque played by the orchestra. Common characterizations differentiated between high and low; inside and outside; fast and slow; and acrobatic, playful, or aggressive games. The particular toques thus provided a framework for the different modalities of play. Since boundaries between rather playful and more antagonistic games were blurred, every jogo could potentially cross the borderline and deteriorate into an open confrontation. Only the mestres in charge were able to prevent this by calling the players back to the "foot" of the berimbau to admonish them, or by changing the rhythm or the song. Hence the strategic ambiguity between game and fight resided at the very core of the art. Despite the insistence of many old mestres that in this period there was less aggression in capoeira than today and that friendship reigned between "comrades," games occasionally did become violent. Capoeira was more than a game; it could be a lethal weapon.

Songs were central to the capoeira game. They conjured up memories of capoeiras of the past, praised orixás and saints and asked them for protection, exhorted players, and commented on the ongoing game. Capoeiras drew from a wide repertoire of tradition during each roda performance, but they were not bound to a mere, uncreative repetition of existing songs. They rather rearranged known songs, weaving their own biography, convictions, and feelings into the lyrics and interpretation. If the refrain sung by the chorus repeated a traditional verse, the solo singer could, after chanting some of the well-known verses, fully improvise his part. Usually singers did use older, established verses but inserted others of their own creation, to compose a song that was suited for the particular context of a given performance. In that way they could acknowledge tradition while at the same time display their skills as improvisers. Thus every capoeira song performed in a roda constituted an intertextual bricolage.[15]

4. The Modernization of Capoeira, 1930s-70s

Capoeira evolved considerably in the second part of the 20th century because Brazilian society went through major changes. The modernization of capoeira also resulted from its interaction with foreign martial arts, in particular from Asia. A number of sensei travelled to the West to exhibit their skills. In Brazil, Jujitsuka challenged urban audiences to step in the ring and confront them. Some capoeiras accepted the challenge, and most of the time they were defeated. The first ju-jitsu school in Brazil was registered in 1914, and others followed, later resulting in a specific Brazilian style of the art, the now famous BJJ.

Since the beginning of the 20th century some Brazilian intellectuals and military officers argued that capoeira needed to be redeemed from its criminal background to become a national sport. A sportsman and boxer from Rio, Anibal Burlamaqui, developed a teaching method for capoeira moves and published a manual in 1928.[16] <Fig NN Sportsmen> But his "national gymnastics" had been cleared of its Afro-Brazilian cultural roots. There was no music or ginga, and practitioners were supposed to practice in boxer attire. That was the capoeira that survived in Rio.

In Bahia, a capoeira master, Manoel dos Reis Machado (1900–1974)—better known as Mestre Bimba—became increasingly unsatisfied with capoeira as it was practiced at the time. According to him, it was overly playful with too much pantomime and not efficient enough for real fights. Bimba developed a new style, eliminating the most theatrical aspects of traditional *vadiação* (such as the chamadas or "calls" during which the proper game stopped while practitioners executed ritualized,

[14] For toques played by 8 different mestres, see Rego, W. *Capoeira Angola*. Salvador, 1968, 59–62.
[15] For capoeira lyrics, see Rego, *Capoeira Angola*; and Assunção, M. R. "History and Memory in Capoeira Lyrics from Bahia, Brazil," in *The Portuguese Black Atlantic*, ed. Treece, D. et al, London, 2007, 199–217.
[16] Burlamaqui, A. *Ginástica nacional: capoeiragem metodizada e regrada*. Rio de Janeiro, 1928.

dance-like steps) and incorporating a range of new kicks, inspired by Asian martial arts, but also French savate and Greco-Roman wrestling.[17] <Fig Bimba>

To distance his style from traditional capoeira he called it "Bahian Regional Fight," a term later abbreviated to "Regional." Even more importantly, he devised a teaching method for capoeira, which so far had only been taught quite unsystematically, on a one-to-one basis. For example, he developed six "sequences," each of which consisted of a string of attacks and defences to be practiced by two students repeatedly until they familiarized themselves with them and could execute them at high speed. Bimba moreover moved the training away from the street into a closed space, which he called, perhaps inspired by his pupils who were university students, the "academy."

Bimba's didactics were probably the most important innovation, because they allowed a much more systematic teaching of capoeira. His students could graduate in only two years, and given their intense training of attacks and the focus on speed, they were able to defeat not only many traditional capoeiras but also more experienced fighters. During the 1930s and 1940s Bimba had his best students confront other fighters in the ring in prize matches with large audiences in various Brazilian cities.[18]

This helped to advertise his new style even more but also had some drawbacks. The emphasis on fighting tended to eliminate the playful and ritual aspects. The ring was hardly a propitious environment for a capoeira orchestra, and prize matches with fighters from other martial arts were increasingly hampered by arguments over the rules that should prevail, for example regarding the proper attire or the attacks that should be allowed. Therefore Bimba and most of his students eventually retreated from the ring and concentrated on consolidating their style. In contrast to earlier attempts to transform capoeira into a sport by eliminating its African roots, Bimba did maintain core Afro-Brazilian rituals of the roda, including the orchestra (based on berimbau and tambourines only), and his rhythms became another hallmark of Regional. At the same time he created, with the help of his pupils with an academic background, new rituals that contributed to attract new audiences. For instance he invented two new rites of passage, a "baptism" ceremony for new and graduation ceremonies for advanced students in his "academy." Students, or capoeiristas, as they were now called, were expected to abide by strict rules of the academy, such as, for example, abstaining from drinking alcohol. These ceremonies reaffirmed the separation between beginners and graduated students and contributed toward the creation of a hierarchy that had not existed before.[19]

It also enhanced the group's identity, which was further reinforced through adoption of white uniforms with the emblem of the school—a Solomon star with an R inside, topped by a cross. No doubt Bimba's religious background—he had been initiated in Afro-Bahian Candomblé religion at an early age and was the chief drummer at his wife's shrine—provided the materials with which he and his group built a definitively modern style that proved to be attractive to new and wider audiences. Some of his middle-class students also helped his academy become officially recognized by the Bahian state government in 1937, an important step toward the decriminalization of the art. All of these innovations did not necessarily please other practitioners, even though Bimba invited them to join. Bimba's success made them feel that he was betraying genuine capoeira in order to promote himself. Ever since then, the meaning of Regional has been an object of heated disputes.[20]

The emergence of Regional not only decisively contributed to the survival of an art form that may have disappeared otherwise, but it also provoked the development of a second, competing style, which modernized by emphasizing tradition. A group of about twenty respected mestres resisted the innovations of Regional since the 1930s, continuing to hold regular rodas according to the traditional way, which they now called "Capoeira de Angola". In 1942, Vicente Ferreira Pastinha took over the direction of that group and dedicated the rest his long life to promote what became known as the

[17] For a list of the kicks Bimba introduced in the 1930s, see Abreu, Fred, *Bimba é bamba.* Salvador,1999, 68.
[18] The best account of these episodes is given by Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, op. cit.
[19] Vieira, L. R. *O jogo da capoeira: Corpo e cultura popular no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, 1995, 161.
[20] Assunção, M. R. *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*. London, 2005: 140–149.

Angola style. <Fig Pastinha> Pastinha became the main—even if not undisputed—figurehead of Bahian capoeira traditionalists for a number of reasons. He was an extraordinary skilled player, having been initiated into capoeira at the end of the 19th century by Benedito, an old Angolan freedman, and he had practiced fencing, jackknife techniques, and Swedish gymnastics while serving in the Navy as an adolescent. Moreover, he was an accomplished musician, who not only had learned to play capoeira music but also had received training in the Navy orchestra. Although he received no formal education beyond primary school, he became the most articulate Angola master, enjoying reflection, in conversations, interviews, or writing, about capoeira. He therefore became "the first popular capoeirista to analyse capoeira as a philosophy and to worry about the ethical and educational aspects of his practice."[21]

He also enjoyed the support of many Bahian intellectuals, such as Jorge Amado, who hailed him as preserving one of the city's core traditions. Having himself experienced trouble with the police as a young man, Pastinha later identified the "tough guys" of the past as being responsible for the bad image of capoeira. He wanted to establish distance between these troublemakers and Capoeira Angola, and for that reason he named his centre "Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola." The ethics of sports spreading at that moment throughout the Western world seemed to provide Pastinha with a model consistent with the type of behaviour he wanted to see implemented in the capoeira rodas. This meant establishing a clear differentiation between capoeira as a game, capoeira as a defence, and capoeira as a training method. Yet at the same time Pastinha, together with other icons of the Angola style, such as M. Waldemar or Cobrinha Verde, emphasized the role of music in controlling and giving meaning to the game, the need to learn the "foundations" of capoeira, and the initiatory character of the art requiring a long process of apprenticeship. All this made capoeira Angola more than a simple sport but rather a holistic art with its own philosophy and an elaborate ritual. This also meant maintaining aspects such as the "calls" even if they were not "efficient." If Pastinha did not invent, like Bimba, an entirely new style, he nevertheless contributed significantly to codify the capoeira of his time, establishing norms for Angola still valid today. Regarding the music, for example, he institutionalized the existing song forms *ladainha*, *chula* and *corrido* as the trilogy for a proper game. He also codified the capoeira orchestra as consisting of three berimbaus, one drum, two tambourines, one bell, and a scraper. Similar to Bimba, Pastinha required his students to take regular classes in a closed "academy" and to wear uniforms modeled on sport jerseys. In contrast to Bimba's Regional, though, the Angola style did not immediately become very popular. As his generation of mestres passed away, Pastinha emerged as the increasingly undisputed voice of traditional capoeira—but after he died in 1981, very few people practiced the Angola style.

5. The Growth of Contemporary Capoeira, 1980s to the present

From the late 1940s onwards, capoeira masters and their groups started to demonstrate their skills in the more developed cities of southeast Brazil. Capoeira became part of folklore shows and was performed alongside other Afro-Bahian forms such as samba-de-roda, candomblé, and maculêlê. Just like prize matches in the ring (which continued until the 1950s), this was a new setting, which not only contributed to disseminate the art but eventually resulted in new adaptations. Furthermore, thousands of Northeasterners migrated to the growing metropolises of the Southeast, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in the search for jobs and a better standard of living. Among them were a number of capoeira practitioners and even masters. Playing capoeira after work was a way to reconnect to their homeland, but some soon realized it could also become a source of income if taught to locals. Not all of them were successful, but by 1970 nine capoeira academies existed in the city of São Paulo alone, all led by Bahians from both Regional and Angola style.[22]

The conflict between both styles seemed less relevant in the new setting, where cooperation among all capoeiristas appeared the best way to ensure the art would take root in the metropolis. A good case in point is the Cordão de Ouro group, set up by mestres Suassuna and Brasília. Suassuana had first

[21] Decanio Filho, A.A. *A herança de Pastinha*. Salvador, 1996, v.
[22] For a complete list, see *Revista Capoeira*, I, no. 4: 24, 1998.

learned traditional capoeira in southern Bahia but had then trained with Bimba's students before coming to São Paulo. Brasília was a student of M. Canjiquinha, a prominent angoleiro, and founder of an important capoeira lineage. As a result, Bahians in the southeast of Brazil usually no longer claimed to belong to a specific style but asserted that they taught capoeira full stop.

A number of Bahian masters from both styles were also established in Rio de Janeiro, such as Paraná, Roque, and Mário Santos. Artur Emídio (1930–2011), a prize-fighter who nevertheless stuck to the rituals and the music of capoeira, was probably the most influential. Most capoeira masters of the second generation in Rio were his students. That capoeira was established mainly in the poorer neighborhoods in the "Northern zone" or even the periphery such as Caxias, where a capoeira street roda has been in existence since the 1970s.

Another important development was the emergence of the Senzala group in the richer "Southern zone" of the city. Two adolescents discovered capoeira during a trip to Salvador where they trained in Bimba's academy. They decided to continue training on their own on the veranda of their flat, and soon a group of white, middle-class youngsters were training with them (although there were also some boys from the nearby shantytown). They received further support from Bimba's students, some of whom established themselves in Rio. The Senzala group developed their own training method, including "exhaustive and methodological repetition of kicks," "systematic trainings of kick-counterattack and kick-fall carried out by pairs."[23]

This renewed emphasis on speed and efficiency, and the systematic use of grappling techniques resulted in Senzala students performing well in the capoeira competitions that were being organized. Their decentralized structure—with every teacher, soon master, being relatively autonomous— also appealed to the new, middle-class audiences, and Senzala became a model organization for capoeira groups all over Brazil. Several important figures subsequently left and established their own organizations. The most prominent example is M. Camisa. He founded Capoeira Abadá, which was to become the most important organization worldwide, claiming 20,000 members in 1996.

The initial expansion of capoeira throughout Brazil took place during the 1960s to the 1980s, when the military were ruling the country. There were various attempts to transform capoeira into a national sport and institutionalize it. The military encouraged the creation of capoeira federations in each state, with the aim of standardizing practice and imposing norms on capoeira groups. The "Technical Rules of Capoeira" were adopted in 1972 and likened capoeira to an athletic competition with judges awarding points and ranking competitors. Some prominent mestres adhered to the Federations, expecting support for their own groups. But many others resented the imposition of rules, for instance stating that groups had to use the greeting "Salve!" before or after classes, adopt a system of coloured belts, or display the Brazilian flag in the academy. Retrospectively it is clear that most of the growth capoeira experienced in this period did not happen within the Federations but through the independent groups.

In São Paulo, for example, two influential groups, Capitães de Areia and Cativeiro, emerged based on an alternative model of "cultural resistance," aiming to maintain the "foundations" of capoeira against control from above and its absorption into a highly standardized sport. Most capoeira groups in the Southeast merged elements of the two Bahian styles, for example Bimba's sequence of movements with the music and instruments of Angola. Many masters insisted that there was only one capoeira and hence the denomination "Contemporary capoeira" began to be used for what was in fact not one unified style but rather a vast range of practices shaped by the idiosyncrasy of individual groups and their masters. In Rio de Janeiro one student of Pastinha academy, though, insisted that Angola was different. After the death of Pastinha in 1981, M. Moraes established in Salvador and spearheaded the revival of the traditionalist Angola style. Angoleiros ever since insist on the specificity of their style and traditions.

[23] Capoeira, N. *Capoeira: Os fundamentos da malícia*. Rio de Janeiro, 1992: 92–93.

The globalisation of capoeira started in the 1970s, when the first masters began teaching their art in some cities in the US and Western Europe, then Japan and Australia. It really took off during the 1990s, when capoeira practice expanded to some African countries, Eastern Europe, Latin America and more Asian countries. This always was a grassroot process, or as some scholars called it, a transnationalisation from below – the Brazilian government was not in any way involved in the process.

Becoming Immaterial Heritage

After more than a century of persecution of capoeira practice by the Brazilian police forces, the Brazilian state only slowly changed its policies towards the art. If capoeira practice in academies was tolerated from the 1920s onwards, it continued to be viewed with suspicion by the elites and the broader public because of its association with Afro-Brazilian street culture of *malandragem.* A group of military officers therefore attempted to raise capoeira to an acceptable sportive activity, by promoting a symposium in 1969 that counted with the participation of many old mestres. After democratisation, the Programa Nacional de Capoeira represents a first attempt to support the immaterial heritage of. The PNC published some source material and sponsored recordings by veteran masters.[24]

The process leading to the recognition of capoeira as part of Brazil's immaterial heritage only started under the Lula government in the early 2000s.<Fig Chronology> It was lead by Minister of Culture, Gilberto Gil, a black singer and composer strongly rooted in the Afro-Bahian popular culture and familiar with capoeira. After a nationwide enquiry in 2006-07, Brazil's National Institute for Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) inscribed the capoeira circle and the profession of the capoeira master into the immaterial heritage of Brazil.[25] This was followed by an application to UNESCO, which declared the capoeira roda immaterial heritage of humanity in 2014.[26]

Since 2008 IPHAN has developed various safeguarding actions, which I have no time to detail here. Particularly important are the creation of regional councils of capoeira masters, that act as consultants to implement safeguarding policies. In fact, since 2012 IPHAN has to a large extent decentralised its intervention, so each state has to define its own safeguarding plan – but to date only some have managed to do so.[27]

Another core form of State intervention is the regulation of the capoeira teacher profession. Given the extreme diversity of capoeira styles – from full-contact competition to ancestral art form this has generated heated debates and many conflicts, without any consensus in sight. The core opposition continues to between those who conceive capoeira as a sport, and those who defend its predominantly cultural character linked to its African and Afro-Brazilian roots. In other words, should the Sports Ministry be responsible for its regulation, or the Ministry of Culture? In fact, at present both develop public policies towards capoeira.

Conclusion

Capoeira experienced an amazingly rich, but also very contradictory trajectory from a harshly repressed combat game of enslaved Africans to a state-sponsored and global practice considered "cool" by its practitioners.

Since the 1920s, three modernisation models competed against each other, although they also influenced each other. They furthermore engaged with other martial arts and broader societal change. This resulted in a complex universe of many competing styles heading into opposed directions: Olympic sport, full-contact technique for MMA or ancestral practice focused on community and tradition. The

[24] For example, the PNC published the manuscripts of M Noronha and issued a LP by M João Pequeno.
[25] IPHAN. *Inventário para registro e salvaguarda da capoeira como patrimônio cultural do Brasil*. Brasília, 2007; IPHAN. *Roda de Capoeira e do Ofício dos Mestres de Capoeira*. Brasília, 2014.
[26] UNESCO. "Capoeira circle". https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/capoeira-circle-00892
[27] IPHAN. *Salvaguarda da Roda de Capoeira e do Ofício dos Mestres de Capoeira : apoio e fomento*. Brasília, 2017.

impossibility of reaching a consensus and the culture wars that derive from this situation also prevent a number of safeguarding actions, even the elaboration of safeguarding plans.

The millions of practitioners in 150 countries make capoeira untypical in terms of immaterial heritage that needs safeguarding to avoid extinction. On the contrary, its sportification and commercialisation, including the use of capoeira by companies to advertise anything form mobile phones to energetic drinks, is perceived by many practitioners rather as a threat, that "decaracterises" the art.

Hence it seems appropriate that safeguarding measures focus on the "old guard" of mestres, and support their efforts to maintain ancestral traditions as well as a more systematic effort to create capoeira repositories, libraries, and archives.