MARTIAL DANCE, FIGHTING, ART, RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION, THERAPY, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT, RITUAL, OR EVEN "A WAY OF BEING".

ARE AMONG THE HOST OF DEFINITIONS OR QUALITIES ATTRIBUTED TO CAPEIRA. THIS PHYSICAL PRACTICE IS BECOMING INCREDIBLY POPULAR THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND ITS MESSAGE IS COUCHED IN DIFFERENT VALUES, DEPENDING ON THE STYLE OF CAPEIRA ADOPTED: ANGOLA, REGIONAL, OR CONTEMPORARY.
All of these virtues can be seen in full bloom in the organization of the ritual (the capoeira circle, or roda), in which considerable pains are taken to reproduce the specific knowledge and language characteristic of the Angola style of capoeira. Let us now join the circle...

**Capevera Angola Ritual Circle Performance**

Capevera originated in Brazil during slavery, and since then there has been tracking the development of our society in all its myriad ways. According to Lina (1991: 10-12), its historical development in Brazil can be traced through four basic stages. In imperial times, before the abolition of slavery, the main purpose of capoeira was to be defensive. After Brazil became a Republic, capoeira gained added attractions as a visible aspect of black culture, and here it was known as Capevera Angola. Under the racialist regime pursued by Getúlio Vargas in the mid-1930s, capevera was organized as a form of gymnastics, and was finally adopted as a sport by the National Sports Council in 1972. The 1930s also saw the development of a new, regional style of capoeira created by Manuel do, or Mestre Bimbal of Bahia, which today is known as Capevera Regional. More recently, a new term was coined for innovative variations on Capevera Regional by Mestre Céncio of the "ABDA Capevera" group — namely, "Contemporary Capevera." This style is practiced by most capevera enthusiasts. Paralleling these three different styles of capevera, we have different types of capoeira circles, and different values which they impart.

It is not my intention here to delve into these differences, for that would involve still another research paper. Our purpose is to illustrate the strict form underlying ritual performance. To do so we will focus specifically on the style known as capevera angola, and describe the capevera circles based on the Capevera Angola Sports Centre, which is the Academy organized by IJCA and Portuguese (CECA — APPR) and which serves as a touchstone for capevera tradition. We must first note that Mestre João Régueiro de Paiva (born December 31, 1937), 84, at age 89, the unique history of capevera. His school and style is a model for practitioners and has been brought to the rest of the world by his students, the most important among them being Mestre Pio de Chambú.

We generally observe, in the discourse and teachings of angola mestres (masters), some emphasis on the preservation of tradition and the fundamentals of angola style capevera. Among these we see, as examples, respect, justice, humility, and patience. All of these virtues can be seen in full bloom in the organization of the ritual (the capevera circle or roda), in which considerable pains are taken to reproduce the specific knowledge and language characteristic of the Angola style of capevera. Let us now join the circle.

**CAPEVERA ANGOLA RITUAL PERFORMANCE, DESCRIBED IN CONTEXT.**

(1) Practically every object, every gesture, song, or prayer, of slice of space and time is interpreted on faith as something other than itself. It is more than it appears to be, and often, quite a lot more. (Hunter 1974: 29)

At the ritual performance one is struck by its polymorphic multivocality. Thus, the way the Academy is decorated — including spaces for hanging the berimbau and rainbow wall paintings (the CECA — APPR), framed photographs of famous masters (in honor of the Heritage, and retelling the story of capevera angola) — down to the uniforms, the body movements and musical style, all of these constitute the numerous languages of capevera angola.

Students arrive early to prepare the ritual space for the circle or roda. They clean the floor and straighten out the benches, while others tune the musical instruments and set up the three canga drums for the ritual performance. There are also spaces, for if the steel wire on the berimbau (the bowstring) breaks during the ceremony, the berimbau must be quickly replaced without interrupting practices.

Ritual performance in capevera consists of the circle, which represents "this old world of God" (the universe). A complete description would necessarily cover the musical and also the elements of self, the hierarchy of rank, moral values, and so on. Then there are the innumerable pairs of oppositions: constant resistance and submission; moves, on your feet and on the floor, close in and outside, joy and pain (sadness), sport and fun, combat and cooperation, attractiveness and suspicion, hand-held fire, and so on. The circle is a festive arena as well as an arena for the world of capevera's symbolic universe. Mestre Bimbal Sete claims there are many masters who believe that capevera, created by Africans in Brazil, has its origins in ancient African rituals. Câmara Cascudo (1967: 183) likewise draws parallels between capevera and African dances as he points to the Yëgo (Dance of the Zebras) as a "mean dance" pertaining to rites of passage, in which adolescent boys dance/compete for the benefits of young female spectators.

Prior to the 1930s, capevera was not practiced indoors in academies, so we would hardly be surprised if the ritual were different from that of today. Back then it was a...
Early on at these rodas, a harmony is found among the musical instruments, the singing (ladaínas, quadras and corridos), and especially the players, whose communication is physical rather than verbal.

CAPOEIRA ANGOLA RITUAL CIRCLE PERFORMANCE

For each berimbau there is a specific tune or harmony. The three blend together to prompt body movements that are predominantly slow, but broader and swifter movements will also be called forth at appropriate times, depending on the rhythm established by the berimbau.

The instrument section in capoeira is called a bateria, ranked as follows: the three berimbau (gunga, mede, cavaço) one or two tamborins, agogo bells, a reco-reco (decorated gourd) and a congá drum or atabaque.

The figure below shows an example of the sequence of instruments in a bateria:

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A CAPOEIRA ANGOLA CIRCLE.

... it is one thing to watch people going through the stylized movements and singing the enigmatic songs that make up the ritual practice, but achieving a proper understanding of what those movements and words mean to them is something else entirely. (Turner, 1974:240)

People generally arrange themselves in a circle at these rodas, but they also sometimes form squares or rectangles. Every group will organize one of these inside its academy about once a week, throughout the year. There is also a party, the Capoeira Angola Event, which brings together the various groups, much like national and international meetings. These are typically sponsored or organized by a specific capoeira Angola group, and a number of different Mestres and their students participate.

Early on at these rodas, a harmony is found among the musical instruments, the singing (ladaínas, quadras and corridos), and especially the players, whose communication is physical rather than verbal.

CAPOEIRA INSTRUMENTS AND RANK. The main instrument in a capoeira Angola circle is the berimbau — which is the highest-served — and the tempo, and style to be played is settled at its foot, at the "pé do berimbau." The instrument comes in three types: the berimbau or gunga is the deepest barre, which generally "runs" the circle and is played by a Mestre or close associate. Next in rank (which in capoeira signifies the player’s experience or wisdom) is the mparameter, followed by the tenor voice.

66 As a general rule, clearest of all amongst the various orders of instrument makers, referring to Mestre João Pequeno and Mestre João de Deus (like other two). The instrument section in capoeira is called a bateria, ranked as follows: the three berimbau (gunga, mede, cavaço) one or two tamborins, agogo bells, a reco-reco (decorated gourd) and a congá drum or atabaque.

-240. The following are the berimbau and tamborim (only belonging to one of the three berimbau).
The ladainha litany (verses 1 to 17) is a type of song in which one may tell a story, say a prayer, sing praise, unburden oneself, issue a challenge, a warning, etc. It is sung solo, that is, as a prompt by the leader.

**CAPOEIRA SONGS.** Before the start of the first bout, the Mestre, or whoever is at the ginga, or perhaps one of the practitioners crouched before the musical bow, will sing a litany. As an illustration of how a roda is begun by Mestre João Pequeno de Passolha, transcribed and translated below is his original composition, Quisabo eu aqua cheguei.

**When I arrived here**

15
01. When I arrived here (L)
02. When I arrived here (L)
03. I went to pray everyone (L)
04. I came to praise the Lord first (L)
05. And the people who live here (L)
06. Now I sing (L)
07. I sing a song in praise (L)
08. I am praising Jesus Christ (L)
09. I am praising Jesus Christ (L)
10. Because he blessed us (L)
11. I am praising and I am praying (L)
12. To the father who created us (L)
13. Blessed the city (L)
14. Blessed the city (L)
15. With all who live here (L)
16. And in the capoeira circle (L)
17. Bless the players, my little friend (L)
18. He has the power (L)
19. Yes, he has the power, friend (L)
20. Yes, he has the power (L)
21. Yes he has the power (L)
22. You know how to play (L)
23. Yes, he knows how to play, friend (L)
24. You play from here to there (L)
25. Yes, he plays for his friend (L)
26. Yes, he plays for his friend (L)
27. Yes, play over here, friend (L)
28. Yes, the world did a turn (L)
29. Yes, what the world has given (L)
30. Yes, what the world gives (L)
31. Yes, what the world gives, friend (L)

**CAPOEIRA ANGOLA RITUAL CIRCLE PERFORMANCE**

The capoeira litany (verses 1 to 17) is a type of song in which one may tell a story, say a prayer, sing praise, unburden oneself, issue a challenge, a warning, etc. It is sung solo, that is, as a prompt by the leader. Mestre João Pequeno’s song brings together a play and a song of praise, placing God on a higher plane than the residents’ (whether of his hometown or somewhere he is passing through).

So he first prays God, petitioning for protection from life’s dangers; then praises the capoeiristas at the circle to charm his audience, put everyone at ease and curb unnecessary impetuousness. At this point, the two players are hunkered down at the foot of the berimbau, listening to the message (with no acrobatics). Only the three small drums and tambourine accompany the litany.

Right after the litany/ADXARDAY (usually after the word “carnival”), verse 17 (above) comes the duet (verses 18 to 31). Here the singer or leader (usually the Mestre) sings a verse and the participants respond in chorus, repeating the leader’s verse in song. The players also join in the chorus and point to each other, then raise both hands to lend emphasis to the statement that “He has the power, knows how to play,” etc.

The lyrics of Verso seno de Deus are: (Yo, the world did a turn, tell the players they may begin practice. They make the sign of the cross, and greet each other with a brotherly handshake.

From that point forward the singing turns to corridos, which also feature chorus responses that, unlike the choros, are unchanging and specific to each corrido. At this stage each player will typically perform, while facing each other, a fall on the knees (queda de costas) toward the berimbau, as both a salute and a way of expressing respect for the rules of the game, as orchestrated by the musicians/dancers here is an example:

**Tem dendê**

1. - Dendê, dendê, nice (P)
2. - Angola practice adds dendê (P)
3. - Dendê space, dendê is nice (C)
4. - Poor technique will add dendê (P)
5. - Dendê space, dendê is nice (C)

If we realize that dendê palm oil is an important ingredient in Bahia for spicing up food, we see that this corrido is sung while the game is savoy, looking good, well done, at a time when the players are elegantly communicating through body language. To start up the corrido, the first two verses are called out by the Mestre for his substitute in leader. After the fourth verse, the chorus alternates in response to each verse called out (over and over until the bout seems to need some other type of song, or the battle signals another type of corrido).
The attitude with which a player approaches the circle or faces life is one of challenge and struggle for social justice. As we follow its ritual performance we observe that it privileges neither left nor right, and favors neither the high nor humble station. Instead, it strikes a balance between opposing parties, whatever their number, in a continuous exercise of humility and patience.

CAPOEIRA ANGOLA RITUAL CIRCLE PERFORMANCE

Closing Remarks about Capoeira Practice. Participants include the Masters, students, and even the audience in the case of an open circle. Anyone not participating in the fight or playing an instrument pays attention to the game and takes part in the chorus. Capoeira angola is a thoughtful, conscious sport in which the capoeiristas attack in self-defense, striking at all times to do the right thing (which extends into everyday life outside the circle). Each must observe the other, and analyze their moves in order to know what he is up against, to whom or how he is relating. One's attention must encompass not only the game, but also what is being sung; for the songs are the vehicle for teaching capoeira in such a way that they are of good and force of the nonverbal communication (body language) between the players.

Attack and defense moves, such as basic steps, feints, spinning kicks, mystic kicks, kicks, freezes, and other moves, which make up capoeira angola are as executed to comprise a nonverbal dialogue between the two contestants. The main thing is not to attack, but rather to know how to defend oneself. Hence the emphasis on the virtues of respect, patience, humility, balance — and therefore justice — which are the primary values sought by the practitioner of capoeira angola. Balance, for instance, is understood in its broadest meaning, that is, the idea of balance comes forward into other aspects of life, so that the capoeira angola practitioner, an angolero, works constantly toward a sense of inner balance, not only in practicing the body movements specific to capoeira, but also with regard to others in daily life.

One is therefore justified in saying that the practice of capoeira angola is itself an exercise in the control of violence, for everything must be done politely, in a good spirit for the sport) and respectfully. That is, "other" person, the adversary, in fact your buddy (partner in practice) — someone who makes it possible for you to go on learning.

Capoeira practitioners have no set time limits. Any given bout can go on for five, 10 minutes, or half an hour; but whenever the heavenly "call" to a specific rhythm or situation, the players begin, that signals the end of the bout and is an invitation for another bout. The players then proceed to the foot of the banana tree, pay homage to one another, like good companions, and make way for the next two capoeiristas to enter the circle.

As time goes by, we see the movements of capoeira angola. The attitude with which a player approaches the circle or faces life is one of challenge and struggle for social justice. As we follow its ritual performance we observe that it privileges neither left nor right, and favors neither the high nor humble station. Instead, it strikes a balance between opposing parties, whatever their number, in a continuous exercise of humility and patience.

Bibliography


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