

## Our References

Monthly magazine of Afro-centric interviews  
Mestre Lua Rasta

*We thank all the Orixás, our ancestors who spilled their blood  
in the battle for FREEDOM, which is still being fought*

A.C. Quilombo Cecília  
Cultural resistance  
Source: PortalCapoeira  
Translation into English: Shayna McHugh



*Tim, tim, tim, lá vai viola...* when the roda gets to this point, the capoeiristas, the instrument players, those who are awaiting their turn to play, and those who are watching, are all already deeply delivered to the trace of capoeira. The movements of the players' bodies occur without thought and without any physical force, as though the capoeiristas were being moved by some invisible force, and the music is so solid that it can be felt in the air.

There is a black man with a beard and long dreadlocks who leaps, dances, shakes, and enters into a religious ecstasy. At the same time, he tosses into the middle of the corrido revolutionary phrases, political questionings, and messages of black pride, making the audience go wild in the rhythm of the berimbau and atabaque. This is Mestre Lua Rasta. He yells "Iê" and the roda stops. Mestre Ciro Lima advises all the spectators – street kids, tourists, capoeiristas, students, old people, couples, families – that this is the Capoeira Angola Movement of Salvador, which came from Africa and began here in the exact moment that the first black men were brought to work as slaves, and that they have resisted against exploitation in the Bahian capitol for 500 years. Mestre Lua then speaks, in his lingo of a black man from the periphery, full of expressions and words that only those who fight to survive and who grow up far from the systems of formal education and good manners understand. He speaks and everyone understands: about the war in Afghanistan, about the mines in the civil war of Angola, about black peoples' ignoring their own culture (his words are illustrated by the large number of Europeans who seek out his rodas), about prostitution, about Brazilian history, and about various themes linked to the daily lives of the great majority of the Bahian population. Sometimes it's a sermon, sometimes advice, sometimes a parable, sometimes a frank and direct political speech about resistance, battle, and rescue, always marked by an impressive cohesion and a determination to open the listeners' eyes to the importance of introspection. And the roda continues, always joyful, a circus without being a crazy spectacle, beautiful without being a lure for gringos. Actually, they always make sure to emphasize that that roda doesn't ask money from anyone.

The importance that it has, for a black man who works the whole week, who breaks his back every day in trying to win his daily bread, who lives in a society in which nothing is similar to him, always seen negatively, always discriminated, a society that pushes him

with all its strength towards drugs, towards crime, towards senseless violence – to arrive on Friday in the Terreiro<sup>1</sup> and see the Angola roda, sacred and healthy, to listen to those ideas, to share with the people who are there, far from a process of commercial folklorization, where the people respect each other and complement each other – the only people who can measure this importance are those who experience it!!

And Mestre Lua himself is a history! And Mestre Lua makes up part of the history! It is a similar history to that of all the African descendents, sons of the poor periphery... a path that twists and turns until the man finds himself inside himself and decides to face the battle head-on. Old holes have snakes inside, and this man has much to teach us.

January 28, 2002

**NR – When and where were you born?**

MLR – I was born in Salvador. I was born on Miguel Torres Street, Cônego Pereira Hill, the old bus station, close to the Pela-Porco. I was born on June 28, 1950. I'll be 52 years old this year.

**NR – And your parents?**

MLR – My mother was also from Salvador, from the same neighborhood. She has passed away. My family is one of black and indigenous tradition. And my father, well, since I'm the son of a single mother, I don't have a single memory of my father. I met him when I was very small. So I have no father; my mother and my grandparents filled the role. Just to make it clear: I was yet another son of a single mother...

**NR – And your grandparents lived in the same neighborhood?**

MLR – The same neighborhood: Macaúbas, the old bus station. My grandfather, who was also my godfather, was called José Gregório Fernandes, a dockworker. My grandmother, Maria das Dores Fernandes, was a descendent of Angola.

**NR – And what was the place like?**

MLR – A descendent of Angola like the majority of the blacks in Bahia, right? In all of Brazil, but mainly in Bahia, where the majority of blacks are Bantus... it's the cultural reference... but when it comes to African customs, these stayed more in the periphery of Bahia, in Paripe, Periperi... we here in Salvador have lost much of the African relations. So for a very long time, the only references that we've had of the African blacks are Candomblé and Capoeira de Angola. But we're actually descendents of Africans!

**NR – Were your family members of Candomblé?**

MLR – They weren't "insiders" of Candomblé, but there was a relationship because they attended Candomblé ceremonies. I remember going to them when I was a boy. They had relationships with the Orixás. Regarding the customs, it was more the tradition of cooking over a wood fire, cooking in the iron pot. Even though we had a stove and a cylinder of gas, we used to cook with a wood fire. This was very traditional, and very good for whoever was in the city, to keep this thing alive, you know, of meals. This was

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<sup>1</sup> The Terreiro de Jesus, which is the square in the Pelourinho where Lua Rasta holds his weekly street roda.

very strong in my family. Candomblé wasn't so strong, and even in my time it was strongly influenced by syncretism, by Catholicism, by Christianity. So in my family this disappeared little by little every day, but I am so proud of being born in this family of blacks and Indians, got it?

**NR – And what do you remember of the street, what was the life like?**

MLR – Dude, it was the greatest...

**NR – The relationship with your mother and brothers, the people in the street...**

MLR – Dude, the poor... the neighborhood is the greatest! I remember the playful games, the friendship... I have the best memories. The worst thing, for me as a black man and for any one of us, being the son of a single mother, in a neighborhood, in a street, in a school, is tough!!! Lots of discrimination, within my own family, you know? Today when a girl of 13 or 14 gets pregnant, her mother ends up caring for the kid... in my time and before that, in my mother's time, to get pregnant outside of marriage... you could be sure that your father would throw you out in the street, so I think that my mother suffered much discrimination because there was no man in the picture. I remember that my mother didn't like this very much; she fought, but...

**NR – And she worked as...**

MLR – A washer-woman, my mother was a washer-woman. She really gave everything to raise her kids and put us in school; she was tough. So I had a childhood, an adolescence, I went to the beach, but I did face discrimination, you know? We overcame it, I overcame it, but I know that this whole time was tough for my mother, until the kids grew up and turned 18 or 20 and were independent, but until we were 14 or 15...

**NR – How many kids were there?**

MLR – I had two sisters, of which only one is alive today, so we were three siblings. There in Barros Reis, I studied in the Isidro Monteiro school in Barbalho... in Carneiro Ribeiro, on Paiva Hill, were the private schools. Private meaning, those little schools of the street.

**NR – And how did you leave the neighborhood and go to the city?**

MLR – I was, well, to tell the truth, despite being very mischievous, very naughty, I was raised by my grandmother, like: raised by my grandmother!!! That story... Until freeing myself from that situation of being "raised by my grandmother"... I'd never been to the Pelourinho. I lived in Barbalho, but I had never been to the city center. Also regarding black culture itself, like, our actual ancestors, the thing that was the clearest for me was Candomblé. Candomblé was strong. In my time I hadn't gotten into that thing of the Christian, of the believer. I remember it was the biggest discrimination – So-and-so is a believer!!! Those guys never joined with anyone. Not even with Catholics, so it was even worse with Candomblé. If you were Catholic, which is the religion of society itself, you're Catholic, but you're a spiritist!! Everything... and nothing!!

**NR – It ended up being yet another mask!**

MLR – And until you realize this... I was raised in the era of “sin,” everything is sin! Arriving late is a sin: - Fuck, midnight, it’s a sin!! Sin, a creation of the church itself, is traumatic for a child. This was very strong in my time. So much so that I only found Capoeira very late in life, because until then, no one had ever told me about capoeira, not even my parents, and why not? Because of the brainwashing that the system did to the blacks, that the capoeirista is a delinquent. Even if a father was poor, was a dockworker, was a porter, he would never admit that his son was a capoeirista. So I came from a poor family, but a family with their values completely alienated by society. I had to study!!! Especially being the son of a single mother, I had to show my stuff, I had to overcome all that in order to be respected even inside my own family, by my own uncles, who were all married. I was seen as the rebel of the family. I began to work when I was 15 or 16 years old. It was in the Shoe Industry, in Barros Reis, and then I had the opportunity to leave the firm and go to the city center. Here in the center I came to discover things; I already had some money...

**NR – Did you keep studying?**

MLR – I stopped studying in order to work. I studied until the fifth grade, and at that time I didn’t have any notion of my own citizenship, of my own blackness, my own culture; I was totally alienated. The Black Movement didn’t even exist in that era, it was more like this: the black man in Brazil – did he study? Great! He didn’t study? He’ll be a porter; he’ll work in the market. Today I see that even those who have education are working in the market, and it’s better to work there than be unemployed. Until entering into the world of Capoeira, because it was Capoeira that opened my eyes to the awareness of revolution in this period...

**NR – When was this?**

MLR – Dude, it was like in 65 or 70, around there... when I was 16 I went to Rio de Janeiro, and I was already a capoeirista. I stayed in Rio until I was twenty, I came and went, but I lived there. Afterwards I came back, I spent some time in São Paulo, on that same trip, for Capoeira, and at the end I went to Europe, where I stayed until I was thirty, and then I came back and I’m here...

**NR – You’re talking about the era of Brazil’s military dictatorship. What were the biggest shocks; what was it like to leave your neighborhood and go to the Pelourinho during the dictatorship?**

MLR – I left the neighborhood and came right to the Pelourinho. I became a student of Mestre Bimba, it was right here where Mestre Bamba’s academy exists today. Afterwards I went to Belvedere da Sé, where there was Mestre Caiçara and Mestre Canjiquinha, and I became a student of Mestre Canjiquinha. I was present at various conflicts between the students, the police, and the army. I didn’t participate, but I saw various confrontations with the Military Police. I had a cousin who was my age, who was a politician at the time, and who was imprisoned for a while. I was present at all that, but in a different context; I wasn’t involved. I didn’t have that vision... of combat, of that whole business of strikes, of protests.

**NR – But even for people outside of that process, what got worse with the dictatorship?**

MLR – We were discriminated in various ways! Because there was that military phase of the dictatorship, but society has always been a dictatorship! We were always oppressed, even when the army wasn't in the streets. The dictatorship continues today; nothing has changed. Today it's disguised, because before we used to really go to the street – like, when they raised the bus fares! Whoever didn't agree went and protested and burned everything, and today there are no protests. So there has always been a dictatorship; we have always lived in a camouflaged dictatorship. Before, it was more direct, because the powers of the time were more afraid of communism, of rebellions. I experienced this as well!

**NR – How was your first contact with Capoeira?**

MLR – My first contact with Capoeira was actually with Mestre Popó from Santo Amaro, when I saw it for the first time. Until then, I had no idea. I used to go to Candomblé and Umbanda with my mother. I went to listen to the music, and I liked to eat the Candomblé food. I was a boy, I listened to the sound of the agogô, the sound of the atabaque; it was a kids' thing, to go to Candomblé. Not because we wanted to be Ogans, or be “insiders” of Candomblé. We went because we enjoyed it; we were totally clueless. But Capoeira was stronger. I saw that demonstration of Maculelê of Santo Amaro, of mestre Popó, and that hit me really hard, that thing of black culture, that I really saw, those black men. I had never seen that; no one had ever told me about Maculelê. So when I saw that for the first time, it moved me, and I was really interested in knowing what that was, what folklore was that, with all those shirtless black men like warriors. So I got interested. Time passed, and it stuck in my mind. After a while, I started to hear comments from relatives, you know, who would get together on Sundays to eat beans, and would gossip about fights and whatnot. I listened. So one day I heard: Dude, that fight... the guy who fought with the escort!!! You know the escort? The military escort that made the police rounds. One guy alone fought with all those guys and destroyed them, and I, fuck, I was amazed that the guy took on that whole crowd by himself and did well. After that, one of my uncles said: - Ah, but the guy was a capoeirista, that's why he won! I said, Fuck, a capoeirista!!! I wanted to know what that was. So that's what hooked me, the story of a fight that occurred, and it stuck with me. When I started to work, when I started to come to the Pelourinho, I left work at five o'clock, and instead of going home, I went to the Historical Center. It was there that I came to meet Mestre Pastinha. But the Capoeira that I saw with him, I had no idea about the Historical Capoeira, the black man's Capoeira, the roots Capoeira. Because I, at sixteen years old, was a cheeky kid, a street kid. Not a street kid, but a neighborhood kid, and I fought for no reason. You know what kids are like at that age, they fight for no reason, they fight for stupid things. The older ones arrive, they want to end the fun, and you go and throw rocks, hit with glass, screw them up. The guy comes after you later and wants to beat you up! For me, learning Capoeira at the time was to defend myself from this. I didn't even think about karate or judo, they didn't even pass through my head, those were already things of the elite class. The people who trained those were mommy's boys. Black men weren't in judo classes, they did Capoeira. I saw the clever Capoeira of Mestre Pastinha, and I would never

understand that; what I wanted was the “tough” capoeira to defend myself, I wanted the Capoeira of the guy who beat up ten men. So I continued my search, until one day I passed through that street where Mestre Bimba was, and I saw the berimbau, the pandeiro, and the atabaque dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum, dum-dum-dum... I went up to see what it was. Mestre Bimba’s academy and his crew; at the time when I entered there was Ferabrás, Jorge de Onça, Airto, Bira Acordeon, Camisa Roxa, Ezequiel, Itapoan, Alegria. So when I saw those guys playing that fast game, I thought that my place was there: - This is the capoeira that I want: Fight! I still had no idea about the Historical Capoeira, the roots Capoeira; I was in a violent phase. Today we say: - Capoeira Angola is non-violence, and Capoeira Regional is non-violence, when in the old days we used to learn in order to be able to really fight! Have you heard what João Pequeno said? That when he entered capoeira it was the era of “tough guys,” that he wanted to be a “tough guy,” and that Capoeira was a thing of “tough guys.” I was much younger, but I experienced that Capoeira of the “tough guys”; you would learn in order to defend yourself. With time, in the folkloric groups in which I participated – I participated in Viva Bahia, which was Emilia Biancardi’s group – I also learned other things, I learned the cultural side of Capoeira, to travel, to give performances. It was no longer possible for you to focus on the “fight”; you had to wake up and notice that the Capoeira of that time already had support for traveling, for being performed in theaters. Even in the folkloric group, which wasn’t so much about earning money as about earning status: damn, no, I’m in such-and-such group, I’m going to perform in the Vila Velha Theater, in Castro Alves! So it changed the stereotype of fighting Capoeira practiced by delinquents. And capoeira began to enter into a cultural process, into a process of awareness that also included the *blocos afros*,<sup>2</sup> the awareness of the young generation, Ilê Aiyê, and Olodum much later, but in the same movement of valorization of black culture, and this was really good, we opened this more cultural path. And since then, we keep discovering new things about Capoeira, new political awareness, about which we had no clue at the time; we used to do things in anger, randomly!

**NR – How was your contact with Capoeira Angola?**

MLR – My contact with Angola was in Rio. I left from there involved in a really good group from Rio, which was Senzala.

**NR – So you went to Rio working with Capoeira?**

MLR – Actually I went to Rio with a folkloric group.

**NR – How old were you?**

MLR – I was eighteen, and I went to Rio with this Viva Bahia group. We did various performances, and the last one was in the Municipal Theater of Rio, which for us at the time: - Fuck, the Municipal Theater!! To perform there with a Capoeira group from Bahia, for me it was like what a trip to Europe would be today; it was a real accomplishment! Today no one wants to go to Rio or São Paulo; they want to go right to Japan! At the time, going to Rio was the best thing ever! We traveled a ton, even though we weren’t very well-paid, we were students. So in Rio I had lots of contact with the theater people. José Celso Martinez, the creator of the Theater Workshop, Augusto Boal,

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<sup>2</sup> Afro-centric carnival groups.

who was exiled at the time, Amil Hadad. So these guys encouraged me in the theatrical aspect. Since I was already involved with a folkloric group, it was easy for me to participate in courses and workshops: Theater of the Oppressed, Theater Workshop, street Theater. And I started to give Capoeira classes. For example, I met José Celso Martinez in a workshop in Cinelândia, in a street workshop, and he told me to teach Capoeira to the theater folks. I also started to have access to the theater. J.C. Martinez was a vanguard theater. It was good for me to participate in that as a capoeirista, since I already had this vision of historical Capoeira.

**NR – And Capoeira Angola?**

MLR – Capoeira Angola was after this whole thing with Senzala.

**NR – When you got back to Salvador?**

MLR – No, in Rio I started to give classes in a space owned by the Black Movement, one of the first groups of the Black Movement. I met Mestre Roque, an angoleiro who gave classes in that academy. And I started to experience a different Capoeira, because here in Bahia I had only experienced Capoeira Regional. I also learned another type of Capoeira, which was the Capoeira of the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, which was neither Capoeira Angola nor Regional, it was more like a hard Angola. I learned and learned Angola. When I returned to Bahia, I already... it was the very process of the awareness of blackness, this is what Capoeira Angola brings, understand? So I found myself an Angoleiro!! It wasn't one of those things like: - I learned with so-and-so, with some guy! Because I trained Regional here with Mestre Bimba. With Mestre Canjiquinha there was Angola and Regional. Canjiquinha always claimed he was neither an angoleiro nor Regional, he defended that Capoeira was according to the berimbau. If the berimbau played Jogo de Dentro, you had to play Jogo de Dentro. If it was São Bento Grande, you had to play São Bento Grande, and that São Bento Grande, actually, was more practiced by the regional capoeiristas, and it was a faster rhythm: dom; dim, dom, dom; dim, dom, dom; dim, dom, dom. And Mestre Bimba didn't use this rhythm in his academy! The São Bento Grande de Bimba was something else: dom, dim; dom dom dim; dom, dim; dom dom dim; and the São Bento Grande of Canjiquinha and of Angola is the dim, dom, dom; dim, dom, dom. This whole toque thing is really complex, got it? You play São Bento Grande da Angola, and in Bimba's academy it's the opposite. The toque of Angola, dom, dim; dom dim; in Regional has a different name, it's Ave Maria! The toque of Capoeira changes a lot, and many mestres also created lots of their own rhythms. You'll see Apanha-laranja-no-chão-tico-tico. I always heard apanha-laranja-no-chão-tico-tico in Angola rodas. It was the guy picking up the handkerchief, snatching the money with his mouth. But the same rhythm, which in Angola is [singing]: apanha-laranja-no-chão-tico-tico-se-meu-amor-for-se-embora-eu-não-fico. So it's really complicated.

**NR – And when did you return to Salvador?**

MLR – First I went to Europe, I went to live in Switzerland, which was a whole other story with Capoeira. I also had a group there, but I didn't want that pre-determined thing of Angola or Regional; it was Capoeira, as I am to this day, I am a capoeirista. Today, I'm an angoleiro at heart, but an angoleiro of my time... today it always appears in the news, ya know, some guy saying he's an angoleiro: the guy spends his whole life in

Regional and then does a couple Angola classes and goes around saying he's Angola and Regional. I'm a capoeirista and I always sought, in an Angola roda, to try my best, with whatever capoeirista I'm playing. But I'm not a native-born angoleiro, just as I'm also not Regional. I experienced so many street rodas, with Mestre Waldemar, Mestre Canjiquinha, Mestre Caiçara, Mestre Traíra, so many mestres in Capoeira, and people want to say I'm an angoleiro or regional... I'm a capoeirista! Of course in my heart and my actual roots I'm Angola, but I won't go around saying I'm an angoleiro. For me it doesn't matter, because today I see that it's totally commercialized. The monopoly, the feudalism – “Whoever isn't an angoleiro is a nobody!” I don't support this idea!

**NR – And how long did you spend in Switzerland?**

MLR – Five years.

**NR – Working with Capoeira?**

MLR – Working with Capoeira, giving classes. Working with percussion, making my instruments, I'm proud of making them wherever I go, and I'll continue making them, even if I have to walk around selling them on the beaches. It was always like this!

**NR – And when you returned to Salvador, did you come right back to the Pelourinho?**

MLR – No, when I came back to Salvador I went to Itapoan, a place that in my childhood I had always wanted to live someday when I was financially able. I always hoped to live in traditional places like that. For me my dream was to live in Itapoan. So after my trip to Europe, I had enough money to live in the place that was my dream, which was Itapoan. Except I was disappointed; when I returned Itapoan was already Babylon, super-populated, lots of people, it already had this problem of even poor peoples' houses having locked gates and bars on the windows, you know? When I pass through Liberdade,<sup>3</sup> I wonder how can people live like this? In the city of Salvador itself, you have tiny houses with locked gates, walls with tons of broken glass on top, and you can see that these people have no money. Fuck, why is that? Ah, because if you leave clothes hanging to try they'll get stolen, if you leave your sneakers outside they'll get stolen! So I was disappointed with that, and I moved. I managed to make a decent amount in Europe and I wasn't about to waste all that money on rent. So we went to the island,<sup>4</sup> we camped on the island and we're there until today. I stayed on the island for twenty years. It's a great place to live, and I'm there to this day, but it's already being surrounded by the Telebahia cell phone company, I've got a huge fight with them and this Babylon that's produced by another Babylon which is the State Government. I've lived there for twenty years... the island used to be the greatest paradise, full of monkeys, full of snakes, of animals, and now it's being totally deforested to make room for fancy condominiums for people who sometimes aren't even super-rich; they're middle-class and have been brainwashed to think that they have to live in a closed condominium, with security. And as for me, I'm seeking a different place, since the place where I retired and where I was going to spend the rest of my life no longer exists. So I've lived on Itaparica for twenty years, and the island is shrinking, they're destroying it. We don't have an environmental group to fight

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<sup>3</sup> Itapoan and Liberdade are neighborhoods in Salvador.

<sup>4</sup> Itaparica Island, an island in All Saint's Bay a short boat ride from the city of Salvador.

it directly, fight even against the government itself, with IBAMA,<sup>5</sup> with the organizations that protect the fauna and the Atlantic Rainforest. It's all lies, all corrupt. My life today in Salvador, which is my land, is sometimes a disappointment. I see that the actual tendency is to trivialize all this. You see that even the police, that we (who are deceived) pay for, right... we're workers that pay our taxes to a police force that should protect us... and we fear the police! So, sincerely: - In Jah, Amen, I have the hope of Jah, of the promise, but from men I no longer hope for anything, just war itself, persecution, prostitution. Now, I don't give up on the teachings, on the rescue of culture; I believe that through culture we can manifest revolutions, real transformations. It's developing street work, confronting Pelourinho Night-and-Day, confronting IPAC,<sup>6</sup> confronting the Military Police. They said that the Pelourinho was run-down, and made it a World Historical Heritage. Heritage of the world, but not of the Bahians, because the Bahians get the shaft! The police protect the foreigners, but we natives who make the culture here, we are humiliated. By organizations like Bahiaturisa, Emtursa, IPAC. All lies, lies, lies, to deceive the population and promote the ACM and its government, totally arbitrary. And I really see us as changing this picture...

**NR – How was living with the old mestres, something that's already distant from the young generations?**

MLR – Dude, the life in those days... it was the old mestres who maintained this resistance, a resistance that was at times even naïve. But they were our role models. Waldemar, Mestre Canjiquinha, Mestre Bimba, Mestre Bobó, these guys were our leaders, they were the guys that, shit, idolizing has nothing to do with it... but we believed in them!!! Canjiquinha was a hero for me. He was a capoeirista who participated in a ton of films. You see a film like *Barravento* or *O Pagador de Promessas*, and the whole theatrical part, the performances, the culture – the production crew left it all in his hands; he was the one who gave the flavor of popular culture to the film. He was the most conceptualized guy in this lineage. Mestre Caiçara was another guy who was really good, in the era when Bahia had a lot of that mysticism. Even this has been lost, you believing in the guy: - Mestre Caiçara of Oxossi, fuck, the guy was of Oxossi, which at the time was something so strong, understand, Oxossi, the orixá of the forests. It was great to live with Mestre Caiçara in day-to-day life and see his way of being. Mestre Caiçara was a totally radical guy, totally rebelling against society, the system, the police system. All this was very important for people who today are between 45 and 60 years old – resistance, you know? Real political resistance! Today a lot of people say: - Ah, but the old mestres played by the system's rules. No, but it was different, today it's we who play by the rules of the system, in that era it was the system who played by their rules, they who insisted, understand? Today getting sponsorship and support to carry out any type of event is impossible! It's only possible for whoever is on the board of directors of Bahiaturisa, of the government, of the cultural organizations of Bahia. Today it's much easier for an Afro-Brazilian Orchestra – which is owned by Tânia Simões, which is owned by IPAC, which is owned by the government, which is owned by who knows who – to get sponsorship for anything they want. Did you see this festival (Bahian Festival of Popular Culture) that happened recently? So much sponsorship, so many things, but all of it for

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<sup>5</sup> IBAMA is a Brazilian environmental organization.

<sup>6</sup> These, as well as Bahiaturisa and Emtursa mentioned later on, are cultural/tourism organizations.

them, from themselves and for themselves. But if you or I do some work, develop some project, no matter how good it is, we won't be inserted into "the scheduled programming"!

**NR – And Capoeira today? And the roda in the Terreiro de Jesus?**

MLR – Capoeira Angola in Bahia – in Brazil, but especially in Bahia – is passing through a very delicate process, which is a process of how the angoleiros were always discriminated against in the past; today there is a turnaround in Capoeira that favors the angoleiro and Capoeira de Angola. I see a massification and also a globalization of Angola, in the sense that if we vacillate we'll be totally discharacterizing our movement, because Capoeira Angola entered into a very capitalist process. The majority of those who are doing Capoeira Angola are more involved in the money first, and later the cultural process, the liberating process, which is the main thing. It's like this: the angoleiros of the old days, who had no opportunity to be in the media or enter the "job market" of Capoeira today, the oldest ones, many found themselves even scared, they were used, they were run down, and left Capoeira today in a state into which the youngest players are inserting themselves. But the awareness of liberation, the consciousness of citizenship, the consciousness of fighting racial discrimination, is lacking in these young people. You can see that there are more whites practicing Capoeira Angola than blacks.

**NR – How do you see this European role in black culture? Is Capoeira entering into a path where it eventually won't be able to sustain itself without the investments of foreigners? And is this really a contact, or yet another usufruct?**

MLR – In this, we will have to count on the consciousness of today's Mestres of Capoeira Angola, the youngest ones, because for those who are already at a certain age, João Pequeno, João Grande, despite the existence of other mestres with as much baggage as them, but who are no longer well-known. You know, even the magazines specializing in Capoeira just take advantage of Capoeira to make money. I see that this whitening of Afro-Brazilian culture is a fact.

**NR – You must have suffered lots of discrimination in Switzerland and here, you're aware of the difficulty that we have to enter into their world, even washing dishes, and it's super easy for them to come here. How do you see this?**

MLR – Well it's obvious that it has to do with money! Fixing this is complicated, as I've just said: an angoleiro is president or something of an association of Regional, he also makes up part of the Capoeira Angola counsel, he's also the godfather of such-and-such group, he's an angoleiro, he says he doesn't need money, but he sells "Angola Mãe"<sup>7</sup> t-shirts, he's involved in needy groups of Capoeira Angola where the mestre has no money to support his group, to get a t-shirt, to buy instruments, and he's there: - Businessman!! Now ask if this guy plays Capoeira? Ask if this guy plays berimbau? If this guy sings Capoeira songs? It's a total mess, but he has money, and he's white! This is one of the examples; now let's look at the European: The European and his culture is over with! What's European culture? Wars, missiles, cash... what's the culture of the United States? And who is maintaining this business of, let's put it this way: - Capoeira came from Africa. It came from Africa to the poorest countries through the enslaved blacks, who

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<sup>7</sup> "Mother Angola"

today are dispersed in Martinique, in Guadalupe, throughout the Caribbean, throughout Brazil. Just now, on Reunion Island, there appeared a martial art called Morangue, which was prohibited until a little while ago. Now, Morangue, together with Capoeira Angola, is the biggest fad in Europe: Capoeira Angola and Morangue!! We had never heard of Morangue, but now everyone's doing it!! The angoleiro who goes to Europe to make money!! What's he worried about? What will he do over there? What will he pass on? He'll take it as though it was a cultural product for the whites to participate, and I'm not condemning anyone because I also did this. Ask the guy if he wants to go to Africa to teach Capoeira? No one wants to return to Angola with Capoeira... no one wants to take Capoeira to Cuba, because there's no money to be made...

**NR – Well, at that time there wasn't as much access to information as there is today...**

MLR – I did that while I was there, I didn't think about living there, no, the weapon that I had to earn money was making my instruments and teaching Capoeira, I had no aspirations of: I'll pass on Capoeira! I'll spread Capoeira! I went to Europe with the goal of money, because if I can make a living here then I won't go, because it's robbery! The U.S. today has João Grande with his crew there, but the Americans are contesting, are spreading that Capoeira is Afro-American, in other words, if it was really Afro-American... Except that they went to Africa and had to put their foot in their mouth, because there is no Capoeira in Africa; you have to go to Bahia. And you think that he would go to Bahia: - Ah no, I'll go to Bahia to tell Bahians that Capoeira is really there? The reactionary American white men and black men, they come here to take away our Capoeira, and we go there to deliver it to them, gift-wrapped, understand? And over there, we compete with our own brothers. The angoleiros in the U.S. today compete with me, with you, with whoever isn't from their group or whoever takes Capoeira Angola there. They do everything to burn you, so that you don't make it. They now think that the U.S. is theirs. The angoleiros who are there, dude, if you're not invited by them to participate in the panel discussions, in the "little workshops" they have there, if you go by your free and spontaneous will and with your own money, they cut you off. You have to be hard with the white reactionary system and with the black capoeirista, if you're not invited by him. It's the little shame that is occurring with Capoeira Angola in Brazil and outside the country. When we started to do street Capoeira here... it was something that already existed, as Mestre Ciro says: there has been Capoeira Angola in Brazil for 500 years.

**NR – When did the roda in the Terreiro start?**

MLR – The rescue has been going on for about 4 or 5 years. This process began when the late Dois de Ouro, who was one of the rescuers of Capoeira, got involved. And then Mestre Boca Rica, Mestre Ciro, and I joined. The oldest one in this story was Dois de Ouro, he was always there. And then there was one point when things heated up, the crew that was doing Capoeira, there were many more troublemakers. Rabble-rousers, which is what the Pelourinho always had. More of those than capoeiristas. They were the guys who made chaos in the roda and demanded money from tourists, or robbed them. Actually the capoeiristas didn't even see this. They were playing, and then some other guy would come around and pass the hat to collect money. They weren't capoeiristas,

they were just taking advantage. So I see it this way, that this street thing was exactly to break a little of this academy business, at a time in which everyone was defending only academy Capoeira – street Capoeira is nothing, corner Capoeira is nothing... - street Mestres... they're nothing! It's a thing of vagabonds, without clothes, playing shirtless, sweating, stinking. That was what the policemen and the employees of IPAC said; they wanted to standardize street Capoeira with a uniform and everything. It was something that Street Capoeira will never accept. There have already been proposals for this. I've had one, Boca Rica has had one, to put on a uniform in order to be organized by them. It's also like the Association (Brazilian Capoeira Angola Association), which we believed to be for the benefit of Capoeira Angola, of capoeiristas. But we were disappointed, because each one of the presidents there has had the Association as their academy, as I don't know, their monopoly, so we've had problems with the presidents of the Association. First it was Mestre João Pequeno who dropped the ball, then Mestre Curió dropped the ball, then Barba Branca dropped the ball, then Mestre Mala too. And it started to be one of those typical things of Brazilian history... on the other hand it was suitable to the whole business of money, to the business of exclusion of the capoeirista himself. I, a capoeirista at 51 years old, Mestre Neco here at 60, Boca Rica at almost 70, and they require us to pay the Association. How long have we been there? For years and years. Now they want us to pay a fee? The people who should pay are the young people, the affiliates, not the people who are already on the counsel of mestres. And there's the whole thing of discrimination itself among the lineages of Capoeira. Who is from Pastinha, who is not, who is from Bobó, who is from João Pequeno. The discrimination of one Capoeirista excluding another: - You're a student of Jogo de Dentro, but I'm a student of So-and-So, and Jogo de Dentro is worthless. It's like the church! It's like this: for me the Church is just one, the Church of Jesus Christ. "Wherever there are two or more men who profess the name of Jesus Christ, there is a Church!" But today you're Baptist, or Pentecostal, and they give no support for whoever is of the universal church. It's very difficult for a guy from one Capoeira group to respect another. It's a really big problem that we have today in Capoeira Angola. We and our colleagues. In the Association, "Mr." Gildo imposed an epoch in which everyone had to be dressed in a white jacket with a blue tie. In other words, to do a presentation, if you're a capoeirista with Axé, I'll take you to the event, but for an official performance, for a trip or something like that, if you don't wear the jacket exactly the way he wants it, he scraps you! Who is he to do this? For me he's nothing in Capoeira! Today we have many people who take advantage, and this is the big problem. And I'm not going to go much farther, because even the young capoeiristas are involved in this! It's the majority; almost no one is free from it! The Young Mestres of Capoeira Angola are a bunch of idiots! If you're one of their students, you have to stay there, eating the bread that the devil kneaded! If he has a good head, then Amen... but if you're against his philosophy – philosophy in the sense of his manipulation – if you don't agree with everything, he kicks you out of the group! You're just fine in the group for ten or fifteen years, you're on good terms with your mestre, but if one day you disagree about something arbitrary, he kicks you out like they do in the Catholic congregations, in the Jehovah's Witnesses... on the day that you don't agree with what he thinks, you'll be banned. You won't be liked by anyone, because your own mestre will burn you everywhere, since he didn't graduate you and you're giving classes! This is Capoeira? In my time Capoeira was learned in a group, but

also in the backyard, and we all know that Capoeira had nothing to do with money. Today we have various groups that manipulate the old mestres of Capoeira, take them to the U.S., give them their 200 dollars and forbid the mestre from going to any other academy, even an academy of Capoeira Angola! The mestre has to stay there until the end. Everyone makes the mestres give workshops just for gringos, just for Americans, no one gives respect; they give them 25 or 50 dollars. What if we did the same thing with our mestres! The roda in the Terreiro is the only Angola roda that's open to anyone; it's not just a roda of angoleiros, but the base is Angola. Whoever is a capoeirista, he could be Regional, and respects Capoeira Angola, he arrives in a roda and does a movement and is discriminated. But he goes there and plays whether he's Angola or not. If he's an angoleiro, then amen, but if he isn't and he plays on the ground, then I don't even want to know. The clothing is that of the common citizen. If the guy wants to wear his group uniform then amen, but I'm not fond of the guys who arrive, ten or fifteen of them, all with the shirt of the same group. It's good because people from the whole world come and play; it's enough for you to have respect, and then you can play an instrument, sing, help out. And this Capoeira, we say that it's the Capoeira of the excluded. Because we're excluded because we play in the street, because we don't use uniforms, because we go to any roda. A girl shows up, she doesn't have a uniform, she's wearing whatever pants, and she plays. A guy is hanging out, he's wearing shorts, he plays and no one's going to get on his case because he's not wearing "Capoeira pants," understand? He won't play in swimming trunks<sup>8</sup>... but barefoot? Sure! So this is the spirit! It's a shame that this roda is the only one of its kind; there should be other street rodas.



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<sup>8</sup> Not swimming trunks as in those of the board-shorts variety... swimming trunks of the Speedo variety is what the Mestre is referring to here.

**NR – And the fabrication of instruments?**

MLR – This work of instrument-making came first from the groups in which I participated. I already liked to work with instruments. I took the instruments to fix them, after performances, the instruments that broke, I took them to an old guy named Nelson Maleiro. He was from here, a Carnival organizer, the president and director of Flor de Bagdá, one of the old Carnival groups. And this guy was involved with the whole crew, all the groups, percussionists and folkloric groups, and I had the chance to meet him through a group in which I participated, and I watched him. This was when I began to do some things with instruments; I didn't miss the opportunity to learn. In Rio I worked in a vat factory that made wine barrels, which is the same process used in making an atabaque. And then I went to São Paulo. I learned how to make atabaques in Rio. And since then, in Europe as well, I met many Africans who made instruments. I went to Africa as well, twice, to Abidjan, the Ivory Coast, and other places, where there were lots of instruments. I went to India, to Thailand.

**NR – So we can see that you got your higher education when you left from your neighborhood to travel the world.**

MLR – I also went from here to right here, when I left the academy for the street. In Canjiquinha's group there would arrive a moment when you had nothing more to do there, and he would show you the path of the street, to learn the daily life of the street. Today it's exactly the opposite: the mestre wants you to stay just inside the academy, in his little group, and you only leave if accompanied by him. You can't play Capoeira in the street; if he finds out he could even kick you out. Today there are many Capoeiristas who are famous and who are very good players, but they are scared of playing in the street. I think this is very strange, because everyone knows that Capoeira began on the street. You can have a base in the academy and in your mestre's training, but it's on the street that you learn, because on the street you don't know who is who! I think this whole street thing also has to do with the fear of exposing yourself to a ridiculous situation, the fear of something disagreeable happening. This risk is real! The guy is scared of going to a street roda and getting a rasteira, because he's Mestre So-and-So, or Professor So-and-So and his reputation will be tarnished. In the street there's none of this; in the street anyone gets taken down! In the Capoeira roda, if you don't fall it's because you're not a Capoeirista. Everyone knows that one of the best rodas of Bahia was Mestre Waldemar's on Pero Vaz street. He could be wherever, but when it was roda time... four o'clock in the afternoon, the greatest stronghold of capoeiristas. They want to make Capoeira a thing of the elite, the guys are in Capoeira to gain power, and we have to unmask these people, resist them!

**NR – Who are your role-models?**

MLR – My uncle, who influenced me in the area of craftsmanship, and was very important in my life. In the street I have a very great role-model in Mestre Canjiquinha, he's a person from whom I learned a lot, a really good guy. Emilia Biancardi, even though she's in the media spotlight today. Mestre Caiçara was also very important for me; Mestre Bimba, of course, was very important. After all this there is a person who is a very great role-model for me, which is Mestre João Pequeno; he was not my mestre but I

always respected him. He's a capoeirista in whom I never saw greed; that's just the way he is, you understand?

**NR – And today?**

MLR – Dude, today I have Mestre Bigodinho, who I also knew in the past. Mestre Neco, the young guys as well, I have much to thank from the capoeiristas of today, I count on them for our investments, our discoveries, and they count on me too! There's Marcelo, Ciro, that whole crew that contributes, that believes. And together, we'll still manage to do many good things with Capoeira, with our culture.

**NR – Feel free to finish with any closing words you'd like.**

MLR – To close, I want to talk about the problem of the students, who always trained with their mestre, but one day arrives when he wants to leave in order to start his own group, and he has a clear relationship with his mestre: - “Mestre, I'm leaving your group, but I'll continue your work, in which I already added lots of my own things... as a warrior, but always respecting you. I don't want you to hinder my work, to burn me. Let me go, since Capoeira is freedom from slavery.” So why do we want to enslave our students? Amen if I stay in your group for my whole life, if I have my liberty as a capoeirista. And capoeiristas really have to unite in order for the movement to be strong. So: - “Don't go to Lua's roda, don't go to Marcelo's roda, because it just has potheads! Don't go to So-and-So's roda since he's not an angoleiro, he plays with two berimbaus. What do you think of Mestre Lua? Of Mestre Ciro?” A street mestre was never a mestre, neither of Angola or Regional, then what? Capoeira! You ask someone like Mestre Curió, or Jararaca, about their lives: they're street mestres! We forget that in the past it was street mestres who were responsible for the popular culture of Capoeira, but today they're all inside academies. As they said in one of these events: - Mestre Lua is neither an angoleiro nor regional, he's a capoeirista! I say I'm really a capoeirista. So why discriminate against me? I'm a Street Capoeirista!!

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