

# Which is yours?

## Capoeira Angola, Regional, and Contemporânea

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(All footnotes are the author's, in the original text)

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### Introduction

As we enter the new millennium, we find that the Capoeira universe has expanded, showing very different faces from those that it showed during the last centuries. At first glance we find two icons and two styles: Mestre Pastinha of Capoeira Angola and Mestre Bimba of Capoeira Regional. But in today's Capoeira environment, rich in diversity, there is semantic confusion regarding the origin, development, and complexity of the existing forms of Capoeira. This text aims to put a bit of "wood in the fire" regarding the definitions, and proposes a new way to see the various capoeiras.

Less than 100 years ago, Capoeira was a crime under the Brazilian penal code, and there was a prison in Fernando de Noronha to which captured capoeiristas were sent. Today, Capoeira possesses the fame of the only genuinely Brazilian sport; it is present in many countries and aims to become an Olympic sport. We hit the turn of the century with an "Advanced Professional Course Specifically in Capoeira" at the University Gama Filho in Rio de Janeiro, and we have a number of practicing capoeiristas today that we never had in history. On the other hand, a minority of these capoeiristas do Angola or Regional, while almost all of them do neither of these styles. Others think they do both...

In this globalized capitalist society, we have to be very careful with concepts. The forms of expressing power and authoritarianism vary, but they all produce the same result: social inequality and exploitation of one's fellow man; in other words, the destruction of life. Human history is written by the winners and always interpreted in order to show changes through technological evolutions, which are utilized to write the "pages of inhumanity," where there is little social and political evolution. The forms of this "illusion of evolution" are many: from by the hierarchical structure described by Etienne de La Boétie of the sixteenth century in the "Discurso da Servidão Voluntária"; to Wilhelm Reich showing how this is done in the area of education and, mainly, in families; and in "The Society of the Spectacle" by Guy Debord, where, alienated, we accept the spectacle of daily life. It's also seen today in the denunciations of the greatest living intellectual, Noah Chomsky,<sup>1</sup> who points out a "fabricated consensus" maintained by the media and by the consumer society.

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<sup>1</sup> His enemy and the voice of the 'establishment,' the newspaper *The New York Times*, ended up having to recognize him as "the most important living intellectual today." Chomsky is a declared anarchist and professor at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*. Even Chomsky, with his special capacity for perception of international politics, erred upon classifying the government of Rio Grande do Sul (or the town hall of Porto Alegre) as "a workers' government" during the opening lecture of the *Second Global Social*

Soma, a therapy created by Roberto Freire,<sup>2</sup> in turn, has been defying concepts for almost forty years. After collective and individual research inside Soma, studying capoeira as a scientific instrument of liberation for over ten years, I observed different practical visions of the art. This text introduces one of the various points into which I intend to dive deeper in a book, which I am writing and I intend to publish this year. Thus, in this text I will simply introduce and question the **styles** of Capoeira.

Various points generate confusion in Capoeira, like the concept of “mestre” and the ideology behind historical conclusions. Mestre can be a title, a certificate of paper or recognition by another Mestre. It can also refer to the pedagogic act of teaching; anyone who teaches something new to another person is thus a mestre. And there’s also the community’s recognition of one’s merits and life experience (generally older people become mestres in this way).

A Mestre appears in the roda, in the rhythm, in the song, in the game, and in his leadership through the dialogs of Angola. A Mestre demonstrates his behavior in the Capoeira Roda, and some are also mestres in the roda of life.

In research done in 1997,<sup>3</sup> I chose the term ART (the terms ‘folklore’ and ‘sport’ are more rigid, because they have suffered fewer changes during the passage of time) to conceptualize Capoeira. I collected the terms **Angola, Regional, ‘Contemporânea,’ Atual, and de Rua**, but I did not dive into their differences. The three styles that I see alive and distinct today are:

- **Capoeira Angola**
- **Capoeira Regional**
- **Capoeira ‘Contemporânea’** (To avoid confusion, I chose the term ‘contemporânea’ instead of ‘angola-and-regional’ when the capoeirista calls himself a practitioner of the two aforementioned styles.)

But stay alert: with the art of Capoeira Angola in movement, this text will be surpassed in a few years (or decades).

Being art, Capoeira changes but preserves the **Bantu** concept of movement in its very structure: *“For the Bantu people, especially the Congo, living is an emotional process, a*

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*Forum* at the beginning of 2002. The PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores – Workers’ Party) might be different from the other parties in its intentions, but in practice it repeats the same structure of power and exploitation, generating and maintaining social inequality and diverting the possibility of a faster and more revolutionary action: the movement in my body, here and now.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Freire, 75 years old, writer and creator of Soma. In the beginning of 2002, I separated from the Soma practiced by the Brancaleone Collective, and opted for a solo flight in the practical research of Somatherapy: **“Soma-Iê Manifesto”** – January 2002.

<sup>3</sup> LIBERTÁRIAS Magazine, #2, Nov./Dec.1997, “Capoeira Angola and the Art of Liberty” by Rui Takeguma. Whoever wants to read the full text can access it on the page:  
<http://somaterapia.vilabol.uol.com.br/artigos.html>

*process of movement. To live is to move, and to move is to learn.*"<sup>4</sup> The basic movement in the Capoeira game, the *ginga* ("walking without leaving one's place..."), is an homage to the African warrior queen N'Zinga N'Bandi (1582-1663/1680, or D. Ana de Sousa, her baptism name in the Catholic religion), who fought against the colonization and enslavement of the Congo and Angola for over forty years. Capoeira adopted the name of her battleground as one of its denominations, and its basic physical movement is inspired by the woman who moved its society politically upwards.

The term Angola comes from N'Gola N'Bandi, a king who resisted the Portuguese colonists' expeditions, successfully counter-attacking them. When in 1558 nomad peoples invaded and destroyed the south of the Congo kingdom, the kingdoms of N'Dongo and Matamba, one of the chiefs called N'Gola N'Zinga donated the kingdom of N'Dongo to his son N'Gola N'Bandi, and the son's name came to designate the conquered realm (N'Gola: Angola).<sup>5</sup> We Brazilians are in a great part descendents of Angolans. Although the arrival of slaves who were deeply knowledgeable kings of black culture enriched Brazilian culture, on the other hand it helped bring about the current misery of the African people. We are thus responsible for the destruction of Africa; it was the beginning of economic globalization, which began in this period of colonial slave traffic with the support of the Catholic Church. This globalization continues the destruction of Africa even today.

Capoeira has always manifested itself in various places, from enclosed spaces to the streets. Thus, the categorization I propose is not based on the place of its manifestation but instead in the **way** the RODA of Capoeira is carried out: its ritual, rhythm, relationship of attack and defense movements, songs, and energy. Not wanting to close up concepts but instead to question them and open them to dialogue, I present just a few historical and modern aspects in which we can perceive styles that respect each other but occupy distinct spaces. It thus becomes necessary to describe at least minimal aspects of distinction among styles, which are already separated in a multiple reality. The history of Capoeira Angola is the history of Brazilian marginality, with ethnic, economic, and sexual conflicts that are preserved even today in one of the most paradoxical of all societies: wealthy in means of production and consumption, wealthy in environmental resources, and wealthy in ethnic and cultural diversity – in contrast to an absurdly accepted social poverty.

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<sup>4</sup> Lecture by Dr. Fu-Kiau (*Lemba Institut* – NY, USA) during the **Third International Capoeira Angola Encounter** of the *International Capoeira Angola Foundation*, Salvador-BA, August 1997.

<sup>5</sup> "The Black Folklore of Brazil" by Arthur Ramos, Rio de Janeiro 1935. The Angola-Brazil relationship is yet another story to be told. The Portuguese were the only Europeans to practice official wars for capturing Africans, and the Brazilians were the only Americans to help them in these violent acts. In 1648, an expeditionary force called Salvador de Sá left from Rio de Janeiro (armed and financed by the mill owners of that area) and reactivated the slave traffic to Brazil after expelling the Dutch from Luanda. It was André Vidal de Negreiros, from the state of Paraíba and the governor of Angola at the time, who destroyed the kingdom of the Congo – which used to be a sovereign of the native kingdoms of Angola – in the battle of Ambuíla in 1665 (from Luiz Felipe de Alencastro's article "Us in Angola, Angola in Us," *Veja* magazine, Nov. 27, 1996).

## Origins of Capoeira Angola

Everything began in mother Africa, the continent that originated the first men who spread throughout the world, generating all peoples. The Atlantic slave trade was one of the great commercial and cultural endeavors that marked the formation of the modern world and the creation of a global economic system (beginning of globalization). As for the Brazilian participation in this tragic venture, it is estimated that 40% of the fifteen million or more men and women captured from their lands were taken to Brazil.<sup>6</sup> Research varies regarding the interpretation of the African ancestry of Capoeira. Without wanting to define an absolute truth, but trying to present possibilities, I present three versions of Capoeira's origin:

- In the research of **Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP)**, Mestre Moraes believes *“Capoeira to be of African origin, more precisely from the Island of Lubango, in the village of the MUCOPES, located in the south of Angola. (...) During the zebra mating season, the male zebras engage in violent combat in order to catch the attention of the females. The young mucope warrior men came to imitate some of the steps of this ritual, which they called N'GOLO. The inhabitants of this village threw a big party every year called EFUNDALA, which celebrated the girls' reaching puberty and thus being ready for marriage. The husband would be the warrior who demonstrated the best performance in the practice of N'GOLO.”*<sup>7</sup> For the greater part of angoleiros, such as Mestres João Pequeno and João Grande, Capoeira was derived from this ritual;

- In the research of Mestre Camisa of *“ABADA-Capoeira,”* *“Capoeira is a fruit of the fusion of African cultures, martial arts, and rituals, in Brazil.”* Like the N'GOLO and also the *“BAÇULA,”* a ritual from the Island of Cabo, *“(…) where one knocks down the other through wrestling, throws, grabbing the legs, neck, or waist; the objective is to take down the adversary (...) I believe that the takedown blows in Capoeira came from Baçula. There is also the 'kabangula,' which is a type of open-handed boxing. (...) There is also the 'Umundiu,' which is a ritual, a game, that uses the hands and the feet; and there are also the acrobatic dances.”*<sup>8</sup>

- For Mestre Cobrinha Verde (heir of Besouro Mangangá, one of the greatest capoeiristas of all times), *“Capoeira was born in the Recôncavo, in Santo Amaro, created by the Africans who arrived in chains to work in the mills. In Africa, they used a dance called batuque. (...) It was from this dance that capoeira was constructed.”*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Freedom by a Thread – History of Brazil's quilombos,” organization of João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes, São Paulo 1996.

<sup>7</sup> **“Historical Brief about Capoeira”** by Mestre Moraes, published in magazines and on the site of GCAP: <http://www.gcap.com.br> This theory was proposed by Luís da Câmara Cascudo (Folklore of Brazil, 1967) and Mestre Pastinha began to defend it as a possibility after going to Africa in 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with *GINGA CAPOEIRA* magazine, #5 – 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The book **“Capoeira and Mandingas – Cobrinha Verde”** by Marcelino dos Santos, Salvador 1991.

I'll wrap up this section on origins with Mestre Pastinha (Vicente Ferreira Pastinha – 4/5/1889-11/13/1981): “...among the oldest Capoeira mestres figures the name of a Portuguese man, José Alves, a student of the Africans, who led a group of capoeiristas in the war of Palmares. **The history of Capoeira begins with the arrival of the first African slaves in Brazil.**”<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added).

### Where the confusion grows...

There is a fog surrounding the History of Capoeira, mainly its oral and marginal tradition. The historical aspects, when viewed without contextualization and careful thought, contribute more to confusion than to enlightenment. One ‘classic’ piece of information about the loss of information about Capoeira is the burning of Brazil’s slavery records by Ruy Barbosa, when he was the Minister of Works, on December 12, 1890. He did this to “remove this lamentable institution from the Brazilian memory.” Now, when we contextualize this information and critique it, it comes to have other interpretations: would burning the records actually erase the memory of ‘lamentable’ slavery? I think that we can only learn from the past and not repeat it if we keep information. To forget the errors of the past is the best way to repeat them. Simply burning the archives would not make slavery be forgotten. In reality, this was a strategy of the government to protect itself from ex-slave-owners seeking compensation for the economic damage caused by the abolition of slavery, which occurred two years before.

In 1998, with the publication of the first nationally distributed magazine dedicated solely to Capoeira, there was an increase of information available to the general public. Soon afterwards, an editorial ‘boom’ occurred with various magazines at the same time, but the majority did not last very long. These magazines, with errors in their editing and printing, repeated information that was more intended to advertise groups and boost egos. On the other hand, there was the possibility of finding serious and deep research.

The importance of Capoeira in Brazilian society is being discovered little by little, but we will never have a clear vision of what happened when it was in marginality. The 1980s saw a boom in the number of academic studies performed by independent groups that seriously investigated Capoeira’s past. As I have already stated, the theme of this article is different, but for whoever wants to research, it’s funny how the famous capoeiristas of our history such as Plácido de Abreu, Duque Estrada, and Barão do Rio Branco, among others, are ignored in the Brazilian educational curriculum. And there is also the importance of Brazilian capoeiristas in the Paraguayan War. Chico Diabo (Cabo Francisco Lacerda), who killed the Paraguayan president Francisco Solano López in 1870, bringing about the end of the war, was a capoeirista.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The book “**Capoeira Angola**” by Mestre Pastinha, Salvador 1964.

<sup>11</sup> “**Los Conjurados Del Quilombo Del Gran Chaco**” by Augusto Roa Bastos, the main Paraguayan writer and one of the most important figures of Latin American literature. In 1989 he received the Cervantes Award – the most celebrated award for Spanish language literature.

There is a separation between that which was Capoeira since its origins until the moment that the dominant system co-opted it. Capoeira was born as an art of liberation, helping the black man and later the marginal people of Brazilian society to maintain a link with their past. It is a black art that in Brazil became strengthened from various contributions, including some from the indigenous people, who helped the blacks in their flights to the forest. It is known that the quilombos were free and diverse societies: 70% of the population of the eight main quilombos was black, 25% Indian, and 5% white, all refugees.<sup>12</sup> There was also the contribution of the Portuguese *fadistas* (*fado* singers). Agile in physical fighting and in the handling of the *navalha* (straight razor), the *fadistas* lived in the streets of Lisboa and the port in the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

The political climate of 1888-1889, the year of Abolition followed by the Proclamation of the Republic, shows how the Brazilian state managed to change in order to keep itself the same in its essence. The ‘social and political revolution,’ as Deodoro called it in his Proclamation of ‘national revolution,’ did not alter the relationship of **dominator versus dominated (on top vs. on bottom)**. “*They administrated the changes in the mode of production in such a way that the ex-slaves – as well as the contadini and the bracianti, Italian immigrants who thickened the ranks of the lower class – did not have, by law, guaranteed access to the possession or ownership of land, to work, and, much less, to a salary.*”<sup>14 and 32</sup> We know that the first decrees prohibiting Capoeira date from 1814, six years after the arrival of the Imperial Family in Brazil. In that period, the Brazilian population was 3.6 million, with 1.9 million (over half) being slaves. After 1890, in the Republic, Capoeira entered into the Penal Code. After centuries of marginality, the art was officially outlawed for over 120 years. We have less than seventy years of experience in free capoeira.

With its probable origin in the sixteenth century and multiple developments in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, Capoeira survived many changes. Because it did not consist in a single unit of form and rites, it was capable of dealing “with new contexts, adapting itself in its details in order to conserve the essentials that constituted it.”<sup>15</sup> Without a doubt, Capoeira developed a potential for fight that generated the slave rebellions – particularly in the provinces that constituted the zone of Paraíba, the great coffee production area,<sup>16</sup> which forced the creation of the Golden Law. Capoeira also appeared as “defense of the nation” in the War of Cisplatina (1825-1828) and the Paraguayan War (1865-1870). It was utilized by the military not just in the wars, but also in elections. For example, in 1909, the electoral capoeirista corporals elected the black deputy and monarchist Dr. Monteiro Lopes in the Federal District (Rio de Janeiro at the time). In that same year, students from Rio promoted the fight between the capoeirista Ciríaco Francisco da Silva and the Jiu-Jitsu fighter Sada Miako. With his victory, Ciríaco became the center of attention and was even featured in national magazines. Around the same time

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<sup>12</sup> “**Capoeira is Brazilian**” by Luiz Carlos K. Rocha, *MUNDO CAPOEIRA* magazine, May 1999.

<sup>13</sup> “**The negregada institution: the capoeiristas in Rio de Janeiro**” by Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares, Rio de Janeiro, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> “**The Golden Law Revisited**” by José Luiz Werneck da Silva, Black Brazilians supplement, *CIÊNCIA HOJE* magazine, #48, November 1988.

<sup>15</sup> “**Zumbi dos Palmares: National Identity and Democracy**” by Maria Lúcia Montes.

<sup>16</sup> “**Brazil in 1889: The Agricultural Zones**” by André Rebouças, 1889.

period, while capoeira was still in marginality, Mestre Pastinha taught the art that he had learned with the African Mestre Benedito to his colleagues in the ‘School of Sailor Apprentices’ from 1902 to 1909.

### Capoeira Regional

Capoeira’s process of change is very old. In 1874, Raul Pederneira described the first nomenclature of movements in Rio slang and defended a “de-sportization” of Capoeira. In Rio de Janeiro in 1907, a military official wrote “**The Guide to Capoeira or Brazilian Gymnastics.**” In 1928, the capoeirista Annibal Burlamaqui, known as Zuma, published “**National Gymnastics – Capoeiragem – Methodized and Regulated.**” Some say that he influenced Mestre Bimba (Manoel dos Reis Machado, 1899/1900-1974), who created the Luta Regional Baiana, founding his academy in 1932.<sup>17A</sup> Mestre Nene disagrees, saying that Mestre Bimba had already had his methodology developed since 1918. Mestre Decânio points out the importance of Dr. José “Sisnando” Lima in the foundation of Regional.<sup>17B</sup> In an era in which Capoeira was a crime, Mestre Bimba modified it, introducing new blows and a system of teaching. After years of effort, he managed to obtain the first State authorization for the practice of Capoeira, on July 9, 1937, from an Army officer of the New State (first Brazilian dictatorship in the twentieth century) in Bahia, Juracy Magalhães.

New changes occurred in this troubled, almost-400-year-old history: through a military strategy of Getúlio Vargas’ populist project, Capoeira was co-opted in an attempt to control it and transform it into Physical Education and Sport. In 1934, Getúlio, interested in winning votes from women, illiterates, soldiers, etc., extinguished the law that prohibited Capoeira and the practice of Afro-Brazilian religions. But, on the other hand, he required that the religions as well as Capoeira be practiced outside the street, in enclosed spaces, with an installation permit. Once again, what looked like ‘liberty’ was, in reality, ‘control.’ So much so that until the 1940s there were still policemen on horses preventing Capoeira in the street (and the toque of Cavalaria on the berimbau, warning the capoeiristas...). It’s interesting that Capoeira Regional was strategically born from Capoeira Angola with a different name: Luta Regional. In this context, the traditional Capoeira began to be called Angola in order to make a better differentiation. In 1953, President Getúlio Vargas watched one of Mestre Bimba’s demonstrations and described Capoeira as: “*The only authentically Brazilian collaboration with physical education, which should be considered our national martial art.*”<sup>18</sup>

With the growth of Regional, which was practiced by registered students and workers, Angola continued at the margin of institutionalization until February 23, 1941, when great mestres of the era delivered the responsibility of preserving the art of Angola to Mestre Pastinha.<sup>19</sup> It is thus that the ***Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola (CECA)*** was born,

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<sup>17</sup> A - “**Capoeira: A Cultural Matrix for a Brazilian Physical Education**” by Sergio Luiz Vieira, 1997.

B - “The Roots of Regional” by Ângelo Decânio, Revista da Bahia, V.32, #33, July 2001.

<sup>18</sup> The newspaper *Tribuna da Bahia*, Salvador, February 7, 1974.

<sup>19</sup> “**Mestre Pastinha – each one is each one, no one fights in my way**” by Rui Takeguma, written for the magazine *CORDÃO BRANCO* on Jan. 30, 2002, *Espaço Cultural TESÃO*, São Paulo. Available on the homepage of Iê – Grupo Anarquista de Capoeira Angola.

being registered only on October 1, 1952. In 1955, it established itself on the Largo do Pelourinho in Salvador, Bahia.

Despite the apparent rift between the styles, there was a mutual respect. Mestre Bimba's students could go to Mestre Pastinha's rodas and vice versa. All were well-received, even because the blows created by Mestre Bimba were not used by students of other schools that did not use his method. Thus began an acceptance of the joining of the capoeira styles. As Mestre Canjiquinha, who was a supervisor of Mestre Pastinha's bateria, relates, "*There is neither capoeira regional nor capoeira angola. There is capoeira. (...) I am a capoeirista. I'm neither an angoleiro nor a regionalista. (...) Now, capoeira is in accordance with the rhythm. If you're at a party: if they play bolero you dance bolero; if they play samba you dance samba; - capoeira is the same way: if the music is slow you dance slowly, if the music is fast then you pick up your pace.*"<sup>20</sup>

### **Where the confusion spreads...**

Rio de Janeiro also possesses a rich marginal history of Capoeira and a rich influence from the Capoeira gangs linked to criminality and to politics. These gangs formed what was almost a parallel army. Later, however, there was a weakening of Carioca Capoeira and an "invention of tradition"<sup>21</sup> of Bahian Capoeira. Mestre Bimba brought his students to São Paulo in 1949 to compete in free-fighting: of the five fights, they won three by knockouts. Mestre Bimba also traveled to present Regional: in 1955 in Fortaleza, Ceará (Teatro José de Alencar); in 1956 in Rio de Janeiro (Maracanãzinho) and in São Paulo (inauguration of TV Record), and in 1968 in Teófilo Otoni, Minas Gerais. Mestre Pastinha and the CECA traveled as well, doing demonstrations in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, Minas Gerais, and Recife.

Despite the existence of traditional capoeiristas in Rio, a new phenomenon began in 1964. Students with little experience in Angola and Regional came together and formed the group that would come to call itself *Senzala* and have a strong influence on Capoeira in the southern/southeastern region of the country, as much by discharacterization (separation from traditional rituals) as by the incorporation of new teaching techniques.

In São Paulo, because of pioneers like Mestre Zé de Freitas (student of Mestre Waldemar da Paixão from Bahia, the greatest all-time singer of Capoeira Angola) and Mestre Valdemar Angoleiro, a space was opened for the arrival, in the 1960s, of capoeiristas who migrated from Bahia seeking better living conditions. Both Regional and Angola mestres came. Because of the non-existence of a Capoeira tradition in São Paulo, there was the necessity for mutual support in order to facilitate better economic survival of these mestres. Mestre Suassuna, for example, helped many capoeiristas set themselves up. This process of adaptation and survival is better exemplified with the foundation, in 1967, of the *Cordão de Ouro* academy, formed by the mestres Brasília and Suassuna, the former being from the Angola lineage of Mestre Canjiquinha and the latter from the Regional lineage of Mestre

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<sup>20</sup> "Canjiquinha – Joy of Capoeira" by Antônio Moreira

<sup>21</sup> "The world of legs in the air – Capoeira in Brazil" by Leticia Vidor de Sousa Reis, 1997

Bimba. That which was impossible for Mestre Pastinha and Mestre Bimba occurred: the fusion of the styles became a reality.

In the 1950s, Capoeira arrived in Belo Horizonte. In 1963, Mestre Pastinha did a presentation in the Catholic University, but it was only in the 1970s that the academies grew and Capoeira became established in the public squares: a roda in the Praça Liberdade was created, where the public came together to see the ‘vadiagem.’ Because of this roda, the famous *Hippie Festival* arose, which developed and became a mark of the city (today it is on the Avenida Afonso Pena), although few speak of its origin linked to Capoeira.

In 1973, Capoeira was implanted in Curitiba through Mestre Sergipe, after Mestre Eurípedes passed through there in the beginning of the 1970s. Mestre Sergipe was a contra-mestre of the angoleiro Mestre Caiçara, but, like Mestre Brasília, he too changed styles. With the arrival of Mestre Burguês in 1975, Capoeira was spread in the city.

Still following the history of the dominant power’s co-opting of Capoeira, in 1968 and 1969 (the second military dictatorship of the twentieth century), the Commission of Aeronautic Sports sponsored two national symposiums about Capoeira with the main goal of establishing a single nomenclature for the movements. Among the various participating mestres was Mestre Bimba, who left before the end of the second symposium because he didn’t want to accept Capoeira Regional being re-structured with other rules and ‘idioms’ (in the first symposium he had sent Mestre Decânio to represent him).

It is also interesting that there were many capoeiristas who wanted to win the same success as Mestre Bimba, creating styles with individual names and characteristics like Stylized Capoeira, Muzenza, Saramango, Primitiva, Barravento, etc. But none of these lasted beyond their groups and descendents. One exception is the collective creation of ‘Angola-and-Regional’ Capoeira, which, in my view, is neither Angola nor Regional.

The 1970s were fundamental in the shrinking of traditional Angola that had been rescued by Mestre Pastinha. In 1971, Pastinha was deceived and lost his academy on the Largo do Pelourinho. In 1979 he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and in 1981 he died, blind, in misery, and almost forgotten. With the death of Mestre Bimba in 1974 – also forgotten, deceived, and poor – in Goiânia, Goiás, Capoeira Regional also lost its strength and its mentor.

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966, Mestre Pastinha along with other mestres and students gave a presentation in Africa during the First International Festival of Black Art in Dakar, Senegal. In the 1970s Capoeira expanded to Europe and the U.S., but it was only in 1989 that the angoleiro Contra-mestre Rosalvo emigrated to Europe, founding the first European academy of Capoeira Angola in 1997 in Berlin, Germany.

In 1972 Capoeira was praised by the Minister of Education and Culture (MEC) as a sport, and in 1974 the Paulista Capoeira Federation was born. In 1992, the Brazilian Capoeira Confederation was formed, and finally, in 1993, the Brazilian Association of Capoeira Angola (ABCA). Thus, after millennia of ludic ancestry and a few centuries of aggressiveness for the fight, Capoeira, which developed variations from the 1920s to the

1950s with the birth of Regional and the survival of Angola, was finally de-criminalized. Consequently, it became elitist. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the fusion and change of Capoeira styles gave birth to ‘Contemporânea,’ and, after a brief weakening, Angola and Regional were reborn. We enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century with one side of Capoeira linked to cultural and economic marginality, since the Capoeira Roda is an apprenticeship of civil disobedience for life (more details in the book). On the other hand, in another style, it is co-opted, serving the static system of social-economic structure that maintains classes, exploitation, and slavery (which today are called globalization or neo-liberalism), competing in vale-tudo fights, or even in universities and military areas, serving hierarchism and complacency. I remember here the words of Mestre Lua ‘Rasta’ from Bahia, “...*the capoeirista needs to be respected... the newest ones seek to understand what is capoeira, what is liberty, what is militarism; and capoeira is anti-military, capoeira has nothing to do with militarism...*”<sup>22</sup>

### ...One practice...

When I started to practice capoeira in Curitiba in 1990, the academies said they practiced Angola and Regional. I passed through the *Muzenza* group of Mestre Burguês and later through the *Centro Paranaense de Capoeira* of Mestre Sergipe. Only at the end of 1991, while seeing a presentation of *GCAP* in Rio de Janeiro, did I experience a ‘rasteira.’ How is it that after two years learning Angola, I discovered Angola?

When I wanted to learn just Angola in Paraná, the capoeiristas laughed and said that Capoeira Angola was a thing for women, in a pejorative and obviously macho sense. In Rio, Mestre Mano comments that in the old days (before 1980), practitioners of Regional were said to step on the angoleiros’ heads in the rodas. In “Contemporânea” Capoeira there is a stereotype of the Angola of angoleiros: very slow and low, without the presence of ritual. Mestre Moraes and *GCAP* rescued Angola with its fighting content. The angoleiro can play Angola and face “Contemporânea” equally, from the low game to the high, in dodging and counter-attack, with *negativas* facing the *positivas*.

In the 1960s, the inexperience in Capoeira (beginning of *Senzala*), the necessity of survival, the support among capoeiristas of different styles (*Cordão de Ouro* and *Senzala*), the separation from the traditional centers (Bahia and Rio), and the desire to create new styles made Capoeira suffer more changes. In 1971, aiming to rescue some of the more traditional aspects, Mestre Almir das Areias, a dissident from *Cordão de Ouro*, created *Capitães da Areia*, which, together with *Cativeiro*, questions the Federation and its proposal.

There are other important groups and mestres which I don’t cite here, because I’m trying to prioritize only those that are closest to the **Soma-Iê** research. In 1976, Roberto Freire, an

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<sup>22</sup> Testimony recorded on video during the First National Capoeira Angola Encounter of Belo Horizonte, in 1999. For me this was the most important Capoeira event in which I participated, not just because of the Mestres present, but mainly because it was organized by almost all the Capoeira Angola groups in Belo Horizonte, as opposed to events promoted by one group or another. The event occurred in a great part due to the efforts of Mestre Primo of the group *Iúna*.

intellectual who had interviewed Mestre Pastinha ten years earlier for the magazine *REALIDADE*, began to practice Capoeira with Mestre Almir (who today is called Anand) and study it scientifically in parallel to the development of Somatherapy.

Here comes a parenthesis for the importance of the *Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP)*, formed by Mestre Moraes. Founded in 1980 in Rio and transferred to Bahia in 1982, it had an unquestionable importance in the rebirth of Capoeira Angola. It left mestres in Rio de Janeiro and formed Mestre Cobrinha Mansa in Bahia. Valorizing the old mestres, and producing research, GCAP brought the traditional energy of the Capoeira Roda to a new position: ritual, fight, and movement. In the beginning of the 1980s, with Regional completing 50 years of existence and Angola 400, the context had totally changed. Regional was predominant, but it had become separated from the precepts of its creator, and the angoleiros, who do not agree with the inevitable fusion of Capoeira styles, were being forgotten and were leaving the art. Mestre João Pequeno, who was Mestre Pastinha's main student, was influenced by the changes in Capoeira and began to use cords and batizados.

Capoeira began to be preserved by and restricted to shows and performances, which associated an acrobatic Capoeira with Maculelê (an art recuperated by Mestre Popó of Santo Amaro), Puxada de Rede, Samba de Roda, and show rituals created by Mestre Canjiquinha. It was the way to live off of Capoeira. Mestre João Grande, who migrated to New York and is today receiving various awards for the preservation of black art, had abandoned Capoeira and was working in Salvador. Thanks to the insistence of Mestre Cobrinha and *GCAP*, he returned to Capoeira in 1984. In 1986, Mestre Nenel (Mestre Bimba's biological son) resolved to recuperate his father's original Regional, forming the *Filhos de Bimba Escola de Capoeira*, denouncing the way that 'Contemporânea' had separated from pure Regional.

In 1992, I moved to Belo Horizonte and joined the *Grupo Iúna de Capoeira Angola*, with professors Primo, João, and Wagner, who, today, ten years later, are considered Mestres. Because of personal reasons, I traveled monthly to the south and southeast and also took research trips to the northeast of Brazil. I could perceive the various styles of Capoeira existing in the 1990s in the art's practice (in rodas and training). I made contact with various capoeiristas, such as Nino Faisca from Olinda, Pernambuco, who was the capoeirista that formed the first group of only-Angola in Curitiba, and who is today in Germany as a professor of the *Associação Angola Dobrada de Capoeira Angola*, coordinated by Mestre Rogério (who formed the group *Iúna*).

One text by Alejandro Frigério published in 1989, "**Capoeira: from a black art to a white sport,**"<sup>23</sup> was a reference for anyone seeking to understand the differences between Capoeira styles. When I look at Frigério's work today, I notice that his analysis was not between Angola and Regional, but instead between Angola and "Contemporânea." Frigério did not encounter pure Regional, and this dichotomy happens even today. People who train

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<sup>23</sup> In the magazine *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Sociais*, v.4 , #10, 1989. The points raised by Frigério are: **Malícia, Complementation, Low Game, Absence of Violence, Beautiful Movements, Slow Music, Importance of Ritual and Theatricality.**

Capoeira, in the majority of groups, are learning “Contemporânea” Capoeira. They learn ‘angola-and-regional.’ The roda begins with a slow rhythm, the ‘angola,’ and soon afterwards begins a faster rhythm, the ‘regional.’ For a researcher who only researched for eight months between 1983 and 1987, his categorization had interesting points. I agree with much of his approach, though I disagree that “slow music” is an intrinsic characteristic of Angola. But I understand that he did a great job, even though his research universe was only two groups of Capoeira Angola. Angola, for me, encompasses a varied possibility of rhythms, from the slow to the fast, and which doesn’t always define the movement of the players. Capoeira music is not just background noise that defines the rhythm, it makes up part of the very dialogue of the game, and the player can ‘break the rules’ either by ignorance or by daring.<sup>3</sup>

Together with the process of growth and “modernization” of Capoeira, “Contemporânea” grew exponentially and Angola and the original Regional dwindled when the art began to migrate to the rest of Brazil and to other countries. In the 1960s, both were weakened and almost died in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Angola was reborn through *GCAP* and Regional was reborn with the *Filhos de Bimba*; thus, the styles begin to be better defined in the 1990s. But conflicts between groups and mestres make the concepts of mastery (titles) and the concepts of the styles become relative. Each group defines them in its own way, and the semantic confusion continues in this turn of the millennium.

“Mestre Pastinha died at age 92 saying he was still learning Angola. How is it possible for anyone to learn both styles?” This question represents the philosophy that aims to define limits for the styles. History has shown us how their fusion was possible, but the movement of Capoeira takes place internally in order to recuperate concepts in the living practice that is the ritual of the rodas. Regional follows the steps of Angola and both manage to re-live and recuperate their uniqueness, letting “Contemporânea” write its own history. Angola returns to its essence as an underground movement, provoking a change in position that permanently questions other styles of Capoeira. It also permanently questions itself for being in movement.

### **...Initial and final considerations.**

In 1993 the Soma research yielded its first fruits. The somatherapists linked to Roberto Freire dove into Capoeira Angola, setting up a space dedicated to the Angola of Mestre Pastinha and creating one of the first spaces dedicated solely to this art (it even had conflicts with a capoeirista during its inauguration) in São Paulo called *Tesão* – the house of Soma, in Perdizes. Around this time, Mestre Almir das Areias created his project *Soma-Capoeira*, aiming to join Angola, Regional, and other styles into just one, which has nothing to do with Somatherapy or the proposal of Soma, which is to live exclusively Angola.

Another point of confusion is the libertarian question, which is badly seen by many due to the political tendency of the ‘left’ and the ‘right’ in confusing this position with chaos or disorder. Besides the denouncing of authoritarianism, Anarchism, like Angola, produces permanent critiques of the relationships that produce social movement. Today, the

Anarchist Movement itself is contaminated with authoritarianism, and **Soma-Iê** aims to fight against this by living Self-management (or better, permanently seeking it). The fight for Self-management is the daily fight against authoritarianism. In studies of Capoeira groups we approach Bantu culture in the decentralization of power and in the respect for human dignity (not to be confused with citizenship<sup>24</sup> - always conflicting concepts...). It's difficult to live from Self-management in society, mainly the associations on a macro-scale, which are possible in the theory of **"Do Principio Federativo"** of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, but rarely lived in practice. An experience that happens daily in the dialogues of the roda of Capoeira Angola.

The reclaimed technical aspects can vary, and let's analyze the bateria as an example. Mestre Pastinha showed that the berimbau is essential in the bateria. With the reclaiming of Angola by GCAP, Mestre Moraes defined the bateria with three berimbaus, two pandeiros, atabaque, agogô, and reco-reco. Other groups, like those of Mestre João Pequeno and Mestre Curió, were using a similar bateria at the time. Many groups set up this bateria as the 'law' without noticing that that is not the only thing that defines the style. Mestre Bimba's Regional, which today uses one berimbau and two pandeiros, used to also contain a reco-reco, according to Mestre Boca Rica.

The instruments entered into Capoeira at various times. The berimbau-de-barriga (belly berimbau) entered into Capoeira between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In social life, the berimbau used to be used by street vendors to call attention. Plant fibers used to be used instead of the arame, and there was also the berimbau-de-boca (mouth berimbau). The name 'berimbau' is of Portuguese and Spanish origin and was transferred to the African musical bow, which is one of humanity's oldest musical instruments.<sup>25</sup> The atabaque probably appeared in the twentieth century, during the institutionalization of Capoeira. Despite appearing in the classic illustration by Johann Moritz Rugendas (from 1830, considered the oldest drawing of the capoeira game), the use of the atabaque did not maintain historical continuity. There are even versions of the story that say it was Mestre Canjiquinha who introduced it recently. If the Capoeira of Rio de Janeiro contributed the straight razor to Capoeira, *"Bahia contributed a lot to the musical part, introducing the pandeiro, the caxixi, and the reco-reco in substitution for clapping; and the berimbau de barriga with a steel cord, which has a more sonorous voice and more resources than the berimbau-de-boca."*<sup>26</sup>

To continue the bateria example, I saw groups changing and varying in the 1990s. Some that used to use one berimbau began to use three. In the superficial aspect, they went from Regional to Angola, but in the technical aspect of the music, the type of rhythm, the tuning of each berimbau and its function in the roda, they simplified and weakened the proposal of Angola, thus increasing the discharacterization and confusion.

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<sup>24</sup> As anarchists, we are not interested in national politics or in defending the State or the Country. We are internationalists. The Brazil of 2002, which maintains a large part of its population in misery, deposits monthly two billion dollars of interest from an un-payable debt with the IMF that was created during the military governments.

<sup>25</sup> **"The Berimbau-de-barriga and its toques"** by Kay Shaffer, folkloric monographs 2, 1977.

<sup>26</sup> **"The game of capoeira – 24 drawings by Carybé"** by Carybé, Bahia, 1955.

Thus, I aim to separate the OBJECTIVE aspects, such as uniform colors, bateria, songs, etc., from the SUBJECTIVE aspects, the intentions and relationships that are sought in the brincadeira of Angola. This whole Afro-Brazilian mystery will not be known without a complete surrender (like abandoning the attempt to have various styles today) to it. We can surpass the ‘objectivity-without-parentheses’ of objective analyses and work the ‘objectivity-between-parentheses’ in Capoeira.<sup>27</sup> **Soma-Iê** wants to shake up the concepts, making everyone an ‘observer’: direct action producing exchanges both inside and outside the roda. Each person will make up their own minds between **illusion** and **perception**. The art of Angola goes against the dominant alienation. Today, even groups of Angola that do not maintain contact with other angoleiro mestres can change their style over time. Because Angola, alive and in movement, is formed by the conjunction of practitioners and their interchanges.

Since I’ve done two years of ‘Contemporânea’ and ten years of pure Angola, I have no experience whatsoever to speak about Regional. I have only some theoretical knowledge. In Angola I only have a little bit of competence to begin to express myself. Whenever one tries to explain the differences in Capoeira styles, the semantic aspect gets very confusing, because it is only possible to understand Capoeira through personal experience. This text is part of a research project in which I aim to show the powerful effects that Angola possesses for human life, being therapy, liberation of creativity and energy, etc...

The diversity of the Capoeira universe is one of its riches. In this aspect, Capoeira imitates nature in its biodiversity. Each day we are discovering new things; “movement is life.”

What I want to do in this text is to clarify the names of the styles, but of course within each style each group possesses its differences. I see in Angola that each individual manages to discover his way to express himself, a true unity in diversity.<sup>28</sup> The practice is much more important than the names, and in this aspect Capoeira is unified. Within my style, I can adapt myself and play in rodas of other styles. It is with a basis in this practice that I ask with this text: Which style is yours? Each person is writing his own history and aiming to maintain the capoeiras.

I’ve observed three distinct environments:

- **CONTEMPORÂNEA** is the most widespread style. I put **all the styles that are less than 50 years old** in this category. It contains the MAJORITY OF GROUPS AND ACADEMIES, with Capoeira being called ‘Angola-and-Regional,’ and the ‘modern-Regional’ contemporânea groups, ‘Soma-Capoeira,’ freestyle Capoeira

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<sup>27</sup> “**Emotions and language in education and politics**” by Humberto Maturana. Capoeira, as a whole, maintains an “objectivity-between-parentheses,” which allows us to be in the same history and growth – accepting others independently of their styles and letting them play, exchanging ideas in the roda. It is also by the responsible negation of this objectivity, recognizing the right moment to refuse the change and establish limits, that we can keep Angola free of disfiguring elements like hierarchism and competitiveness, which are inherent in today’s society. We can and should react through the evolution of the relationship of the organism (Angola) with the environment (Capoeira).

<sup>28</sup> Anarchist purpose: living by self-management. We anarchists have much to learn from these strategies and practices. To learn with libertarian theory in order to live the game of Angola in social life outside the roda.

(for Vale-tudo fighting), Hydro-Capoeira, Capoeira mixed with other martial arts (boxing, muay-thai, etc), and even those groups that don't want to abandon their previous titles. In the 1990s, they tried and are still trying to approach Angola (which is generating confusion, because everyone has the right to learn what they want, but in this system of categorization, the “contemporary” angoleiros differ from those who play EXCLUSIVELY Angola);

- **PURE REGIONAL** of Mestre Bimba, which is being spread and recuperated mainly by Mestre Nenel. It has also suffered changes, and **it has about 80 years of existence**;

- **PURE ANGOLA**, which has Mestre Pastinha as its greatest icon, but which contains practices and techniques derived from **400 years of existence** and experimentation. In this category, competitions or championships are not accepted, because one cannot measure the best person in the roda – the “best” doesn't exist. Each one gives his best to the roda and this creates collective energy, which returns to each individual. **Soma-Iê** is included in this category, along with the therapy groups linked to the *Iê Collectives of São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, and Curitiba*. Despite not having a mestre sponsoring us, we seek the responsibility of not mixing or corrupting the essence of Angola, always doing workshops with angoleiro mestres. Another point of reference besides GCAP and its derivatives<sup>29</sup> is the ABCA (*Brazilian Capoeira Angola Association*), which enabled mestres who had stopped for over 20 years or who had modified their styles to return to Angola. And innumerable angoleiros spread throughout the World, those already cited as well as other such as M. Curió, M. Lua de Bobó, M. René, M. Roberval, and M. Laércio, not to mention the old capoeiristas such as M. Antônio Diabo de Jequié.

This categorization<sup>30</sup> may be used by groups and rodas, but it is something about the capoeirista himself that I want to define. If Mestre Bimba was an angoleiro and created Regional, then anyone can change one's style over the passage of one's life. It's not always the title granted by an angoleiro mestre that defines one's style. Mestre João Pequeno, the greatest living root of Angola, graduated mestres in Minas Gerais who are not angoleiros in this categorization. There are also other old angoleiro mestres who graduated students and mestres who are not angoleiros (Mestres Brasília and Sergipe, and other innumerable examples). Capoeira is PRACTICE and not THEORY. If mestres have an Angola or

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<sup>29</sup> Direct derivations of GCAP, in my view, are CCARJ (*Centro de Capoeira Angola do Rio de Janeiro*) and FICA (*Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola*). Indirect derivations are those without a formal link with these Mestres, even though they have learned and still do learn from them, such as for example, *Iúna* of Belo Horizonte, *Angola Dobrada*, and even *Aprendizes de Angola*, which existed in Curitiba. There are few groups that are exclusively Angola. In the cities of Curitiba, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte there are FEWER THAN TEN groups of this style, among hundreds and thousands of groups of Capoeira “Contemporânea.” In Curitiba and Florianópolis, Somatherapy was the entity that formed the first groups of Capoeira Angola. It is in Bahia that the greatest diversity of Angola roots are preserved.

<sup>30</sup> Seeking support in the line of thought of the Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana Romesín (“*everything is said by the observer*”), this categorization is more to **distinguish** than to **classify**. I thank some friends and members of *Iê* for revision of this text, especially Marcão from Belo Horizonte, Marcos Vinícius Bortolus. Also the editing of the text, done by the poet André Pessôa, and the final revision, by Juliana Freire.

Regional graduation and don't follow it, then I frame their style based on the daily practice of themselves, their groups, and their students.

This categorization is not between what is better and what is worse. I simply want to explain a form of seeing Capoeira that I developed in recent years, in practice, in living, and in research. Despite the styles having rodas and trainings that define the daily practice of their participants, anyone can participate in a different style, as long as they respect the local rituals, which maintains the possibility of calling all this CAPOEIRA. There are many events in which old mestres are invited, whether to valorize them or to attempt to use their names – these are fine lines, and secondary as long as these mestres are respected

The individuality defended by Mestre Pastinha (“*Each one is each one, no one fights like me*”) is fundamental in the Angola style. However, the infiltration of militarization and standardization<sup>31</sup> can still discharacterize Angola in the present context of economic globalization. Even groups that were fundamental in the rescue of Angola can weaken it if they insist on a single standardization. Mestre Pastinha's ‘Cobra Mansa,’ Mestre João Pequeno, is fundamental today, because besides being the most important living and active capoeirista, he knew how to experiment and bring back ritualistic elements of his Angola. Few can claim to have over 71 years of Capoeira in almost 85 years of life.

I hope for critiques and suggestions to ‘shake up’ the perceptions that I presented here, which I can address in later texts (I'll put the corrections in the book), aiming to seek more ‘sincerities’ than ‘truths.’ In the last few decades, with the existence of video and photo techniques, there are capoeiristas attempting to invent (to lie about) their past. A question can be a challenge or a dialogue, in the roda and in life. Among the styles of Capoeira, I ask: Which one is yours?

I can define others from outside and each person can define himself. It is thus that we can confront concepts. Wanting to define others can seem authoritarian, a form of defending (closing) myself, but it can also make up part of my libertarian right. Authoritarianism is also mutable and exists in relationships and not just in concepts. Concepts demonstrate the practice, and the practice is modified daily, through the relationships of the individual with his environment. *I am an angoleiro, yes sir...* and I ask you, which style is yours?

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<sup>31</sup> It would be interesting to dive into the way that dictatorships influence this in national history, because governments tend to spread their regulated and rigid structure throughout society from the top to the bottom. Angola, like anarchism, is born from each individual and is harmonized daily in interpersonal conflicts. In capoeira, this is generated in the roda. Anarchism would be a way to amplify this experience to day-to-day conflicts, generating a self-managing society, from the bottom to the top. Not without rules, but instead rules in movement, fruit of the here and now conflicts, among people **in equality** of positions and **with liberty** of expression.

<sup>32</sup> After I finished this article, the newspaper “*Folha de São Paulo*” reported on January 24, 2002, in the article “**Brazilian Companies are white and male**”: “Women and blacks are underrepresented in Brazilian companies. Blacks and mulattos, for example – who count for 46% of the country's population – occupy an irrelevant quantity (6%) of the management positions in today's companies.” It is yet another example of how Abolition is on paper and not in social relationships as a whole. The battle was never *blacks vs. whites* or *women vs. men* but instead between who is **on top** vs. who is **on bottom**. (Zapatism or Anarchism).

“In order to have more certainties, I have to know about imperfections.”

– Manoel de Barros

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