African retentions of Capoeira Angola

Aisha Z. Jordan
Clark Atlanta University

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AFRICAN RETENTIONS OF CAPOEIRA ANGOLA

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

AISHA ZAKIYA JORDAN

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICANA WOMEN’S STUDIES

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 2008
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have taken place without Dr. Josephine Bradley and Dr. Phillip Dunston. I truly appreciate their time, patience, encouragement, support, and scholarly recommendations. The end result is a product of their guidance and direction. A special thanks is extended to the support of my friends and classmates.

No statement of acknowledgements would be complete without recognition of the enormous contribution made by my family to this writing project. Over the course of the last couple of years during which I have dedicated my life to completing my thesis, my husband Mike helped me to persevere when I became discouraged. He has also played an enormously important role in helping me to care for our ultra active infant daughter, Nyah, thereby allowing me to focus my attention on writing and research. He will never know how much I appreciate the support he has given me throughout this project.

I must also acknowledge that Nyah made a noteworthy contribution to this project. As she has developed physically and cognitively, I have been inspired by her example. She has enhanced my determination to succeed.

Further, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that my mother's and father's candid observations and suggestions have helped me to clarify a number of issues raised in my thesis. More significantly, my mother, father and brothers, Hassan and Julian, like my husband, never failed to give me a word of encouragement. They reinforced my confidence and made it clear that I could realize my dream of writing a thesis that truly reflects the skills that I have acquired as a graduate student at Clark Atlanta University.
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Definition of Terms

Angoleiro. An individual who practices Capoeira Angola.

African aesthetic. The total composition of an African’s relationship with time and space, community, rhythm, and symbolic spiritual powers.¹

Agogo. A Yoruba musical instrument, cone shaped, two toned metal bell.

Atabaque. A drum utilized in Capoeira, Candomblé, and other African Brazilian activities.

Berimbau. An African-derived gourd-resonated single string instrument or musical Bow.²

Candomblé. A religion in Brazil which originated from a Yoruban religion based on the deities or orixas.

Capoeirista. A Capoeira practitioner.

Corridos. Call and response songs.

Drama. Intentional accented expression, through performance, dress, language, or celebration; also a natural flair that is amalgamated through the community of African people.

Ginga. A fundamental step in Capoeira, in which the player rhythmically moves from one side to the other.³

Ladainha. A litany about Capoeira, contained in a preliminary song sung by one person.

Malicia. The outsmarting of one player by an opponent in a cunning, yet playful manner in the realm of Capoeira.


Orixa. spirit beings, deities, also known as saints in Candomblé or African Brazilian pantheon.

Pandeiro. A Portuguese word for tambourine, used in a Capoeira.

Quilombo. A community of runaway slaves or maroon society.

Reco-reco. A hollowed-out piece of bamboo used as a musical instrument.

Roda. A Portuguese word for ring, the space for playing Capoeira.

Samba. A popular Brazilian dance, originated from the Angolan word semba.
   The Angolan translation of semba is “pelvic movement” or “belly bounce”.4

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between the African aesthetics and the African retentions of Capoeira Angola. This art form is an African Brazilian ritual competitive dance brought to Brazil by enslaved Africans. The African aesthetics that were examined were call and response, and drama. The term “African” in African aesthetics applies to Africans and African Americans. This study is significant because it explores the overlooked, yet essential, characteristics of Capoeira Angola from an African perspective.

Although there is much debate over Capoeira Angola’s geographical place of origin, it is inconceivable to ignore the African attributes of the dance. Many argue that it is a Brazilian art form; however, it is inaccurate to exclusively credit Brazil for Capoeira Angola’s foundation. Capoeira Angola was first documented during the time of slavery in Brazil.1 The majority of slaves in Brazil came from Africa. Africans brought this tradition with them in the transatlantic slave trade. In all probability, some Brazilian characteristics have been incorporated into this art form due to the integration of native Brazilians and African slaves. Even though there is a diminutive amount of research that validates the African roots in Capoeira Angola, many scholars refute these claims. Capoeira Angola is often acknowledged solely as a form of self-defense; however, fighting is not the only aspect of this African artistic expression. Unlike the study done by Thomas J. Desch-Obi,

that he examines *n'golo* Capoeira Angola’s predecessor, this study specifically focuses on the African aesthetics and retentions of Capoeira Angola.

Capoeira Angola originated from the Bangala people of southern Angola. It originated from the *n'golo* dance, which was performed during a rite of passage ceremony, celebrating the transformation of young girls into adult women. The dance consisted of two young men who were in contest for one of the new initiates. The winner is allowed to choose a wife without having to pay a dowry. The mock combat dance was accompanied by music which included instruments and songs. The two young men who engaged in this art form mimic the movements of a zebra.

Stylistically, the *n'golo* and Capoeira Angola movements are identical to a zebra’s movements. For instance, a unique movement in Capoeira Angola and its predecessor, *n'golo*, is the *au* or *aul*, which is a cartwheel like movement. The *au* allows both opponents to be physically inverted, where one’s hands are on the ground and the legs are used to kick, mimicking a zebra. Furthermore, the movements of Capoeira Angola usually emanate from a crouching position, which allows both opponents to easily execute the kicks and evade the other person’s kicks. The *au* is “central to the Capoeira Angola’s combative arsenal and aesthetic, and is found in no other martial art in the world besides the *engolo* (*n'golo*) tradition.”

Once Africans traveled across the transatlantic during the latter part of the sixteenth century, so did the *n'golo* dance. Most of the enslaved Africans in Brazil came from neighboring provinces in southern Angola. When the Africans were enslaved and forced to work in Brazil, the competitive dance turned into a weapon of resistance,

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known as Capoeira Angola. The slaves utilized this dance as a weapon against their slave masters. Some scholars speculate that Capoeira Angola was used on the plantation against slave masters when a slave revolt occurred. However, others believe that Capoeira Angola was a form of resistance utilized against invaders (mostly the Dutch or Portuguese) of the quilombos of Brazil. quilombos were runaway slave communities. The possibilities of the Africans retaining their cultural beliefs from the n’golo and infusing them into Capoeira Angola are more than likely, since there was limited separation between African groups from Angola. Even with this documented information, it is difficult to acquire information about the African aesthetics of Capoeira Angola including call and response, and drama.

*Call and response* is a “spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the statements (‘calls’) are punctuated by expressions (‘responses’).”

Call and response usually involves spontaneity or improvisation. The art of improvisation is the action and reaction to the moment, whether it is verbal or nonverbal. The verbal aspect is studied through Capoeira Angola songs and the nonverbal facet is examined by the means of dance movements.

*Chamada de bênção* literally translated to mean “call to the blessing” in Portuguese is an example of Capoeira Angola’s call and response, nonverbal aesthetic element. To execute a chamada de bênção, one individual calls his or her opponent by spreading their arms wide, or with one arm extended to another individual. The other player responds by touching hands with the opponent and they walk backward and forward together. There is an ongoing debate on the basis of the chamada. Some

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individuals believe the “call” comes from a parody of European social dance. This movement reenacts the story of the slave master dancing with a slave woman whom the slave master later abused. Consequently *chamada de bênçã o* is a series of movements that tell a story; this is an African tradition. African folklore is usually transmitted orally, but one’s body actions prove that a story can also be told through dance. The African tradition affirms that a dance cannot be materialized unless an event occurs or is referenced through an African legend or myth. “African dance translates everyday experiences into movement.”

*Chamada de bênçã o* illustrates the improvisation in storytelling or narration within Capoeira Angola. The story is told to the Capoeira Angola community by gestural or nonverbal communication, which plays a crucial role in the African aesthetic *call and response* and exemplifies African folklore.

Moreover, a dance from the people in TCHITELELA of southwest Angola provides an example of the physical reenactment of folklore, similar to Capoeira Angola’s *chamada de bênçã o*. Specifically, a southwest Angolan myth of the village tells the story of an eagle that flies over a village and casts its shadow on the children. It is believed that the shadow will take the children’s souls. As a result, the dance consists of people pretending to see the eagle and trying to evade the eagle’s shadow. Their gestures are dramatized and the facial expressions are animated in the dance. The “call” comes from the individuals who are pretending to be the eagle; moving their arms up and down

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6 Ibid.
imitating the bird. The response stems from the people who are attempting to evade the bird’s advances.

The African aesthetic “call and response” and African retentions are found in both Capoeira Angola and modern African American’s popular culture. For instance, Beyoncé Knowles, an African-American rhythm and blues singer, actress and dancer popularized a series of dances in her song titled Get Me Bodied. She implements a form of call and response by naming various dances and the audience responds by executing these dances. This style of call and response can be found in many types of African or African-American genres of music such as hip hop and rhythm and blues. Similarly, call and response is a feature of black church culture. Call and response instills a form of connecting the dance to the African traditions and African aesthetics.

Furthermore, the style of dance known as “popping” is an example of nonverbal story telling related to African dance. In the hip hop community, “popping” is a method in which one quickly contracts and relaxes the muscles in the body and adds an assortment of poses to form dance movements. The dancer is able to include his/her own style by telling a story in the dance. For instance, the “popping” dancer may tell a story about playing a game of basketball and winning by the visual portrayal of such in body movements. While dancing, the dancer may pretend to bounce a ball and act as if he/she won through theatrics. Even though, “popping” may not tell a detailed story like the people in TCHITELELA, there is a form of nonverbal, physical communication in both the folkloric story dancing and in “popping.” These types of expressive actions can also be categorized in the aesthetic value of drama, due to an individual’s expressive body gestures. African aesthetics are often disregarded in Capoeira Angola; however, the
similarities of aesthetics found in Capoeira Angola and daily life are credited to the extension of African preservation within the African community.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework employed in this research is based on Kariamu Welsh-Asante’s explanation of African aesthetics and Molefi Kete Asante’s Afrocentricity theory. This analysis singularizes the commonalities that are found in various African societies in relationship to Capoeira Angola. Welsh-Asante indicates that when analyzing the African aesthetic, it is critical to examine an African’s relationship with time and space, as well as community, rhythm, and myth or symbolic spiritual powers.7

Welsh-Asante’s notion of time and space is crucial to the explanation of African aesthetics because it embodies the essence of the traditions and rituals of various African societies. The significance of time and space within the realm of African society relates to the ceremonies, customs, and initiations that are vital to African culture. Furthermore, community signifies a collective that is unified by some type of commonality which is appropriate when discussing the individuals involved in practicing and preserving Capoeira Angola and African traditions. Welsh-Asante constructed the notion of family aesthetics which may be identified with the concept of community. Family aesthetics explain the unambiguous qualities that are common in a group, while simultaneously sustaining one’s own individuality.8 For instance, the movements from Capoeira Angola and the n’golo dance of the Macupe and Mulundo people of Angola have similar aesthetic traits to the mock combat dance of African slaves in South Carolina and in

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8 Ibid.
Georgia. It is probable that certain movements have been added or altered as a result of locale, ethnicity, and cultural influences; however, the dance still possesses an aesthetic trait that links African American society with African society. The dance still sustains its original essence due to family aesthetics, meaning that Capoeira Angola’s dance expression reflects community as well as individuality.

Additionally, rhythm is perpetually rooted in the very existence of Africans. Rhythm not only describes the tempo and beat in music and dance, but it also illustrates the rhythm in one’s lifestyle. Moreover, in observation of rhythm, Welsh-Asante states, “The relationship between Africans and rhythms is not only constant but it is essential. It is not a question of having rhythm or not having rhythm but how well does one negotiate rhythm in life and in the artistic expressions of life.”

Rhythm cannot be viewed as merely a set of organized patterns of sound but more comprehensively as a lifestyle. Capoeira Angola embodies many elements that once analyzed can be viewed through the perspective of rhythm. Music, movements, and the enrichment of African culture are a part of the rhythm as recognized in Capoeira Angola.

The belief in symbolic spiritual powers, or myth, is also a trait that can be recognized in the culture of Capoeira Angola. In many cases, the element of spirit is related to a specific faith or religion. However, spiritual powers fall under a realm not only related to faith. A belief in such powers also reflects a lifestyle. African images and symbols represent the culture of African people. The concept of spirit may also come from epic memory. Epic or race memory is the occurrence by which “African people can draw upon a collective aesthetic bank that houses images, symbols and rhythms based

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upon history and subsequent mythology." The concept of epic memory suggests the mental and emotional connection that may be associated with Capoeira Angola and Africa. This connection is most apparent when viewing Capoeira Angola through the scope of a mechanism of cultural retention. The study of spiritual powers through symbols and religion are vital in investigating the African aesthetics of Capoeira Angola and are often overlooked. Hence, Molefi Kete Asante’s concept of Afrocentricity states:

Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action on which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena. Thus, it is possible for any one to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in a given phenomenon.

This theory guides the research towards the interests, ethics, and all that is African in Capoeira Angola. This is not meant to disregard the other elements that may be found in Capoeira Angola; however, it is meant to centralize Africa within the dance and the artistic expression.

The African aesthetic epitomizes an art that represents the creative culture of African people. It is impracticable to analyze the art form without having an understanding of time and space, community, rhythm, and myth or symbolic spiritual powers in correlation to Africa. Both Molefi Kete Asante’s and Kariamu Welsh-Asante’s theories on African aesthetic and Afrocentricity provide the basis for conceptualizing Capoeira Angola.

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Methodology

This research project addresses the African retentions through an ethnographic study. “Ethnography means describing a culture and understanding another way of life from the native point of view”\(^{12}\) through the basis of field research. Field research or fieldwork is an observational study of people in their natural surroundings over an extended period of time that ranges from a few months to several years. This is usually an observational participant. Participant observation research uses the qualitative method in which a researcher observes and participates in social settings and events.\(^{13}\)

Accordingly, for this study, research locations have focused on the sites where there is the study of Capoeira Angola. Information has been acquired by engaging in Capoeira Angola classes, events, demonstrations, festivals, workshops, and conferences in Atlanta, Georgia; Washington, D.C.; and Raleigh, North Carolina. The period of research ranges from 2003 until 2007. The researcher was also an observational participant in Capoeira Angola during a study experience in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil from July 2005 to August 2005. There is no specific rationale in the places that were chosen as research points in the United States. However, Salvador, Bahia was the chosen location as opposed to other states in Brazil, because this is where the largest percentage of documentation on Capoeira Angola has been retrieved because of its African population. During the transatlantic slave trade, a massive number of Africans were forced into slavery in many parts of Brazil; however, the largest slave port was located in Bahia. At each site research, including the classes in North America, activities and Capoeira Angola


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 364.
conferences were led by either a male Capoeira Angola mestre (master) or a skillful elder student. Although several other regions have been visited and incorporated into the study of Capoeira Angola, this study is not meant as a comparison and contrast of the events in these cities. The research methodology not only utilizes field notes; it employs qualitative data, by the means of secondary sources. This method of research is significant because it allows the researcher to be immersed into the environment that is under examination.

This study focuses on the culture and the people involved in Capoeira Angola by exlucating the social and behavioral structure of events. As an observational participant, obtaining cultural and explicit knowledge is vital for this research. Cultural knowledge includes an understanding of symbols, songs, speech, actions, and facts.¹⁴

**Research Question**

The research question is as follows: What factors of Capoeira Angola are reflective of African aesthetics and retentions?

**Limitation**

There is limited information that has been translated into English regarding Capoeira Angola. Therefore, the limitation of this study occurred while engaging in archival research in Brazil. The researcher’s fluency in Portuguese was not sufficient for translation of some texts written in Portuguese.

**Organization of the Thesis**

The chapters of the thesis are organized in the following manner: Chapter 1, the Introduction, provides the objective of the thesis, an explanation of the selected Conceptual Framework and Methodology. An examination of the relevant literature is

discussed in Chapter 2. The History of Capoeira Angola is presented in Chapter 3. This Chapter categorizes the Historical Context in a timeline into six periods that include: Pre-Colonial Brazil, African Roots, Brazil’s Colonial Period, Slavery, Underground, and Capoeira’s Academic Period. Additionally, the origin and meaning of the word Capoeira Angola is identified in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents the findings thematically utilizing Kariamu Welsh-Asante’s definition of African aesthetic. Chapter 5 presents the conclusion and identifies potential future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to Capoeira Angola, and to the African retentions of this competitive dance. Although research has been conducted on the Brazilian aspect of Capoeira Angola, there is a diminutive amount of research that promotes the African aspects and retentions which are critical to the study of Capoeira Angola. Furthermore, the game of Capoeira Angola displays symbolic, ritualistic movements that embody the African aesthetic *call and response* through dance. The game of Capoeira is a formation in which the movements of Capoeira are executed by two players or opponents. The term player or Capoeira player refers to the people that are physically incorporated within Capoeira. Essentially, the notion of *call and response* through body movement is a mode of communication between the two players and the Capoeira Angola community. This form of *call and response* through dance is a part of African culture. Judith Hanna clearly states: “Dance in Africa is communicative behavior in that movements can form a para- or quasi-language, sometimes more effective than verbal language.” It is astonishing that the relationship between the body movement and nonverbal language has not attracted much attention in the study of Capoeira Angola. Neither has the history behind the movements been thoroughly examined. Only a

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minority of researchers focused on the nonverbal language or symbolism in Capoeira Angola.

Accordingly, Gerard Taylor in *Capoeira Conditioning: How to Build Strength, Agility, and Cardiovascular Fitness Using Capoeira* makes reference exclusively to the dance movements, not mentioning any African contributions in regards to the movements. Taylor presents an extensive study about the execution of the moves and the fact that it is a dance. However, his narrative provides limited details about the history behind the moves. Although it is equally important to learn about the movements and the manner in which to execute them, it is important to be aware of its history because an awareness gives the movement a greater purpose. However, Taylor in *Capoeira 100: An Illustrated Guide to the Essential Movements and Techniques* provides a brief explanation to the name of Queen Nzinga in regards to the movement *ginga.*

Unfortunately, there is no other explanation provided. Moreover, only a minority of researchers focused on the nonverbal body language or symbolism in Capoeira Angola.

However, scholar Thomas J. Desch-Obi, in “Combat and the Crossing of the Kalunga” relates Capoeira Angola to the African nonverbal language and symbolic characteristic through a dance movement called *volta ao mundo.* This dance movement is a form of a *chamda,* which means “to call” and *volta ao mundo* means to “go around the

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world.” *Volta ao mundo* is a gestural succession that is executed by both capoeiristas circling the inside of the *roda* by walking or jogging in a counterclockwise direction.

Desch-Obi theorizes that Capoeira Angola is related to “the Central African cosmological paradigm, linking combat to the crossing of the *kalunga*.”6 The *kalunga* represents the cross between two worlds that represents the world of the living and the world of the dead or African ancestors. Within the Central African ideology, the cross is implied in the center of the circle which moves counterclockwise. In other words, Desch-Obi suggests that the *roda* symbolizes the *kalunga*. When the capoeiristas enter the *roda* they become a part of a spiritual world. This transformation occurs when one executes the mock dance movements, or when the players implement the *volta ao mundo* in their dance. Furthermore, the individuals traveling around the *roda* symbolize the continuity of existence, meaning there is no beginning or end in the cycle of life. The principle is based on the connection to life and the continuum of spirit, which is significant in the life of African ideology. Conversely, from a Western perspective the succession of life is often perceived from a linear perception, which means life begins with birth and ends in death.

Ultimately, Taylor agrees with Desch-Obi’s concept of the African cosmological paradigm of *kalunga*. Taylor later discusses the *kalunga* in *Capoeira: The Jogo de Angola from Luanda to Cyberspace* which was published a few months before *Capoeira Conditioning*. Additionally, Taylor’s defines *kalunga* in the N’Bunda language as a sea and in the Kongoese cosmology it means “rivers and the kingdom of the ancestors.”7

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However, Taylor conclusively gives credit to African ideology by stating that the kalunga represents the cross between two worlds.

Consequently, the notion of the kalunga embodying two worlds may also be symbolic of the inverted movements in Capoeira Angola. Desch-Obi suggests that because many of the dance movements are executed from an inverted position the theory of kalunga cannot be ignored because it represents an inverted world.\(^8\)

However, Matthias Röhrig Assunção, in Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art believes that any information theorized about the kalunga and Capoeira Angola is erroneous. He believes that the theory of kalunga is false because the elder mestres did not teach this philosophy to their students, consequently there was no knowledge of this theory until it was proposed in the 1990s.\(^9\)

If in fact Capoeira Angola mestres did not pass along the kalunga philosophy to their students, there must have been a natural embodiment that occurred in the lives of capoeiristas and the roda. Robert Farris Thompson believes art and spirit are related and should exist in harmony to enhance one’s life-force. He states, “Improve your character to improve your art. Art and goodness are combined.”\(^10\) This ideology is parallel to an individual’s consciousness in the beliefs of Capoeira Angola. The art form is a way of life, through the linking of ancestral traditions. It is not meant to be separated from

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10 Robert Farris Thompson, African Art in Motion (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1979), 1.
everyday existence because it moves through the continuum of the African cosmogram or the circle, whether it is in the roda or in life.

The spirit or existence of Capoeira Angola would be non-existent without music. However, it is difficult to comprehend the fact that most researchers only analyze the songs that are void of any relationship to Africa. For example, Assunção’s analysis of the *ladainha* is ambiguous. The *ladainha* is a litany or narrative solo and it is the first part of the succession of traditional songs. The three types of songs included in this succession are the *ladainha, chula,* and *corrido.* Some of the songs are about slavery, infamous places in Bahia and Africa, and legends from Capoeira Angola history. However, Assunção believes the *ladainha* is a song about “life in general, or Capoeira Angola in particular.”¹¹ Assunção’s explanation of the songs content is vague in fact, he makes no reference to the African characteristics that are found in many Capoeira Angola *ladainhas.*

Conversely, Lewis gives a clear analysis on the *ladainha* and the African relationship of Capoeira Angola. He mentions that the traditional mestres improvise many *ladainhas.* Improvisation is a part of the African aesthetic. He continues to explain that improvisation includes the mental and spiritual preparation for the Capoeira Angola players. In other words, being that the *ladainha* is the first song in the Capoeira Angola game, it prepares the capoeiristas to enter to ancestral realm of Capoeira Angola. Lewis also mentions that the Capoeira Angola mestres who improvise do such “out of a deep

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respect for the tradition, and because he is proud of his verbal ability and beautiful voice.”

The aesthetic value of improvisation is found in African culture. However, Christopher Small, in *Music, Society, Education*, theorizes that improvisation in African society is glorified. Regarding African music, he proclaims that “improvisation is less common than one might imagine.” Being that most African songs utilize *call and response*, it is difficult to find Small’s theory as accurate. An article written by James A. Snead titled, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture” refutes Small’s hypothesis. Snead declares that in African culture “Without an organizing principle of repetition, true improvisation would be impossible, since an improvisation relies upon the ongoing recurrence of the beat.” Capoeira Angola retains a constant rhythm only with slight variations in the *berimbaus*. Therefore, Snead’s explanation is significant to improvisation and *call and response* because it describes the music of Capoeira Angola.

Nonetheless, there is a Capoeira Angola *ladainha* that expresses the true essence of Capoeira Angola’s history and its African origins. The Portuguese and English translation of the ladainha titled “Rei Zumbi dos Palmares” is found below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History deceives us</td>
<td>A história nos engana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Says everything contrary</td>
<td>Diz tudo pelo contrário</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even says that abolition</td>
<td>Até diz que a abolição</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happened in the month of May</td>
<td>Aconteceu no mês de maio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The proof of this lie</td>
<td>A prova dessa mentira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is that from misery I do not escape.</td>
<td>É que da miséria eu não saio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Long live the 20th of November
Moment to be remembered
I don’t see in the 13th of May
Anything to commemorate
A long time passes
And the Blackman always will struggle.
Zumbi is our hero
Zumbi is our hero, old friend of Palmares
he was the leader
For the cause of the black man
It was he who fought the most
In spite of all the fighting, my friend
That black man did not liberate himself, comrade!

Viva vinte de novembro
Momento pra se lembrar
Não vejo em treze de maio
Nada pra comemorar
Muitos tempos se passaram
E o negro sempre a lutar
Zumbi é nosso heroi
Zumbi é nosso heroi, colega velho
Do Palmares foi senhor
Pela causa do homem negro
Foi ele quem mais lutou
Apesar de toda luta, colega velho
O negro não se libertou, camarada!

This ladainha reveals a significant part of African Brazilian history. The song specifically details the infamous Quilombo dos Palmares, which was a successful maroon settlement in Pernambuco, Brazil. Palmares flourished nearly the entire seventeenth century and was in constant battle with the Portuguese and the Dutch. The warriors in this settlement were skillful war strategists; who protected their land and people with elaborate fortifications, including walls and palisades, pit traps and trenches. It is also believed that this settlement encompassed many Imbangalas (African warriors) that utilized Capoeira Angola as a form of self-defense.

Warrior leaders, Ganga Zumba and Zumbi, led Palmares to most of their victories. Zumbi was an Angolan born in Palmares and is a major icon in African Brazilian culture that is honored in the ladainha “Rei Zumbi dos Palmares.” The ladainha also mentions November 20th. This marks the date in 1695 when Zumbi was beheaded by the Portuguese. Hence, in Brazil November 20th is celebrated annually and pays homage to the African Brazilian heroes. This day is known as “National Day of the Black Conscience.” Additionally, the provided ladainha rejects May 13th as a day of

celebration because it commemorates the date in which slavery was abolished in 1888. The song prefers to honor the last day of Zumbi’s life. Additionally, legend has it that Zumbi was a great Capoeira Angola leader. However, there appears to be no written documentation that verifies this claim. Yet, it exists within oral traditions of Capoeira Angola songs.

Moreover, the *chula* and the *corrido* of Capoeira Angola are forms of *call and response*. In *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil*, Peter Fryer defines *call and response* as the common structural device in African traditional music. He deems that this aesthetic characteristic is a song with slight overlapping between the leader and chorus. Additionally, Lewis believes the sound of the voice or the tone in which Capoeira Angola songs are sung, are reminiscent of the African-American work songs or ‘field hollers.’ The *call and response* songs can also be compared to African-American retention of the black church. For instance, in the black church, the hymn lining tradition is a form of *call and response* which is closely related to the *call and response* in Capoeira Angola. Often times the minister, choir director, and designated church members take part in this tradition. Hymn lining is usually “spoken rather than sing song declamation.” However, speaking as opposed to singing is the only difference between the hymn lining tradition and the songs in Capoeira Angola.

Moreover, a minority of scholars have studied the Capoeira Angola aesthetic value of *call and response* by the means of rites of passage. Nevertheless, Lewis delivers

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an enlightening proposition on the ritual that commemorates the transition of one’s social status within Capoeira Angola. He suggests that some novice players in Capoeira Angola move to the higher level of understanding, by unknowingly receiving a *bensão* meaning “blessing” from the *mestre*. His example is centered on the manner in which a person greets the other upon entering the *roda*. The two players are supposed to shake hands before they play a game. Lewis posses a situation in which a beginner student enters the *roda* with a *mestre*, and the novice quickly finds himself on the floor before he has the chance to greet the *mestre*. Instead of a handshake, the *mestre* gives his “blessing” by knocking the student to the ground. This “blessing” suggests an indirect form of *call and response* between the *mestre* and the new player. The call occurs in the intended handshake and the response transpires by the *mestre*’s “blessing.”

This nonverbal form of communication in the Capoeira Angola ritual is evident in African society. In an interview with Meme Fransina in Heike Becker’s “Ceremonial Leaders of *Efundula*,” it affirmed that there is a significance of nonverbal communication within the Angolan rites of passage ceremony. She describes the latter stage of the initiation; in which the young women are approached by an acquaintance of the male initiates. The friend puts a ribbon around the arm of the young woman that the male initiate has chosen as his future wife. The ribbon symbolizes a proposal in marriage. If the young woman accepts she keeps the ribbon around her arm, but if she rejects the advancement, she takes the ribbon off. This was the last phase of the initiation process, which meant the young woman was officially initiated. Consequently, the ribbon marked the completion of the initiation.

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Furthermore, the end of the rite of passage was nonverbal and embodied the aesthetic facet of *call and response*. During the *Efundula* it was understood that the young woman that wore the ribbon of a male initiate was expected to marry him and move on to the next social level in their community. Just as in Capoeira Angola, it is understood that the individual that is given the *benção* is also expected to accept the *mestre*’s induction and progress to the subsequent level in the Capoeira Angola community. This is established by the silent form of communication between both parties. In *Efundula*, the “call” represents the man tying the ribbon and the “response” is the woman accepting the ribbon or discarding it.

Additionally, Lewis suggests that the initiation ritual in Capoeira Angola is meant to prepare the student for the unexpected, both in society and in Capoeira Angola. He explicitly affirms that the “blessing” expresses the “hypocrisy of the social system, both past and present.”20 Within the hypothesis of the “blessing practice,” Lewis’ concepts of “past and present” are integral to the “blessing” connotation. He considers Brazil’s slave era as an indication of the “past,” because slaves were mandated to ask for a “blessing” every time they were in the presence of their slave owner. The slave owners that may have granted their slaves a “blessing” may end up torturing them the next day. Lewis’ notion of “present,” indicates the idea of not trusting authority nor anyone to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the initiation ritual is based on improvisation because the *mestre* decides whether or not a student is ready to receive the “blessing” and goes through the informal initiation. Lewis’ study of the “blessing” demonstrates an example of the *call and response*, and rites of passage in Capoeira Angola.

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J. Lowell Lewis and Masila Mutisya’s text and journal article, "Demythologization and Demystification of African Initiation Rites" are in agreement with one another in terms of the purpose of the rites of passage. Mutisya states that the rite of passage indicates when an individual understands the "rules of society and the responsibility of obeying the rules, of self-respect and respect for others." This same ideology can take place in the "blessing," and represents the transition in Capoeira Angola where a beginner, essentially a child in Capoeira Angola, transcends into "adulthood" and developmentally understands the ethics in this art form. The mestre sees something in the player indicating that it is time for the player to have a better understanding of the history and philosophy of Capoeira Angola. This is exemplary of the "call" of call and response. The novice capoeirista is considered the child. The mestre then symbolically brings the novice student to enlightenment, which represents the "response" of adulthood.

Perhaps, this initiation symbolizes the rite of passage in which an adolescent becomes an adult, through the African retention of dance. "Dance metaphorically enacts and communicates status transformation in rites of passage." Further, Robert Nicholls in the essay, "African Dance: Transitions and Continuity" in African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry clarifies the importance of initiation rituals that

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introduce the young to adult society by the means of dance. In the case of this study “dance” represents Capoeira Angola. In any case, “dance communicates messages about respect for self and others, physical coordination and mental poise, standards of conduct, and cultural integration.” All of these qualities describe the lesson learned in the Capoeira Angola culture. John Samuel Mbiti, author of *African Religions and Philosophy*, shares a similar ideology to scholar Robert Nicholls essay. First, Mbiti affirms that “initiation rites have a great educational purpose. . . . It is a period of awakening.” Moreover, Nicholls’s lists the qualities that make up an African rite of passage. For instance, in the case of Capoeira Angola, a novice player must trust and respect its *mestre* and the art form. Lewis and Nicholls’ notion of trust and respect are similar. Lewis suggests that one must trust others only to a certain degree both in the *roda* and in society. This is also equivalent to Nicholls’ notion of rite of passage within the African community. He believes that in the rites of passage the African initiates must be poised mentally, coordinated physically, and understand the “standards of conduct” and “cultural integration.” Even though these attributes are meant to describe African dance, these qualities are also relevant to Capoeira Angola.

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Moreover, Nicholls’ theory of “mental poise” is an important quality because if the player is not psychologically ready, it may cause a lack of self-confidence within the inner realm of Capoeira Angola and society in general. “Standards of conduct” as a theory describes how the new player at the point of initiation should have an understanding the unwritten rules of Capoeira Angola. For instance, it is expected that a player should shake an opponent’s hand before and after a game or genuflecting or squatting at the main berimbau, the gunga before the game begins. Nicholls’ perception of “cultural integration” can be interpreted into the amalgamation of African culture with Brazilian culture. In other words, the basis of Nicholls’ theories suggests that because of Capoeira Angola’s African origin, continuing with the slaves in Brazil impacted the Portuguese language in the songs of Capoeira Angola. Accordingly, literature appears limited that refutes Lewis’ claim in regards to the initiation process between the mestre and the student.

Capoeira Angola would be non-existent without the African aesthetic of drama. Drama is the performance and celebration of the African community through artistic expression. Style and flair are examples of artistic expression that are rooted in Capoeira Angola and within the black community. For instance, Africans and African Americans operate under the aesthetic of drama within the church. A church that has a black congregation and embraces the black aesthetic will have its own individual style that is not comparable to white churches and are usually accomplished through the music or spirituals. This is due to the nature of creativity which tends to be instinctive within the black community.
There is also the ideology that *malicia* is congruent to the African trickster. In accordance with John Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* declares that the trickster is a sacred being or a god associated with religious beliefs.\(^{27}\) The qualities of the trickster has to do with the African aesthetic of *drama*. *Malicia* refers to one’s ability to outsmart the other opponent in a cunning yet playful manner. In Capoeira, if one is said to “have *malicia*” it means the person is observant of the opponent’s strengths and weaknesses, and uses this knowledge as a benefit. The person that posses malicia performs the movements with flair and skill.

Moreover, *malicia* illustrates the sense of surprise from the offensive player. However, Matthias Assunção makes a crucial point in concerning the terms of *malicia*. He contextualizes *malicia* by stating “It is meant to lull the other player into a false sense of security, only to surprise him with a move he was not expecting. However, respect for the other player usually meant not to carry out the attack, but only to show him what one could have done.”\(^{28}\) For instance, an opponent appearing to execute a kick may switch his/ her movement at the last second, making his/ her opponent fall off balance. This causes the imbalanced player appear incompetent, or as an unskilled player. *Malicia* can be exaggerated in movement or the players become relaxed in their movements and appear to be unaffected by the trickery.

Thus, the relevance of Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion* is important to the study of Capoeira Angola’s notion of *malicia*. He asserts that *malicia* is


used daily within the black community whether or not it is African, African American or African Brazilian, whether one realizes it or not. However, Thompson suggests that one must also appear to be calm so that weakness is not exposed, which reveals the African value known as the “aesthetic coolness.” Thompson also argues that “coolness . . . is a trait which grants a person the power to incarnate the destiny of his tradition.” In other words, the African traditions in Capoeira Angola allow the African existence and the power that can come from coolness both inside and outside of the roda. He investigates the notion of being calm through the Itutu traditions of the Yoruba culture. The notion of keeping cool plays a part in the African aesthetics of Capoeira Angola, because it discloses the player’s anger which also reveals their weakness. This idea of cool-headedness may be applied inside or outside of the roda. Lewis concludes:

One of the joys of watching beautiful Capoeira Angola is discovering that one has been taking in by one of these consummate actors. One ‘reads’ face and body to mean that the player is really angry or hurt or upset, only to be pleasantly surprised when he throws off the mask with a laugh. This kind of dramatic pretense is another aspect of malícia, of fooling one’s opponent, and often the audience can be fooled as well.  

Some scholars speculate that malícia is a natural occurrence for many individuals who encompass the African aesthetics of rhythm. Some individuals theorize that the innate generational connection between one’s African ancestors through melanin is the reason people of African descent have rhythm. For example, Earnest Hooton in his essay, “Is the Negro Inferior?” declares “a certain fluidity of muscular movement and a hyper


sensibility to rhythm are responsible for the racial individuality of Negro music and art.”32 However, in *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*, John Hoberman believes that this type of thinking only promotes a generalization of the black race as the only people that have a “sense of rhythm”33 which makes racial characters ambiguous. Nonetheless, the foundation behind the research of Capoeira Angola does not undertake an extensive examination of the rhythm of black people, but it is important to mention when exploring the African origins.

However, scholar and capoeirista, Nestor Capoeira, who wrote *Capoeira: Roots of the Dance-Fight-Game* makes no reference regarding race, when explaining *malicia*. He believes that spontaneity and effortlessness is manifested in a Capoeira player. Nestor Capoeira’s theory of playing with ease is in congruence with Thompson’s ideology of coolness; but it differs in the way Thompson presents race as a factor in the embodiment of *malicia*. However, Nestor Capoeira asserts that *malicia* is exhibited in a player due to one’s knowledge and experience in the game of Capoeira Angola. Nestor asserts that one must be knowledgeable of the fundamentals of Capoeira Angola, which is the foundation, roots and way of being.34 In other words, it is important to know the basics, history and knowing that Capoeira Angola cannot be separated from everyday life. Furthermore, he avows that the “traditional Capoeira Angola players,” meaning individuals who practice

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Capoeira Angola (Angoleiros) make no distinction between their reality and Capoeira Angola. Angoleiros who tend to be of African descent “identify themselves as an exploited and marginal subgroups, typically the darkest and sometimes the poorest . . . identifying strongly with the homeland and seeing racism as the chief impediment to their social mobility.”35 The connection that these Capoeira Angola players feel regarding the African foundation is difficult to separate from the art form in their everyday existences. Capoeira Nestor proclaims that an Angoleiro may find it difficult to attend a class where he/ she is simply taught kicking techniques.36

The race proposition is not the only form of malicia that is rationalized in Capoeira Angola. Teacher and scholar, Muniz Sodre and Capoeira Nestor propose the theory that malicia is feminine in nature. However, the reasons suggested emerge from a sexist ideology. Muniz Sodre claims that malicia is feminine because its power is unclear, incomprehensible, and irrational.37 He also states, “The outward movements are masculine, but the inside strategies are feminine.”38 Unfortunately, the author does not provide any other detail regarding to this theory of malicia being feminist, and there are few scholars who have a rebuttal for this concept.


37 Ibid., 30.

38 Ibid., 24.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of Capoeira and its distinctive African origins are critical in understanding the African aesthetics in the retentions of Capoeira Angola. This chapter details six historical periods of Capoeira in chronological order including: Pre-colonial Brazil, African Roots, Brazil’s Colonial Brazil, Slavery, Underground, and Capoeira’s Academic Period. Additionally, this chapter explains the word origin of Capoeira, the two opposing styles of this form and the game of Capoeira.

Pre-colonial Brazil Period

The original inhabitants of Brazil are known as Amerindians and have populated the land, of Brazil for more than ten thousand years. These individuals were divided into hundreds of sub groups stratified by language. The tribes are Ge (Je), Carib, Aruak (Arawak) and Tupi-Guarani. The southeastern region of Brazil was known as the Tiete-Uruguai of Brazil which was populated by the Ge (Je) people. This area was generally populated with the ethnic group identified as Kaingáng. The Kaingáng were non-sedentary people, meaning they had no permanent homes or agriculture. They wandered from place to place and slept in nearby caves. They also lived off the fruits of the land as opposed to planned farming. “These people were not only shy, they were desperate and
cruel; they not only fled from the Whites into the often impenetrable hinterland, but killed the invading stranger.\(^1\)

Even though the Kaingáng people fought for their humanity, most were eventually massacred by colonizers and others eventually surrendered. It didn’t seem to matter that the “The Kaingáng of Sao Paulo . . . were reduced from 1,200 persons at the time of their pacification in 1912 to a mere 87 ragged and starving individuals in 1957.”\(^2\) There was little to no influence that the colonizers or African slaves had over the Kaingáng. This may have been because this tribe of Amerindians lived a nomadic lifestyle and inhabited deep in the forest of Brazil. Furthermore, the Carib and Aruak people barely had any connection with the colonizers or Africans because they mostly lived on the border of Venezuela, Colombia, Guiana, and the Antilles.

The Tupi-Guarani or Tupi people resided along the Atlantic coast, in the northeastern area of Brazil. They were the largest indigenous group in Brazil. This ethnic group had the most contact with the African slaves because the Tupi lived on the coast of Brazil, where the slave ports were located. Their regions of land consisted of farms and villages; however, hunting, and fishing were also parts of their basic means of survival. The Tupi were semi-sedentary people, meaning the tribes lived a somewhat nomadic lifestyle.\(^3\) Usually two or three years would pass before they would move to another area of land. Moreover, the Tupi’s political structure consisted of several villages with

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autonomous tribes that were ruled by councils of elders, chiefs, and shamans. There was no such element as an upper and lower class, however there were temporary slaves present who were acquired from tribal wars.

Among all of the Amerindian tribes, Tupi people are best known for their fierce warfare. Many of these conflicts originated from disputes over land for farming, hunting, and fishing. However, this discord evolved into hostilities that were “motivated by a culturally continued animosity, a kind of intertribal interaction”⁴ There was an ongoing succession of wars because they were constantly avenging fellow tribesmen. The Tupi people were ferocious warriors, and it is claimed that they devoured their prisoners at an elaborate ceremony. The existence of cannibalism was the result of warfare. They ate their prisoners because they were no longer considered significant to society, even as slaves.

**African Roots Period**

The African Roots Period details Capoeira Angola’s originators, objective, body movements, music, and other African mock combat dances. Capoeira is a manifestation of a dance called *n’golo* which comes from Africans of present-day southern Angola. The *n’golo* is practiced by the ethnic groups that lived near Luanda known as the Bangala people. The Bangala people consist of many ethnic groups such as the Khoisan, Proto-Luyana, and the Proto-Herero. The *n’golo* is a ritual dance that is practiced during the celebration of rites of passage. However, it is theorized that the Imbangla’s hand-to-hand,

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mock combat training is the predecessor of the *n’golo* dance.⁵

The Imbangalas were groups of me initiated into warrior bands, initially from northern Angola, but they traveled and settled in southern Angola. They survived by raiding villages and they built their army by taking captives from various places in southern Angola.⁶ They trained their soldiers on weaponry, but emphasized the importance of hand-to-hand combat and evasion of the attack. “All their defense consists of *sanguav*, which is to leap from one side to another with a thousand twists and such agility that they can dodge arrows and spears.”⁷ There are also movements that are in handstand position. These inverted postures allow the person to evade attacks and to execute kicks in a position other than an upright stance. When the warrior went into an upside down position it tended to catch its opponent off guard, allowing the Imbangala to attack with great success. Eventually, the Imbangala’s ended their nomadic lifestyle and settled in states scattered throughout southern Angola.

The training and mock combat of the Imbangalas became an integral part of the initiation ceremony, known as *Efundula* or *Mufico*. The celebratory initiation pays tribute to a girl’s transition from puberty into adulthood. Once married, the young woman moves from her paternal home to her new husband’s quarters. The tradition also honors procreation and childrearing for the *muficuemes*, or girls. In many cases the *muficuemes* are known as “ash girls,” because their bodies are adorned with white ashes during the


ceremony. Once these girls are decorated with the “symbolic plant armor,” they symbolically embody the spirits of past ancestors. This ritual represents the beginning of future generations within the African community. In the course of the initiation, the community forms a circle around two young men that compete in a mock battle dance. The winner is then able to choose a wife from the girl initiates without paying dowry. However, in some of the Bangala subgroups dowry is paid by cattle.

*N’golo* dance means zebra dance and it is a mock combative dance. Much of the body kinesics imitates the movements of this animal. A zebra may use its hind legs to kick when protecting itself from another animal. The objective in the *n’golo* dance is to hit the opponent’s body with one’s foot or head, or knock the opponent out of the community’s circle. Similarly, in the *n’golo* dance, a person may stand on his hands and use his legs as a defense mechanism. There are several kicking techniques in *n’golo*; however, the most effective are the kicks that are executed in an inverted pose, with the person’s hands placed on the ground, in a handstand position. The following kicks are considered to be some of the best moves in Imbangala mock combat and *n’golo* dance: “*okusanena-may-ulu* (using handstand to kick), *okusana omaulo-ese* (using handstand/cartwheel to kick down), and *okuyepa* (using cartwheels to escape.)

Furthermore, kicks from an inverted position are not the only type of defensive moves in the Bangala mock combat dance. There are different ways of evading the attack moves that are also a part of the dance. The individual defending himself will attempt to

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dodge his opponents attack moves. Since there are no blocks in the n’golo, one must be able to evade the other person’s physical advances with ease and agility. For instance, one individual may execute a kick and the other person may be able to evade the kick by completing an au (cartwheel). The kicker may have missed his opponent because of the cartwheel that was implemented by the opponent. Desch-Obi states that “While in the circle the two combatants will often try to display their trickery and cunning, central attributes exhibited by engolo\textsuperscript{10} adepts.”\textsuperscript{11}

It is theorized that zebras were emulated in the mock combat dance because they were abundant in the Bangala land and the zebras were experts at defending themselves. Additionally, zebras “exhibit strength, speed, and agility”\textsuperscript{12} and they possess the ability of sanguar.\textsuperscript{13} Additionally, there is social connotation in the rites of passage between the zebra and the n’golo dance. Desch-Obi insists:

A young bachelor zebra who wishes to take a stallion’s young foal to start his own herd, must first prove himself in ritual combat against the other young bachelors. This combat consists of a match with kicks and ‘neck wrestling’ (head butting) . . . After winning, the elect bachelor is then tested by the father in battle. The stallion’s intention is not to keep his daughter from mating, but to test the bachelors to ensure the strongest takes his daughter. The other bachelors watch and imitate in anticipation of the day then can become the elect and challenge a stallion for his daughter.\textsuperscript{14}

The zebra’s social order and initiation process is similar to the Efundula ceremony; the only difference is that the father does not get involved. The Bangala

\textsuperscript{10} Engolo is another way spelling of n’golo.


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 58.

people may have gotten their inspiration for a rites of passage ceremony by observing the zebra’s ritual. Many African societies believe that lessons could be learned from animals and that animals are a part of, and contribute to, the well-being of society.

The zebra clearly played a crucial part in the foundation of n’golo’s movements; however, the n’golo’s music accompaniment is equally significant. The movements in the n’golo dance are in rhythm with the communities’ hand clapping, drum beats, humming and call and response songs. Before the n’golo dance takes place the humming is followed by a soloist who begins the call and response. He often enters the circle dancing and shouting. Another opponent will then join the solo singer in the middle of the circle and begin the mock war dance. Moreover, there are many instruments that accompany the ritual of Capoeira; but there were only two that appeared in the n’golo dance. The atabaque (in figure 1) and the berimbau (in figure 2), along with the caxixi (in figure 3), are a part of the Efundula. The atabaque is a drum.
Figure 1. *Atabaque*
Photograph by the author
Figure 2. *Berimbau*
Photograph by the author
Figure 3. Caxixi, baqueta and dobrão
Photograph by the author
Figure 4. Capoeirista playing the berimbau
Photograph by the author
The berimbau is the chief instrument used in Capoeira and it plays a role in African traditional ceremonies, such as the Efundula. It is a single-string percussion instrument or musical bow. The string is known as the arame and is made from many materials, including twisted plant fiber or the most popular-dried animal intestines, mostly from a pig or cat. The steel wire is a modern convention; which can be found in the tire of a bicycle or automobile. The string on the berimbau is struck with a thin stick known as vaqueta or baqueta. The vaqueta used in Africa is a thin slither of cane, palm leaf stem, or a piece of wood whittled to the size of a long pencil. The caxixi resembles a small woven basket enclosed with small pebbles or beads and is held in the same hand as the vaqueta. The sound is similar to a maraca or rattle. The other hand holds the dobrão or moeda, (in figure 3), which is a coin or a stone. The dobrão is pressed against the arame to change the tone of the instrument. There have also been accounts of Angolans using the nail of their thumb to stop the arame rather than the dobrão.

Additionally, one of the most important pieces of the berimbau is the gourd or cabaça. The gourd is tied to the verga, which is the long wooden part of the instrument. Sound is created through the open side of the cabaça, which vibrates against the musician’s stomach. Different sounds are produced by altering the positions of the cabaça and modifying the pressure applied to the body of the Capoeira Angola player. The berimbau instrument is considered African because of its apparent similarities in the Kongo-Angolan musical bows. The rucumbo is an instrument that resembles the berimbau utilized by Kongo speaking people. In 1890, Portuguese writer and traveler Henrique de Carvalho described the instrument’s function: (in figure 4)
This instrument is well known in our province of Angola. They take a stick of a particular pliable wood and bend it into a bow... The bow is held between the body and the left arm, using the left hand to hold it at the right height. Touching the string at different heights with a stick held in the right hand produces good sounds which recall those of a violin and are altogether pleasant.\(^{15}\)

Even though de Carvalho was describing the use of the *rucumbo* of Luanda, his description implicitly applies to the function of many other African string instruments that are parallel to the *berimbau*. De Carvalho has indirectly given instructions on how to play the *berimbau* as well. Furthermore, ethnographer, musicologist, and African linguist, Gerhard Kubick believes the instruments known as *mbulumbumba* and *hungu* of Ngumbi and Handa, of south west Angola, are smaller versions of the *berimbau*.\(^{16}\) Presently, the *berimbau* utilized in Capoeira Angola is approximately four feet high.

Both the *berimbau* and the *caxixi* are African in origin; however, there is debate whether or not the *caxixi* originated in West, or Central Africa. Ethnomusicologist Kazadi wa Mukuna theorizes that the Luba rattle, *dikasa* of Central Africa, is the precursor of the *caxixi*, except the *dikasa* is shorter in stature and has a rounder shape in comparison to the modern *caxixi*. Additionally, Kubick speculates that the origin of the *caxixi* is in Central Africa because of the Kongo-Angolan basket rattle. This rattle is similar to the *caxixi*, except the Angolan rattle possesses a handle longer than the present day *caxixi*. Another ethnomusicologist, Laura Boulton, suggests that the Umbundu basket rattle, *osangu*, is the valid predecessor to the *caxixi*, even though the rattle has no plaited handle.


like the contemporary *caxixi*. Like the Bantu term, *mucaxixi*, is phonetically related to *caxixi*, which is also an African rattle basket. Although the exact origin of the *caxixi* may be difficult to ascertain, all of the various studies of the *caxixi* confirm its location being in Africa.

The remainder of instruments utilized in today’s Capoeira Angola did not appear in the art form until the nineteenth century. With the exception of the *pandeiro* (in figure 5), which is a tambourine, the other instruments of Capoeira are from Kongo-Angola of Central Africa, West Nigeria and Benin; however, they were not used in the *n’golo* dance. The *pandeiro* is the Brazilian addition to Capoeira. The *agogô* (in figure 6) and *reco-reco* (in figure 7) are African in origin. The *agogô* is a clapperless double bell. Also known as *gâ* in Fon, the *agogô* originates in the Yoruba culture and in Central Africa. The bell is struck with a wooden stick to reverberate its sound. *Reco-reco* is a bamboo with transverse notches that is rubbed with a stick in order to produce a scrapping sound.

The *n’golo* is still practiced today, with little or no changes to its execution. Nevertheless, *n’golo* is among several types of combat dances that occur during various African rituals. The combat dances vary from styles of wrestling, hand or fist fighting, and the use of sticks and spears. However, the *n’golo* movements include kicks and head

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19 Ibid., 323.

butts. Occasionally, depending upon the ethnic group, male initiation rituals may incorporate acrobatics. Individuals, such as soldiers and mercenaries, practiced the dance to demonstrate their skills and to obtain status. It is believed that many of the traditional Kongo-Angola Bantu soldiers displayed agile movements, leaping from side to side, similar to the movements of the n'golo dance executed during the Efundula ceremony.

In Nigeria, the Korokoro dancers perform a mock combat dance, which includes kicks and hand thrusts, and illustrates how Nigerian soldiers meet their antagonists in war. Similar movements can be found in Capoeira Angola. A province in Angola known as Luanda has a dance called Bassula which has similar movements to the n'golo dance.

Additionally, slave communities in places such as Martinique, Cuba, and the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia are known for mock combat dances that embody movements similar to Capoeira. In Martinique, there is a sport called l'agya. In Cuba, the combat dance is called mani or bambosa. These art forms include the use of acrobats, embody a similar movements to those of a mock combat, and are accompanied by music. The dance movements are fairly similar to Capoeira, yet in comparison to the n'golo the movements are parallel to Capoeira Angola.

The African Roots Period proves the African origins in Capoeira, by its foundation in the Imbangala’s mock combat dance and the n’golo dance. The African aesthetic of call and response and rhythm are exhibited in the musical aspect of this art

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form. Rhythm is also illustrated in the description of movements. These aesthetic characteristics are vital when discussing Capoeira Angola’s African origins.
Figure 5. Pandeiro
Photograph by the author
Figure 6. Agogo
Photograph by the author
Figure 7. *Reco Reco*
Photograph by the author
Brazil’s Colonial Period

Christopher Columbus’ voyages, in 1492, initiated an European interest in the New World. His expedition caused a form of contention over territory between Portugal and Spain. However, in order to manage this dilemma, in 1494, Spain and Portugal prepared a Treaty of Tordesillas, dividing South America into two sections. The land in the east was meant for Portugal and that of the west for Spain. Brazil was granted to Portugal on April 22, 1500, when a Portuguese sea captain, Pedro Alvares Cabral “discovered” Brazil.

In spite of Cabral’s “discovery,” the Portuguese initially made no attempts in colonizing Brazil. Cabral left Brazil and left two prisoners behind to learn the language of the “Indians” so that business or an invasion could be successfully achieved in the future. This lack of interest allowed for several visits from other countries. The small number of Portuguese who resided in Brazil were abandoned criminals, shipwrecked sailors, and employees of the small trading posts. Furthermore, many of these individuals assimilated to the native’s culture in the following methods:

The first colonists were adopting the usages and customs of the indigenes: the dietary regime; the processes of work, of farming, of hunting . . . language . . . sports and diversions...the strangers soon permitted themselves to be influenced by the ideas, the sentiments, and even the vices of the barbarians. It may be said that, after some years of life in America, the European had more resemblances to the savage than to the civilized man.  

By 1530, Portugal finally began to show an interest, in Brazil. Portuguese explorer, Martim Afonso de Sousa commanded the institution of colonization in Brazil. The first production of a colony was close to the Tupi’s area of habitation. Nevertheless,

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24 T. Lynn Smith, Brazil: People and Institutions (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 367.
this would be the first time that many of the indigenous of Brazil had contact with the Portuguese. Martim Afonso immediately brought four thousand people over on four ships to take control of Brazil. The expedition included royal officials, soldiers, priests, laborers, settlers, and sailors. Many of these men were sent without their wives.\(^{25}\) It was rare for these Portuguese men to marry Amerindian women; however, they did engage in sexual relationships. Consequently, many of these interactions produced children. The children of the Portuguese and the Amerindians are known as *mameluocs*. They were successful slave traders because they were able to bargain with both counterparts.

Shortly after the intermingling of the Portuguese and the Tupi, many colonies were established. As a result, the Portuguese began to enslave the Amerindians. Many Amerindians died because of the infectious diseases that the Portuguese brought to their land. The Portuguese began to run short on laborers and felt that the Amerindians were unsuitable as slaves, so they turned to Africa. Beginning in 1530, the Portuguese, Spaniards, French and Dutch imported Africans into Brazil. Once Africans were slaves, the Amerindians became peasants, servants, or free slaves. In some cases instead of receiving money for their labor, they received clothes, food, and shelter. The Amerindians did not receive the same type of ill treatment that the Africans did.

By 1548, the colony had many sugar plantations along the coast and also traded brazilwood. Brazilwood was valued by the Europeans because it contained an attractive red dye. However, the trees were overly exploited and are currently almost extinct. This wood played a major role in Brazil’s economy. Outsiders wanted to be a part of Brazil’s

financial success. Consequently, other Europeans, the French and Dutch, wanted to claim Brazil. In 1555, the French invaded and occupied the Brazilian coast, near present-day Rio de Janeiro. However, ten years later the Portuguese troops expelled the French from the land. The Dutch raided the coast of Bahia in 1604. Furthermore, in 1612 the French attempted to colonize Brazil again, which ultimately ended in defeat three years later. The Dutch invasion in of 1630 to 1654 was the most successful and long lasting invasion to the coast of Brazil. Both the Dutch and French predominately occupied on the coast of Brazil and did not venture too far off into the hinterlands where the Amerindians lived. Nonetheless, many Amerindians tried to conform to the lifestyles of the Portuguese. The men became laborers, artisans, tailors, shoemakers, spinners, tile makers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and potters.26 Most of the women worked as spinners, weavers, or servants. It appears that much of the tribal custom and traditions of the Amerindians were lost once they entered the urban lifestyle of Brazil.

Slavery Period

The Slavery Period aims to describe the history of slavery in Brazil, the role of Capoeira in maroon societies, and the origin of the word Capoeira. During the Transatlantic slave trade, massive numbers of Africans were forced into slavery in many parts of Brazil. The largest slave port was Bahia, the colonial capital of Brazil. This research focuses mostly on Bahia, as opposed to other states in Brazil.

In 1891, three years after the abolition of slavery, Ruy Barbosa, Brazil’s Minister of Finance, destroyed the majority of records pertaining to slavery. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the identities of the various African ethnic groups that were forced

into slavery. However, Pierre Verger’s research on slave trade in Bahia provides an
irrefutable theory that enables us to know, with some degree of certainty, which groups
were enslaved. Verger divides the Slavery Period into four distinct cycles:

1. The Guinea cycle during the second half of the sixteenth century.
2. The Angola cycle in the seventeenth century.
3. The Mina Coast cycle during the first three quarters of the eighteenth century.
4. The Bight of Benin cycle between 1770 and 1851.27

In the seventeenth century, the Angolans were the largest number of Africans
forced into slavery in Bahia. The average amount of enslaved Angolans who entered
Bahia was five to ten thousand per year.28 During the course of the Angola cycle, most of
the Africans came from Cabinda, which is north of the Kongo River and includes,
provinces of Luanda, and Benguela, located in present-day Angola. Much of the African
traditions of Yoruba and the customs of Kongo-Angola have been preserved in Bahia.
Verger’s research on the transportation of Africans suggests that many of the ethnic
groups had common languages and traditions, thereby enabling them to continue their
customs and maintain a connection with their ethnic groups. Furthermore, on many
plantations in Brazil, at three in the afternoon, the work day ended and slaves had the rest
of the day to do as they pleased. Many slaves worked extra jobs in order to buy their
freedom. Some bought a lot of land which they would cultivate in hopes of residing there
once they were rewarded with their independence.

Brazilian slaves were free to marry other slaves of free Africans with a few minor
prerequisites. Both the man and woman were required to learn specific Catholic prayers

27 Pierre Verger, Bahia and the West African Trade 1594-1851 (Nigeria: Idaban University Press,
1964), 3.

28 J. Lowell Lewis, Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira (Chicago:
University Of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.
and be knowledgeable about confession and the sacraments. The couple married upon the approval from their master. Brazil did not require the prospective husband to pay dowry for his wife. Consequently, the Africans were unable to practice their *Efundula* tradition because they took on the Catholic traditions of their slave masters.

Many of the African traditions were lost or altered during slavery, consequently the *n'golo* became known as Capoeira and this competitive dance was transformed into a form of resistance. Stylistically, Capoeira did not change much in this period; however, it turned into a fight against slave owners and oppressors. It is theorized that the slaves on the plantation prepared themselves for a revolt through practicing Capoeira. An alternate hypothesis suggests that the slaves practiced the dance as a form of self entertainment or as a past time on the plantations. Still, others report that the *n'golo* dance continued in the quilombos or mocambos.

A *quilombo* is a maroon society or a fugitive slave-settlement and *mocambo* or *mu-kambo* which means hideout. In Angola, the *kilombo* is known as a male military camp or society. Even though *quilombo* is currently the most popular word for a fugitive slave settlement in Brazil, it did not appear in Brazilian-Portuguese vocabulary until the early seventeenth century. Unlike the United States, there were no northern states escape routes; therefore, the slaves sought freedom in the forests of Brazil, essentially creating their own African villages. The *quilombos* had "a real government of

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escaped Blacks on Brazilian soil."\(^{31}\)

It is also suspected that the quilombo was a military camp headed by the Imbangalas. This theory may have some credence because the Africans needed to protect their people and their land. They utilized their prowess and experience as warriors to defend themselves against their enemies. In some cases, the quilombos succeeded because of their trades with the Portuguese fugitive villages included firearms as well as swords and arrows. For the most part, the African runaways defended themselves with their bodies with the "use of strange leg, arms, trunk, and head blows with much agility and violence, capable of giving them incredible superiority."\(^{32}\) Capoeira’s movements remained the same during the period of enslavement.

**Word Origin**

The Slavery Period is the era in which the word Capoeira was first documented. The word came into existence nearly two hundred years after the beginning of the Transatlantic slave trade in Brazil. The first appearance of the word Capoeira was in 1712 in a dictionary titled *Vocabulário Português e Latin*.\(^{33}\) Through the study of etymology, several scholars have developed theories about the meaning of the word Capoeira.

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In Tupi Guarani, the root in the word “caa” means forest or woods, while “puera” means extinct. Furthermore, “caa-apuam-era” indicates “a place where the brush has been cut down” or similarly “caa-puera” implies “new growth of shrubbery on cleared land.” It is also believed that “copuera” in a Tupi Amerindian language means “old plantation.” The Portuguese word “capão” means cock or chicken, many enslaved African men in Brazil tended to play Capoeira in their spare time which resembled a cockfight.

Moreover, there appears to be a connection between Africa and Capoeira and its interpretation by the Amerindian population. The reason for the alleged Amerindian connection to the African ritual of Capoeira is unclear. Records of Brazilian aborigines are difficult to obtain because not much information on their race was ever documented. Both Africans and Amerindians were marginalized in Brazilian culture. They worked side by side, undoubtedly sharing tools, food, drink and living space, among other things. Then after some time, Amerindians were deemed peasants and were paid a small amount of money for their labor in contrast to the fate of the Africans who were forced into enslavement. However, the natives of Brazil lived harmoniously with the African fugitives in the quilombos. This gave them the opportunity to exchange customs, ideas, 


and possibly the conception of the word Capoeira. During the Slavery Period, the intent of Capoeira changed, where it was no longer utilized as a ritual mock combat dance, but was transformed into a weapon of resistance. Stylistically, Capoeira did not change.

**Underground Period**

The Underground Period represents the transformation of Capoeira from a ritual dance to one outlawed by the Portuguese. After the abolition of slavery, in 1888, many ex-slaves left the plantations in search of jobs in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Recife. This movement formed large, poor neighborhoods, containing Africans and individuals of slave descent. The authorities of Brazil constantly harassed the residents of these dwellings thereby making it difficult for them to live peacefully. Consequently, as early as 1820, players of Capoeira, of the ritual mock combat dance responded to the legal punishment by organizing their own exclusive groups known as *maltas*.

The *maltas* played an integral role in the history of Capoeira because they were the individuals who kept the art form alive at the end of and after slavery in the face of social turmoil. The *maltas* had the characteristics of a brotherhood or secret society and the leaders tended to be a free black or fugitive.\(^{37}\) Even though *maltas* were in constant dispute with one another regarding who had the best group, there was a collective agreement with regards to avenging a person’s honor. For example, if a slave master was intending to punish a Capoeira player, some of the *maltas* joined forces in order to have a strong group against the slave master.

In 1814, Major Miguel Nunes Vidigal, Chief of Police in Brazil, commanded the eradication of all African social and cultural expressions, meaning, Capoeira, *Candomblé*,

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and Samba. Hypocritically, Major Vidigal studied Capoeira and used it against other capoeiristas, along with extreme measures of corporal punishment. When he used Capoeira as his hand-to-hand assault, Vidigal added weapons such as straight razors and clubs. In retaliation, maltas also began to use weapons, such as a straight razors, in order to have better protection against the police officers of Brazil. Stylistically, Capoeira transforms into a violent art form with the inclusion of weapons, mostly the straight razor.

Even though some law enforcement authorities studied and practiced Capoeira, they perceived it as a threat to “public order.” During this time, the law’s concept of “public disorder” included “vagrancy, begging, curfew violation, disrespect to authority, verbal insult, unspecified disorderly conduct, and public drunkenness.”

Even though persons committing these offenses were the most sought after, the people who were committing serious crimes such as murder, assault and personal injury were not pursued with as much haste. The abhorrence towards Capoeira players may have been racially charged. The majority of the capoeiristas in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro were black and mestizos; however, there were numerous politicians and citizens from the elite social class in Rio de Janeiro. Documentation was unavailable as to the method of teaching Capoeira to the law enforcement officers.


Because the participants of Capoeira were receiving so much persecution, it became necessary for them to create a method of concealment. One of the methods utilized by the *capoeiristas* was the incorporation of the *berimbau* signal. In order to have a successful *roda*, the Capoeira players had someone act as the watchman for the police, while the others played on the streets. The person who was the designated lookout invariably positioned himself in earshot of the *roda* and had a *berimbau* in hand; he would play a specific rhythm if he saw policemen on horses going towards the *roda*. The rhythm is called *cavalaria*; the cadence mimics the sound of horses galloping thus, sounding like the horses the policemen were riding. The *capoeirastas* quickly dispersed or busied themselves with other things after being alerted by the lookout, so that the when the police passed by they would not be playing Capoeira.

Ultimately, Brazil decided to enact a definitive law to govern those who practiced Capoeira. In 1892, the first penal code of the Brazilian Republic outlawed Capoeira. More specifically, the law provided as follows:

> To practice, in the streets or public squares, agility or body skill exercises known by the name of *capoeiragem* would lead to two to six months in prison. To belong to a *malta* or Capoeira group was an aggravating circumstance. A double sentence would be inflicted [sic] 'to the chiefs or heads' [sic] of these groups. Those caught a second time could get up to three years. If the Capoeira player was a foreigner he would be deported after doing time.41

Even though Capoeira was subjected to relentless persecution by law enforcement authorities, legislators and judges of Brazil, it still managed to survive, especially in Bahia, perhaps due to the employed method of concealment. Perhaps it survived because

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Bahia was a major slave port of Brazil. Far more Africans and slave descendants lived in Bahia than in other parts of Brazil, which made it very difficult to completely erase the tradition of Capoeira. On the other hand, Brazil’s elite groups temporarily destroyed the art form in Rio de Janeiro and Recife. As the Underground period continued, *capoeiristas* struggled with constant persecutions and torture, but this managed to change as Capoeira approached the Academic Period.

**Capoeira’s Academic Period**

This segment of Capoeira’s history is known as the academic period because this is when Capoeira was officially taught as an organized discipline. The academic period focuses on the transition from practicing Capoeira in secret to its recognition as Brazil’s national sport. The Academic Period also explains the history of the two alternate forms of Capoeira: Regional and Angola, and how they differ from one another. Capoeira was introduced into the academic arena by a man named *Mestre* (master) Bimba also known as Manoel dos Reis Machado (1900-1974). Bimba was 12 years old when he became an apprentice of Capoeira. He learned from an Angolan man named *Mestre* Bentinho in Salvador, Bahia. Bimba created his first unofficial school in 1918, when he was 18 years old, teaching blacks and *mestizos* in the poor neighborhoods of Bahia. At the time, he taught that the original art form of Capoeira was brought over to Brazil by his African ancestors. As time passed he decided that Capoeira’s negative image needed to change. As a result, he modified the philosophy, structure, and social aspects of Capoeira so that the art form could be liberated from the underground.
In 1927, Mestre Bimba and his students presented his interpretation of Capoeira for Bahia’s Governor, Juracy Magalhães. The Governor was impressed and many politicians learned about Bimba’s demonstration and became interested. The president of Brazil, Getúlio Vargas abolished the illegalization of Capoeira, along with Samba and Candomblé; however, there were legal restrictions placed on the dance. The African traditions were not allowed to be practiced in public and the group was required to have consent from the police. Vargas’ restrictions were not strictly enforced. Perhaps he noticed the positive impact Capoeira was making in Brazil. It is evident that President Vargas was politically motivated when he made the decision to give blacks a margin of freedom. His political platform placed great emphasis on the importance of physical and sports education. In 1953, Vargas allegedly stated, “Capoeira is the only truly national sport.” However, it was not until 1972 that Capoeira was officially proclaimed a Brazilian national sport, under the jurisdiction of the Feracao Brasileiro de Pugilismo (Brazilian Boxing Ferderation).

Bimba did not receive his official permit to teach Capoeira until 1937, even though his academy opened in 1930. He taught a form of Capoeira known as Luta Regional Baiana (Bahia’s Local Fight). Today, it is known as Capoeira Regional which means “local” or “regional” and refers to the region of Brazil in which it is performed.

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43 Ibid.

Mestre Bimba’s modification of Capoeira created a division in the arena of this artistic expression. In 1941, some capoeiritas and associates of Mestre Bimba decided that the original traditions of Capoeira needed to be recognized and venerated. This created a split in Capoeira one is known as Capoeira Regional and other is titled Capoeira Angola. The traditional form of Capoeira is known as Capoeira Angola. Angola was added to the end of the word Capoeira to validate its African origin. A man by the name of Mestre Pastinha, also known as Vicente Ferreira Pastinha (1889 - 1981), kept the African customs alive.

Pastinha was born in Salvador, Bahia and was introduced to Capoeira at the age of 8. He learned about the philosophy and traditions of Capoeira from an African mestre named Benedito. After several years of experience, Pastinha began teaching Capoeira Angola in the rural parts of Bahia. Moreover, as time passed he opened an academy in a colonial building located in Pelourinho Square in Bahia. It became the first academy of Capoeira Angola. Even though Pastinha was considered the unofficial representative of Capoeira Angola, he did not allow politics to interfere with the teachings of Capoeira. He humbly stated, “Capoeira isn’t mine, it belongs to the Africans in Brazil.”

Mestre Pastinha also declared, “Capoeira is loving, not evil . . . it is a habit like any other, a gentle practice that we create inside ourselves.”

Although there appears to be no documentation of animosity between Bimba and Pastinha, their students wanted to determine which form of Capoeira was better than the

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46 Ibid.
other. This is a matter of opinion; however, there are many differences in both art expressions. In fact, the debate continues even today.

*Regional vs. Angola*

There is a definitive difference between the two types of Capoeira. Furthermore, *Mestre* Bimba transformed the philosophy, structure, and social aspects of Capoeira. Much of the philosophy in both forms of Capoeira is centered on the way one plays the game. The Angolan ideology is playful and based on *malicia*. *Malicia* refers to one's ability to outsmart an opponent in a cunning, yet playful manner. If one is said to “have *malicia*” it means the person is always perceptive to his opponent’s strengths and weaknesses. This characteristic is performed effortlessly with flair and proficiency.

The flair in Capoeira Angola is defined by the form of self-expression in one’s movements and gestures. Even though there are some guidelines that are taught in Capoeira Angola, the movements are meant to be free and open to one's individuality. This is not to proclaim that people enter the *roda* and do whatever they desire. The movements executed in the parameters of dance and “attack moves” are a combination of one’s personal interpretation of the movement.

Capoeira Regional’s philosophy is focused on a contest of body strength and combat. Bimba added basic moves from Eastern and Western martial arts such as Judo and Jiu Jitsu. As a result, the movements in Regional are ostentatious, aggressive, and characterized by high-speed gymnastic movements. This style of Capoeira also varies in tempo and elevation. Angola is slow in rhythm and the movements tend to be low to the ground. In other words, the hands are on the floor for the majority of the Angola game, while Regional’s game is fast, and the movements are from an upright position.
Mestre Bimba has added several attributes to change the structure of Capoeira. He created an initiation process in which students are baptized and given an apelido (nickname). This is known as a batizado (baptism). In the batizado, students receive their ranking belts, and older students receive diplomas. Everyone engages in a roda after the ranking ceremony ends. The belts are colored and illustrate each practitioner's level of proficiency by the color of the belt, similar to the belt rankings in Asian martial arts.

Mestre Bimba initially began the status system with colored scarves. He maintained this custom from the underground period of Capoeira. Some capoeiristas wore scarves around their necks to protect them from razor cuts which were sometimes inflicted by another capoeirista, or by an enemy. By contrast, students in Capoeira Angola are not ranked and do not receive belts. Even in the absence of a multi-level status system in Capoeira Angola, a student can only achieve the title of mestre after numerous years of practice and experience. Capoeira Angola has never had a batizado. Pashinha wanted the emphasis to be on freedom of expression and individuality. Capoeira Angola classes were informal and sometimes taught in the streets.

The social aspect of Capoeira changed drastically after Mestre Bimba's alterations. In the 1950s many of Bimba's students left Salvador to open academies throughout Brazil, mostly in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. He charged his students a large fee to be a part of the Regional academy. As a result, his classes attracted students from the middle and upper socioeconomic sectors of Brazilian society. The majority of people who trained in his academy were upwardly mobile, white or light in complexion, were university students and future professionals.47 Angoleiros (capoeiristas who play

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Capoeira Angola) were usually black and poor. They were unable to attend the classes because they were too expensive or they had no transportation to reach the academy. Both forms of Capoeira spread throughout Brazil, and in the 1970s, both forms began to be taught in Europe and the United States. However, the more popular of the two is Capoeira Regional.

*Capoeira Game*

In the game of Capoeira Angola, there is a combination of humor and fun, with seriousness and strength. Capoeira may sometimes be viewed as a dance, while others may see it as self-defense. The game goes on in the middle of a circle or ring which is called *roda*. The *roda* consists of audience members or *capoeiristas* and the *bateria*, which is the section of people playing instruments. The instruments played in the *bateria* are as follows: three *berimbau*, which are called *gunga, medio and viola*, as well as the *atambaque, pandeiro, agogo, and reco-reco*. The instruments are accompanied with music sung in Portuguese with some African dialect.

Furthermore, the traditional song cycle of Capoeira Angola is divided into three distinct parts: the *ladainha, chula*, and *corrido*. All of these songs are sung in Portuguese. The *ladainha* is a narrative solo, usually sung by the teacher or *mestre*. The songs are important because they are forms of oral history, detailing stories about slavery, infamous places in Bahia and Africa, and legends from Capoeira history. The *chula* is followed by the *ladainha* and it is a form of *call and response* that pays homage to those who merit such respect, such as God, leaders, and revered places. The final section of the song sequence is the *corrido*. Similar to the *chula*, *corridos* follow a *call and response* pattern as well. The responses to each call do not simply repeat what was said by the soloist. The
verses vary from song to song.

The game starts with two players who meet in front of the main berimbau, the gunga, which is usually played by the mestre or an experienced player. The players shake hands to show camaraderie. Once the players are in the roda, they dialogue through movements that originate from the basic move of ginga. Instead of taking a fixed stance, ginga is the movement that has a steady flow from which all the other moves derive from this dance-like pattern. There are attack moves, but these moves are usually designed to show the player how he could have gotten kicked or head butt. Some players use more physical force than others, but that is not necessarily the object of the game. The object of the game is to outsmart the opponent through malicia.

Capoeira Angola may receive less attention, in part, because of its African connection, as opposed to Capoeira Regional where the Brazilian aspect is readily embraced. Capoeira Angola is the subject of focus in this thesis. However, Capoeira Regional often neglects the Angolan origins. Incidentally, most of Capoeira’s academic edification concentrates on establishing its presence as it prevails today, which is from Regional Capoeira viewpoint because it is the most popular. There is controversy within the Capoeira community regarding which art form is superior to the other. The argument ranges from the differences in ideology, dance or movement, and music. Additionally, both opposing forms of Capoeira often disagree on the origins and authenticity. However, there is a minimal amount of information based exclusively on the African retentions.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS/ DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings, and provides the discussion of the findings related to African retentions in Capoeira Angola. The research allows for an emergence of a continuity of African culture that is embedded in the art form of Capoeira Angola. The implementation of this ethnographic study focused on the information gathered by the researcher as a participant observer in various settings, including Capoeira classes, events, demonstrations, festivals, workshops, and conferences. Information has been acquired in Atlanta, Georgia; Washington, D.C.; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. The period of research ranges from the years 2003 to 2007. There is no specific justification in the places that were chosen as research locations in the United States of America. However, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil was chosen as a reference point because of its African historical background. Salvador, Bahia was the largest slave port during the transatlantic slave trade. The researcher was an observational participant of Capoeira Angola on a study abroad to Salvador, Bahia, Brazil from July 2005 to August 2005. As an observational participant, obtaining cultural knowledge was crucial to this analysis. Cultural knowledge includes an understanding of symbols, songs, speech, actions, and facts.¹

The theory utilized in this research originates from Kariamu Welsh-Asante’s definition of African aesthetics and Molefi Kete-Asante’s Afrocentricity theory. Kariamu

¹ W. Lawrence Neuman, Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 5th ed. (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon, 2002), 366.
Afrocentricity theory. Kariamu Welsh-Asante affirms that when analyzing the African aesthetic, it is critical to examine an African’s relationship with time and space, community, rhythm, and symbolic spiritual powers. The findings in this research focused on these four themes. The research findings were also analyzed through Molefi Kete Asante’s theory of Afrocentricity based on the centralization of African culture as established in the dance Capoeira Angola. Within the parameters of the Afrocentricity theory, the selected themes analyzed the African aesthetics of call and response, and drama.

For instance, Welsh-Asante’s notion of time and space illustrates the value of the traditions and rituals within the dance of Capoeira Angola and African society, and the notion of community signifies a collective that is unified by a form of commonality. Additionally, Welsh-Asante created a theory titled, family aesthetics that is applicable in identifying the notion of community. Family aesthetics explicates the traits that are common in a group, while simultaneously sustaining one’s own individuality. Moreover, it describes one’s individuality or the ability to possess a unique form of self-expression within a community, while engaging in the communal traditions and rituals within the African society or Capoeira Angola culture.

Kariamu Welsh-Asante confirms that when analyzing the African aesthetic, it is important to examine the relationship that an African has with rhythm. Since Capoeira Angola originated in Angola, examination of rhythm is crucial to this art form because rhythm describes the tempo and beat in music and dance. Nevertheless, Welsh-Asante

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3 Ibid.
introduces an alternate method of viewing rhythm, affirming that it is not accurate to confine the definition of rhythm to the conventional meaning. "It is not a question of having rhythm or not having rhythm but how well does one negotiate rhythm in life and in the artistic expressions of life." Welsh-Asante’s response implicates rhythm is not only a set of organized patterns of sound, but it is also a lifestyle.

The lifestyle of a person is usually established by one’s beliefs; consequently, the themes of rhythm and myth or symbolic spiritual powers are parallel with one another because they represent one’s lifestyle. In the case of this particular research, myth has been eliminated from the symbolic spiritual powers aspect because myth describes something that is considered a legend or is considered under the pretense of falsehood, whereas the notion of symbolic spiritual powers explains a type of emblematic sacred force or energy. Symbolic spiritual powers may denote an association with faith or belief, and in particular, the images and symbols that represent the culture of Africa and Africanisms found in Capoeira Angola.

Findings

The researcher found that the Africanisms in Capoeira Angola are apparent and compelling. Firstly, the findings indicate that the cultural art form encompasses African characteristics of music and dance. In terms of music, the findings conclude that instruments and songs are vital elements that are connected to the African traditions of Capoeira Angola. Furthermore, the dance or specific body movements provide evidence that African continuity is established in Capoeira Angola. The use of African aesthetics, call and response, and drama are prevalent among other aesthetics such as rhythm and

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improvisation. These aesthetics were found in both the music and dance attributes which were of the ritual competitive dance of Capoeira Angola. Finally, the findings indicate that the notion of epic memory is unconsciously instituted in Capoeira Angola. Epic memory is a theory that suggests that individuals of African descent naturally possess the ability to stay connected to the African culture. There are alternate terms other than epic memory, such as race memory, culture memory, or ethnic memory.

Discussion

In the analysis of the music of Capoeira Angola, it is apparent that the instruments used for the art retain many elements of Africanisms on account of the African aesthetic call and response. Call and response is a “verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener.”5 The verbal aspect is obvious in the music of Capoeira Angola as opposed to the nonverbal facet, which is instituted in the dance movements. Nevertheless, in terms of the musical aspect of call and response, the “call” comes from the soloist and the “response” is given by the community, or the collective group of people involved in the art form. Improvisation also plays a critical role in the African retention of call and response.

For instance, in Capoeira Angola, the instrument known as the berimbau plays a critical role in the nonverbal form of communication through call and response. In the bateria, all three berimbaus (gunga, medio, and viola) respond to one another through the rhythm of the instruments. Bateria are a group of people who play the instruments in Capoeira Angola. Nevertheless, the gunga, which has a deep tone, may play the basic rhythm called Angola, and the person playing the medio will respond to the gunga by

playing the opposite rhythm which is known as Sao Bento Grande. The viola, which has the highest pitch, responds to the guna by making variations or improvising the rhythm of Angola. This is the same concept in the jembe or Mandinka three drum ensemble.\(^6\) The bateria also engage in a form of call and response that is critical to the rhythm of African culture. There are specific rhythms that are played, where the person playing the specific rhythm answers or responds with a specific rhythm that responds to the other drummer counterparts.

Moreover, the berimbau is the instrument that conducts the flow of the games. In other words, the berimbau plays a specific rhythm that “calls” the capoeiristas and they “respond” to this rhythm by ending or beginning their game. This rhythm is usually executed by the person playing the biggest berimbau which is known as the guna. The guna is typically played by one of the most experienced players, the teacher of the class, or mestre. This instrument maintains the rhythm of the game. Not only does the person playing the guna have the authority to begin and end the Capoeira games, he or she also controls the rhythm of the dance movements. In other words, if the person playing the berimbau plays at a fast tempo, the other instruments follow and the players in the roda speed up their dance movements in order to stay in time with music. This is a form of nonverbal communication because even though the messages are not given orally, they are conveyed through the music.

It appears that the role of the guna berimbau is similar to the orixa/orisha Exu in the Candomblé religion. Candomblé is a religion in Brazil which originated from a Yoruban religion based on the deities or orixas. The religion is a form of syncretism,

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emerged in Salvador, Bahia. Candomblé was transported to Brazil during the Atlantic slave trade by some African worshipers and followers of the Yoruba Orishas. Once the enslaved Africans arrived in Brazil, they were forced to assimilate to Catholicism. This religion is practiced in Brazil and "is essentially the religion of the Yoruba people, from what are now the nations of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin in Western Africa." Furthermore, this religion was practiced by African slaves in Brazil. The slave owners viewed this religion as a form of witchcraft and made it illegal to practice. Thus to avoid persecution, the slaves fused the Yoruba religion with Catholicism creating Candomblé.

For instance, often when slaves appeared to be praying to the Catholic Saint, Saint Barbara; however, they were really praying to their deity or orixa Iansã. Both entities represent courage in their respective belief systems for courage. Furthermore, Exu/ Eshu is a deity that represents a messenger, communicator and guardian. Exu conducts the life, or energy force called Axe. In other words, without this specific orixa, according to the beliefs of Candomblé, there would be no life force. Just as in Capoeira Angola with the absence of the berimbau, there would be no Capoeira Angola. The researcher had the opportunity to attend a Capoeira Angola workshop in Atlanta, Georgia where a Capoeira Angola teacher explained that berimbau holds a great deal of energy. The mestre may have meant that the berimbau holds energy because these are the only instruments that are allowed to play variations. He mentioned the importance of his Candomblé which is the religion that he practices. It is to be noted that most of the Capoeira players that practice Candomblé are African Brazilians who live in Brazil. The people who are a part of the culture of Candomblé are representative of various religion demonstrations all over

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7 Shelia S. Walker in Bahia, Africa of the Americas, VHS, produced by Geovanni Brewer, Michael Brewer, Brock Peters (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Extension Media Center, 1988)
the world. Nevertheless, in this case the mestre at the workshop may have indirectly given reference to his beliefs in Candomblé and the orixa, Exu by citing the berimbau’s energy force and as a communicator between the spiritual world and the world of the living.

Moreover, the concept of nonverbal communication by the means of *call and response* was also evident during the Underground period of Capoeira Angola. From approximately 1820 to 1927, the sound of the berimbau called, or alerted other capoeiristas that Brazilian authority figures were approaching. Because Capoeira was illegal, the capoeiristas responded by quickly ending their Capoeira game to prevent persecution from Brazilian policemen.

The berimbau is a major instrument in Capoeira and it is played in some African traditional ceremonies, such as the *Efundula*, which is an Angolan initiation ceremony. However, it is theorized that the berimbau was usually played alone during African ceremonies because the sound of the bow stringed instrument is light in comparison to the sound of the African drums. It is believed that the berimbau derived from an Angolan hunting bow. Even though the word berimbau is Portuguese, the origin is clearly African, which illustrates the retentions of African culture or Africanism that are found in the berimbau. The Kongo-Angolan musical bow has similar qualities to the berimbau. However, the Kongo-Angolan bow, or the rucumbo of Luanda, is shorter in stature in comparison to the berimbau. Musicologist and African linguist, Gerhard Kubick believes the instruments known as *mbulumbumba* and *hungu* of Ngumbi and

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Handa, of southwest Angola, are smaller versions of the berimbau. Currently, the berimbau is approximately four feet high. A mestre at a Capoeira Angola conference in Salvador, Bahia stated that the berimbau is the heart of Capoeira Angola and without it Capoeira Angola would lose its power.

However, with further research, the ethnographic analysis allowed the researcher to examine the elements of African ethos found in the dance and music aspects of Capoeira Angola at an African festival. As a participant observer, the researcher learned that this particular African festival only allowed African-centered performances and Capoeira Angola was one of those chosen art forms. Capoeira Angola was presented among African dance, storytelling, and singing. The individuals who were in charge of the event requested that only people of African descent be a part of the Capoeira Angola demonstration and provided no further explanation. Consequently, such distinction created controversy with the minority of non-African students in the group because they were not allowed to participate. Nevertheless, these individuals chose to stay and watch the demonstration. It is to be noted that the act of segregation is not representative of all African festivals or all events that involve Capoeira Angola. Nevertheless, after a welcoming introduction, the Capoeira Angola class entered the stage and was well received by the audience. The majority of the audience was African and the minority was African-American. The Capoeira players played their instruments and the eldest member of the group played the instrument known as the gunga which is the chief berimbau, and sang a ladainha. Ladainha is a litany, or narrative solo, and is the first part of the succession of the traditional songs. The song made reference to Africa and slaves of

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Brazil, even though the song is in Portuguese (just as all of the songs in Capoeira Angola). It was almost as if the crowd understood the language. The *ladainha* was followed by the *chula* and *corrido* which are the *call and response* portions of the Capoeira Angola songs, during which the teacher sings the solos and the *capoeiristas* sing the chorus. After the audience heard the Capoeira Angola students repeat the *call and response* a few times, they quickly became familiar with the words and joined in on their own volition. The African populated audience sang the songs with great adulation and many clapped to the rhythm.

Capoeira Angola’s *call and response* aesthetic element was evident throughout the entire demonstration through the African music. Only after a few times of hearing the *call and response* song succession, the African populated audience understood the method and promptly joined in. *Capoeiristas* are usually the only individuals who respond to their teacher’s call in the *chula* and the *corridos*. The participant observer has witnessed several other demonstrations in which it was imperative that the Capoeira Angola class provide necessary lessons on how to sing the songs, because the crowd was unable to understand the concept of the *call and response*. However, there was no need for any instructions with the people at the African festival.

There are many probable explanations that justify the themes of time and space, and community that resulted in the audience’s reaction to the music of Capoeira Angola. First, the majority of the audience consisted of people of African descent, which created a community that joined together to celebrate their traditions and rituals. Secondly, it is rare for any gathering of Africans to sit idle while musicians or dancers are illustrating their skill. Case in point, scholar Nicholls states:
Traditional dances tend to be participatory in nature; since the audiences and the performers usually belong to the same community everyone is involved. The dance arena is created by the spectators who reinforce the dancers by shouting encouragement, ululating, clapping, joining in on choruses, and vocalizing responses. The role of audience and performer is often interchangeable.\(^1\)

The researcher has been a participant observer in numerous Capoeira demonstrations and it appears that even when the *Angoleiros* dance and music were consistently performed well, the crowd’s reaction differed depending on the individuals watching the performance. For instance, three performances at a predominately white institution in Atlanta, Georgia were observed. The majority of the audience consisted of individuals of non-African descent. The audience members sat motionless, did not join the signing and there was no crowd interaction. Even after the Capoeira teacher explained the art form, the crowd appeared to be uncomfortable about the topic, or mildly disinterested. In contrast, the African populated crowd in Raleigh, North Carolina appeared to immediately understand the different elements of Capoeira Angola, needing little explanation from the Angoleiros that demonstrated the art form.

Another plausible reason for the active involvement and participation of audiences populated by people of African descent would be that the audience members appeared to be familiar with the dance and music because of African traditions witnessed in the past, or through epic or race memory. Epic memory suggests that individuals of African descent naturally possess the ability to stay connected to African culture. According to Kariamu Welsh-Asante, epic memory is “conscious and subconscious

calling upon the ancestors, god, mind, to permit the flow of energy so that the artist can create."

Furthermore, in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil in the summer of 2005, the researcher had the opportunity to observe a Capoeira Angola class and *roda* with other students from the United States. The students who observed the class were of African descent, and had never previously witnessed this artistic expression. However, in examining the way in which they interacted with the class and the *roda*, one would believe that the individuals were familiar with Capoeira Angola. They smiled, clapped and showed their interest with shouts of happiness.

Nonetheless, another possible reason behind the audience’s reaction to the music of Capoeira Angola, stems from the qualities of *call and response* within an African community and the significant role that the *berimbau* plays in Capoeira Angola and African society. The *call and response* came natural to the African audience because most songs in African culture include *call and response*. Lastly, some of the audience members may have been from Angola and recognized the Portuguese songs. However, it is inconclusive as to the number of people that were from Angola. Angolans would have been able to understand the songs because the official language of Angola is Portuguese.

Further, the Portuguese colonial authorities did not officially declare Angola as their province until the nineteenth century; however, the Portuguese settled in Angola as early as the sixteenth century. On November 11, 1975, the Portuguese government

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granted Angola independence.\textsuperscript{12} However, it is the researcher's understanding that most of the audience consisted of African Americans, Ghanaians, and Nigerians. The researcher is under the assumption that this was the first time that the audience members witnessed a Capoeira Angola game.

The songs of Capoeira Angola also embody African continuity through the pitch and tone that are reminiscent of Africans traditions, customs and African enslavement. In Salvador, Bahia, Brazil the researcher had the opportunity to observe a Capoeira Angola class and \textit{roda}. The African Brazilian \textit{mestre} sang a \textit{ladainha}. Unfortunately, the researcher was unfamiliar with the song. However, his vocal inflections were filled with emotion, and his voice was reminiscent of the teachers singing from the African festival in Raleigh, North Carolina. His tone, as well as the overall vocal tone in Capoeira Angola songs, are similar to the sound of African-American work songs and hollers because the songs are sung with power and force.

Spirituals have elements of Africanisms, or African retentions that may be similar to Capoeira Angola songs. Spirituals are songs that express religious faith and provide critical information that advocated the survival of enslaved African Americans. These songs were sung at worship services, ring shouts, baptisms, weddings, slave funerals, and in the field. The work songs encompassed a rhythmic characteristic that allowed the slaves to work in time to their music which allowed for better working conditions despite inhumane conditions. During the slavery period in Brazil, Capoeira was sometimes practiced in hiding. There are also accounts in which \textit{capoeiristas} were able to practice this art form in plain view of the slave masters because they never equated the dance as a

\textsuperscript{12} Inge Tvedten, \textit{Angola: Struggle for Peace and Reconstruction} (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 16.
tool later used for rebellion. Furthermore, spirituals were also a tool of rebellion because of the coded language.

Various songs that were coded were meant to help slaves escape which include songs such as “Steal Away to Jesus,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Oh Sinners, You’d Better get Ready.” There was a form of hidden communication through African-American music, just as dance and body movements were the form of hidden communication in Capoeira Angola. The words of the spirituals combined African syntactical characteristics with slave dialect. Some Capoeira Angola songs have different African languages combined with the Portuguese lyrics; however, there does not appear to be coded languages. The codes were similar to the African tradition of storytelling, in which Africans told stories, myths or fables that had information in the story. Slave masters believed that the slave’s words were nonsense which enabled the slaves to communicate and relay messages of escape to freedom and survival.

The lyrics of spirituals represent rhythm and symbolic spiritual powers. Even though many of the lyrics of the spirituals came from the bible, the slaves made no distinction in regards to “secular” and “non secular” music. Similarly, in African society there is no separation of religion and one’s everyday existence. These songs were also sung in the *call and response* method. However, there was usually no instrumental accompaniment in the spirituals, which is unlike Capoeira Angola. The music in traditional African culture will usually include some type of musical instrument. However, it was believed that the slaves in both the United States and Brazil used the drum as a form of communication which usually called for a rebellion. The slave owners

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quickly banned the drum and other forms of communication were forced to develop. However, the instruments in Capoeira, besides the drum, were never confiscated by the slave owners. Furthermore, in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates created a theory that examines the connection between black dialect and black literary tradition. This correlation is similar in illustrating the Africanisms that are found in the language used by black people, or Africans, in that which is found in black literature. The correlation in sound and dialect of Capoeira songs remains similar as in work songs.

Additionally, another example of the continuity of African elements in the music of Capoeira Angola is evident in the song *Aruanda, or A Luanda*. This song references the “spiritland,” or Luanda, the capital of Angola, essentially the song makes reference to Africa. Furthermore, the researcher was involved in a Capoeira Angola demonstration at a predominantly white institution in Atlanta, Georgia in which the class was mandated to end their demonstration after this particular song. The *Aruanda* song made the audience uncomfortable. This was interesting because the crowd seemed to enjoy the songs that the class sung before *Arunda*. Once the song began, the smiles of many observers faded and many people were unable to look at the demonstration, others pretended to be distracted by outside entities. The song evoked a great deal of emotion because some of the *capoeiristas* on the *bateria* began to cry. When the researcher asked some of the students why they cried, they all agreed that there was something about the song that seemed ancestral in nature. It is a form of *call and response*, where the name *Aruanda* is repeated in a slow tempo. The pitch did not change much from the previous songs; however, the *Aruanda* had a sound that is reminiscent of African-American spirituals or works songs.
Significantly, there may have been a form of epic or cultural memory that created the emotion that brought the capoeiristas who are descendants of Africa to tears. The concept of spirit may also come from epic memory. Epic memory occurs when “African people can draw upon a collective aesthetic bank that houses images, symbols and rhythms based upon history and subsequent mythology.” The concept of epic memory suggests the mental and emotional connection that may be associated with Capoeira and Africa. Furthermore, Samuel Floyd in The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History From Africa to the United States also makes reference to cultural memory. He asserts that “cultural memory” makes reference “to nonfactual and nonreferential motivations, actions, and beliefs that members of a culture seem, without direct knowledge or deliberate training, to ‘know’ that feel unequivocally ‘true’ and ‘right’ when encountered, experienced, and executed.” Additionally, epic memory is an element found in Capoeira Angola and its African retentions that is found in the aesthetic facets of call and response, and drama.

The dance of Capoeira Angola exemplifies African traditions through illustrative body movements that are implicit within the African community. Most of the moves in Capoeira Angola are executed from an inverted position which illustrates a form of African retention. The inverted dance movements represent the world of the dead or the

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16 Ibid.

kalunga\textsuperscript{18} which is found in the African cosmological paradigm known as Yowa (figure 8).

![Kongo Cosmogram](image)

Figure 8. Yowa: Kongo Cosmogram

The Kongo cosmogram known as Yowa represents the "continuity of human life" and embodies two worlds which symbolizes the world of the living and the world of the dead or African ancestors.\textsuperscript{19} The kalunga is the bottom portion of the cosmogram. When capoeiristas are playing Capoeira Angola they are not only continuing the traditions of the n'golo dance but the inverted movements are also symbolically creating a connection to the world of the African ancestors. When the players are in an upside down position, they are placing themselves in the world of the dead or ancestors. Both Capoeira Angola’s roda and the circle of the Kongo cosmogram represent the crossroads which

\textsuperscript{18} T. J. Desch-Obi, “Combat and the Crossing of the Kalunga,” in Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora, ed. L. M. Haywood (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2002), 364.

creates a space where there is an intersection between the ancestors and the living. While playing Capoeira Angola in the roda, the circle signifies one’s spiritual maturity, where the players have entered a spiritual point of enlightenment and understanding.

Welsh Asante’s symbolic spiritual powers fall under a realm not only related to religion, but also reflections of a lifestyle. The Kongo Cosmogram represents a point in which one reaches a higher stage in one’s life or in the game of Capoeira. In other words, when the Capoeira Angola dance requires one to be in the inverted position it allows the Angoleiro to become close to their ancestors and to reach a point of spiritual enlightenment. Furthermore, Candomblé’s orixa Exu or Elegba may be significant to the Yowa Cosmogram because the deity is known as the guardian of the crosswords and the translator between the spiritual realm of the other deities and the physical world of humanity.

In the themes of rhythm and symbolic spiritual powers, a Africanism is established in the Capoeira Angola lifestyle of malicia. Malicia is acted out daily within the black community, where people must also appear calm so their weaknesses are not exposed. According to Thompson, this is a form of survival which reflects an African value known as the “aesthetic of the cool.” Thompson investigates the notion of being cool and calm, through the Itutu traditions of the Yoruba culture. This idea of remaining calm may be applied inside, or outside of the roda.


Ultimately, much of the outcome of a Capoeira game is a result of one’s life, similar to what was stated earlier by Thompson, “Improve your character to improve your art” Capoeira is a way of life and should not be separated from the physical world or everyday life. According to Alan P. Merriam:

In Euroamerican society... there is a tendency to compartmentalize the arts and to divorce them from aspects of everyday life; thus we have ‘pure’ art as opposed to ‘applied’ art, as well as the ‘artist’ and ‘commercial artists’ or ‘craftsman,’ who are also differentiated both in role and in function.22

For example, Welsh-Asante’s notion of family aesthetics, community and individuality are critical to the dance movements in Capoeira Angola. A Capoeira Angola mestre from Salvador, Bahia, Brazil stressed the importance of individuality at a lecture held in Atlanta, Georgia. He detailed the importance of capoeiristas obtaining self-expression in the game of Capoeira Angola. He continued by emphasizing that even though Capoeira Angola is a community and a culture within itself, the people involved in this art form should maintain their individuality by adding one’s unique style to the established dance movements. This allows for creativity in one’s game.

After the lecture, the mestre demonstrated the importance of self-expression through the dance movements known as ginga. Ginga is a basic Capoeira dance movement, which is executed in a “swaying” motion. The term “ginga” also means “fancy footwork.” Instead of having a fixed stance, there is a constant movement in the game of Capoeira and all of the movements derive from ginga. The Capoeira Angola mestre demonstrated the alternate ways in utilizing ginga. As he added jumps to his


ginga, he moved his elbows sporadically. There were other instances, in which the researcher observed the creativity that other capoeirista established in their ginga. The researcher observed an Angoleiro in a class in Washington, D.C.. During a game, a woman executed her ginga by adding her own form of self-expression. Her ginga was confined to a small area, her limbs remained close to her body while she rocked slowly to the rhythm of the music.

Even though there are some guidelines that are taught in Capoeira Angola, the movements are meant to be expressed freely and its variations are open to one's individuality. However, this is not to proclaim that people enter the roda and do whatever they desire. The movements executed in the parameters of dance and “attack moves” are amalgamated with one’s personal interpretation of the movement. The drama of Capoeira Angola is associated with the creativity of one’s nature to be free mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Further, Welsh-Asante’s concept of family aesthetic is important because it introduces drama, another form of African aesthetic. In the aesthetic of drama, there are also theatrical mannerisms that are found in Capoeira Angola. In the African aesthetic of drama, the characteristic of malicia is an integral part of Capoeira Angola. Malicia is not only established in the chamada, it is also utilized throughout the entire game. In Capoeira Angola, malicia refers to one’s ability to outsmart the other opponent in a cunning, yet playful, manner. If one is said to “have malicia” it means the person is always perceptive to an opponent’s strengths and weaknesses and uses this awareness to as an advantage.
The following incident exemplifies the effectiveness of *malicia*. In a Washington D.C., Capoeira Angola’s class, an *Angoleiro* moved as if something was wrong with both of his knees while dancing the *ginga*. His legs wobbled while both of his knees moved to the rhythm of the music. Every now and then he pretended to be hurt, by touching his knees and grimacing. This action tended to distract his opponent because the opponent was too busy wondering if something was wrong with the other player’s knees. Thus the second player failed to pay attention to his own game. Then the man with the wobbly knees, suddenly executed a kick to the opponents’ chest. The second *capoeirista* was caught off guard. However, they both laughed at the lightness of the game.

The African aesthetic of *drama* coincides with *malicia* especially in terms of the theatrics involved in Capoeira Angola. Those individuals who embody the African aesthetic naturally personify elements of *malicia* because there is no separation in the everyday life and what goes on within the roda. Moreover, an African American or an African Brazilian man may deal with similar problems within their respective societies, such as racism and poverty. Both men must find ways to prevail against the many systems of injustice. In other words, they are forced to “outsmart” the system. This is not suggesting that these individuals turn to crime instead; they must turn to their wit and creativity to survive and accomplish their goals. It is imperative to be familiar with their opponents, just as they must know the system. Both men must be aware of the system’s strengths and weaknesses in order to outmaneuver the obstacles they encounter. This clever discernment of the system, which parallels the opponent in Capoeira, allows the men to move in and out of situations unscathed.
In the aesthetic of drama there are also theatrical mannerisms that are found in Capoeira Angola. The following illustrates such drama: before a game begins, the players are supposed to shake hands before they execute their movements. The researcher attended a Capoeira Angola conference in Washington, D.C. where, a mestre pretended to see something that was going on behind his opponent’s shoulder. He made several animated faces, he widened his eyes and laughed at the imaginary event. Finally, the beginner turned around to view what the mestre was looking at, only to see that there was absolutely nothing there. Before she could turn back around, the mestre playfully implemented a cabeçada (a head butt) and she fell to the ground. The animated facial expression was a form of malícia. In order to compliment his malícia, she should have equally responded by pretending to see something occurring behind his back or she could have pretended to look at her watch while yawning waiting for him to conclude his imaginary amusement. This is all apart of the theatrics of Capoeira Angola. It may be possible that because of the history in which Africans and African Americans improvise through storytelling, dance and art, they are also able to communicate with one another with physical gestures, eye contact and animations. This may be attributed to the aesthetics of improvisation and drama.

African aesthetics are often disregarded in Capoeira Angola because of its African roots. The similarities of aesthetic values found in Capoeira and daily life are credited to the extension of African preservation within the African community. An alternate way in exploring time and space in relationship to Capoeira Angola and African culture may be analyzed within the theory of displacement of Africans from their homeland. The constant relocation of enslaved people contributed to the demise of many of their
traditions because the physical “space” of African people was constantly changing. Since Capoeira originated in Africa, the concept of time and space gives credence to the epoch and location in Africa and Capoeira. Analyzing time and space within the notion of displacement allows for the recognition of African demographics within the retentions of Capoeira Angola’s dance and music.

Additionally, during the researcher’s study abroad experience in Bahia, Salvador, it was apparent that Capoeira was played all over the streets of Bahia. Interestingly, the artistic expression that was demonstrated on the streets of Bahia was Capoeira Regional. This is the alternate form of Capoeira that incorporated both Eastern and Western philosophies. Capoeira Regional was officially proclaimed a Brazilian national sport, under the jurisdiction of the Feracao Brasileiro de Pugilismo (Brazilian Boxing Ferderation), in 1972. Furthermore, Regional was also the art form that brought Capoeira out of its underground phase. If Mestre Bimba (the creator of Capoeira Regional) did not pursue its modifications to the art form it could still be illegal to practice, or it may have diminished completely with time.

There are many probable reasons that explain the theme of time and space in correlation to displacement in Capoeira Angola and African culture. One reason may be that because tourism is prevalent in Bahia, and the Bahianas are simply hoping to make money through the art form. Bahiana is a person from Bahia, Salvador, Brazil. Interestingly, Regionalistas are found mostly on the streets of Bahia playing Capoeira for money. Regionalistas are people who practice Capoeira Regional. This gives credence to the idea of time and space being parallel to displacement within the African Brazilian

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community in Bahia. Their playing in the streets may represent a form of displacement or exploitation of Capoeira in order to entertain the foreigners. In this case, the traditional African facets of Capoeira Angola become lost. In many cases the rodas on the street looked as if the Capoeira players were playing for the crowd as opposed to playing for the love of the dance and music.

An alternate viewpoint may stem from the notion of poverty. The space on the street was created in order to make money and survive as opposed to getting involved with criminal activity. It is important to state that the Capoeira Angola rodas that the researcher visited in Bahia were indoors as opposed to on the streets. In the three months that the researcher visited Bahia, she never saw Capoeira Angola being played in the streets. Moreover, the tourist did not partake in the call and response portions of the Capoeira songs. The African aesthetic of drama was evident in the street rodas of Capoeira Regional because their movements were acrobatic and full of energy because they were entertaining.

Furthermore, another form of displacement in terms of time and space occurs in the examination of the maltas. The maltas are groups of capoeiristas that formed to face the social issues in Brazil. The maltas portrayed the characteristics of an exclusive brotherhood or secret society and the leaders tended to be a free black or fugitive. Thomas H. Holloway believes that the maltas introduced a social space in the culture of Capoeira specifically meant for the African Brazilians, slaves and free slaves. They were empowered to create their own groups as a separate space in Brazil’s oppressed


society. Consequently, the social space or time and space have also been created within the Capoeira Angola *rodas*, that is, the African festivals.

Another instance in which the concept of identity and race occurs when a community is in search of space. For example, the researcher attended a workshop in Washington, D.C. taught by a master of Capoeira Angola from Brazil. Our days were filled with rigorous training, but once our physical challenge was over, our mental challenge began. After training, over thirty people engaged in a heated discussion about the issues of race in Capoeira. The discussion began with talk about a Capoeira conference meant solely for people of African decent. A black male understood that Capoeira is African in origin and should be celebrated in those regards. He stated, “Why can’t we have our time as African Americans to study Capoeira?” Some agreed with him and said that the conference would be opened to everyone only on the last day. Others disagreed with his belief and felt that Capoeira should be studied by everyone. One woman of Brazilian decent was insulted by this theory and became quite emotional. She believed that Capoeira is as much African as it is Brazilian. Others felt that this conference would have been a form of reverse discrimination within the Capoeira community. Both sides of the argument made some good points. Even though this thesis is not meant to continue the debate in race relations in Capoeira Angola, it is important to note that the African Americans in this class were in search of a sense of community by making a connection with the people of African descent.

Nevertheless, the debate on race in Capoeira Angola, illustrates the probability that a researcher may produce biased information on the history of Capoeira Angola. For example, a brief description of the competitive dance was presented by an African
American male to different schools in Atlanta, Georgia; however, the history of Capoeira as he presented it was different depending on the audience’s racial makeup. At a majority African-American high school in Atlanta, Georgia, the lecturer presented an in-depth history of slaves in Brazil, revolution and Africa. However, a few days later, the same teacher gave a presentation at a predominately white institution and the information about slavery in Brazil and resistance was never revealed and Africa was barely mentioned. When major sections that describe the African elements of the history of Capoeira Angola are eliminated, the genuine essence becomes lost.

Moreover, the researcher also found a similar situation in which the information about Africa was eliminated. In Atlanta, Georgia, an African Brazilian Capoeira Angola mestre came to present a workshop and lecture about Capoeira Angola. Classes from Washington, D.C., Raleigh, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia were present. The lecture portion of the presentation was conducted in Portuguese because this was the mestres’ native language and he did not understand any English. A European American from North Carolina translated for the mestre. The researcher quickly realized that much of the information that was being translated was not in its entirety, or the words that he claimed the mestre said were manipulated and false. Because the researcher understood Portuguese enough to follow the mestre, it was evident that the “so called” translator left out pertinent information. The mestre said the Portuguese word for slave several times during his lecture. Yet, the translator never mentioned it in his English rendition. The Capoeira Angola mestre also discussed the African-Brazilian rebellions and mentioned the quilombos of Brazil and mentioned African-Brazilian heroes. However, the translator never mentioned these names either. An Angolan woman spoke up and told him that he
was missing the majority of the translation and finally began to translate exactly what the words of the African Brazilian mestre. The second translation was completely different from the European-American’s translations. Perhaps the translator, along with other European-Americans who were fluent in Portuguese, choose not to provide accurate English conversion because they believed that the art form would be overly African in nature. They possibly felt that the information about African Brazilian heroes was irrelevant. Unfortunately, this was not the only occurrence in which the researcher witnessed a misrepresentation of the African history of Capoeira Angola.

Another incident occurred in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil in which some particular European-Americans had immersed themselves in the Capoeira Angola culture by learning the language and had traveled to Brazil to expand their knowledge in the competitive dance. After the dance movements were taught, the class sat down to listen to the African-Brazilian mestre, lecture on keeping n’golo dance traditions alive in the game of Capoeira Angola. However, even though these European American students understood Portuguese, they began to talk among themselves and ignored the mestres information about the African dance.

Consequently, there are many questions for future research that have developed from these types of incidents. They include: If people other than those of African descent participate in Capoeira Angola does their presence impact the African traditions of the art form? Will the culture be usurped by European American or Western society? Is there an implied enhanced form of authenticity once the ideology of Africanism is eliminated from the culture of Capoeira Angola? These questions are applicable for imminent research.
It appears that due to the displacement of Africans during slavery, the African retentions in Capoeira Angola may exist in other art forms of mock combat. Slave communities such as those in Martinique, Cuba, and the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia are known for mock combat dances that embody movements similar to Capoeira. In Martinique, there is a sport called *l'agya*. In Cuba the combat dance is called *mani* or *bambosa*. Both of these art forms employ acrobatics, are pseudo combative and are accompanied by music. There are also oral accounts of an art form characterized by “knocking and kicking” from the Sea Islands.

However, one must be mindful that the southern states and the places in the Caribbean transported many slaves from Africa. For the most part, Brazilian natives were not forced into slavery outside of the country; therefore, could not possibly pass along the mock combat dance. Thus, it cold be concluded that the qualities of such dance are parallel because of their common African ancestors. The movements in these alternate dances were comparatively similar to Capoeira.

Just as the movements in the mock combat dances are similar to Capoeira Angola, they are also found in the style of dance known as breakdancing. Breakdancing is an American dance style that is normally danced to funk, or hip hop music. Furthermore, breakdancing can possibly be viewed as a modern day Capoeira Angola because of its similarities. Although, it is still inconclusive as to whether or not breakdancing originated from Capoeira Angola, there are dance moves within each that are similar. However, it is difficult to identify the exact time in which the traditions of Capoeira traveled to the United States. Perhaps the art form never traveled to the United States by a person, instead Capoeira Angola may be a part of ancestral or epic memory.
If one were to examine the relationship between Capoeira Angola and breakdancing, one must take into account the critical historical background of Capoeira Angola. In brief, the transition of the mock combat dance began in present day southern Angola as a part of the rites of passage into adulthood and marriage. The dance is known as n’golo. However, once slavery began in Brazil, Angola became the central location in which Africans were imported in the transatlantic slave trade. Many Angolans continued to practice this competitive dance; however, over time the dance transformed into a combative dance. The n’golo dance became known as Capoeira and participation in such became punishable by law because capoeirista used the art form against the authority. In the year of 1937 the law against Capoeira was eradicated and the Capoeira academies opened in many parts of Brazil. However, it is difficult to locate data in which the first class opened in the United States, because classes were informal and records were non-existent.

It is believed that breakdancing was “born of American ghetto culture in the seventies.” However, it is also believed that the early breakers (break dancers) had not witnessed Capoeira. Yet, alternately, there are also accounts in which a Capoeira mestre from Brazil traveled to the United States and taught students Capoeira in a park in New York intermittently on Sundays. The classes brought the attention of bystanders. Many watched and contributed money to the class of Capoeira instruction. The individuals who created breakdancing may have been the students learning Capoeira or observers in the park of New York.

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Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny the influence that Capoeira has on breakdancing because of the obvious similarities. “Popular examples of African retention in our collective memory lie in... Capoeira.”\(^{28}\) The examples include movements that are parallel to each other. For instance, similar to Capoeira, in breakdancing there is a dance known as “top rocking” in the execution of which two opponents engage in a “war dance.”\(^{29}\) The dancers jerk their body to the rhythm of the music while simultaneously imitating the use of weapons against one another. Comparatively, in Capoeira Angola there is a movement known as queda de rins. The literal translation of queda de rins is to “fall on kidney.” Insinuating that the “capoeiristas” weight is balanced on his elbow, which in turn is placed near the kidney area. Both arms serve as support while the legs hand outstretched in the air\(^{30}\) or the knees are drawn close to the body. In breakdancing, the same move is called the “baby freeze”\(^{31}\) which is a “freeze.” A freeze is employed when a breaker immediately stops all body motion in the middle of a series of dance steps.

Just as one can find very similar movements within Capoeira Angola and breakdancing the African retentions of both are easily parallel as well. Both art forms are executed in a circle. The African cosmology tends to implement most ceremonies in a circular succession as opposed to a linear method. The notion of “war dance” is similar in


the ideologies of both Capoeira and breakdancing. Typically there are two people who engage in this dance, just like the n’golo dance.

The researcher accompanied an Atlanta, Georgia based Capoeira Angola class to a competitive breakdancing event. The Angoleiros were amazed to witness the similarities in the movements in Capoeira and breakdancing. For instance, it became apparent that the African aesthetic of drama was evident in breakdancing just as it is employed in Capoeira Angola. There was a competition between two groups of breakers. One individual from each team stepped forward and displayed his or her best moves. The groups also displayed the aesthetic of family because even though they were a part of group made common by breakdancing, they displayed their individuality by adding their own display of personality to the moves. Furthermore, call and response was evident in breakdancing. For instance, after a breaker “challenged” another breaker, the opponent responded by executing a better movement. This is similar to call and response in Capoeira Angola when one person executes a movement, the other person must respond with another movement.

Although highly evident, dance mediums are not the only cultural expressions that embody African retentions similar to those found of Capoeira Angola. The black church is another example in which African retentions are similar to the culture in Capoeira Angola. For instance, Africans and African Americans operate under the aesthetics of call and response, and drama within the church. A church that has a black congregation and embraces an African aesthetic embody the totality of dance and music. This is due to the nature of creativity which tends to be instinctive within the black community. Drama is associated with the creativity in one’s nature to be free socially, physically, and
spiritually. This creates a certain lifestyle where one’s faith plays a distinctive role in that person’s existence.

Furthermore, in the black church there is a phenomenon known as the ring shout, which is an example of an Africanism that is similarly established in Capoeira Angola. This is an African American tradition that includes music and dance that went on in places such as: the slave praise houses then later became African American churches, and in hidden areas in the forest, also known as brush arbor. The individuals who dance the ring shout clap to the tempo, and move counterclockwise in a circle, while slightly stomping their feet and clicking their heels, while simultaneously dragging, sliding, and shuffling their feet across the ground. Even though the dance of ring shout began as early as 1816, it is a valued retention that is still found in rural southern churches today.\(^\text{32}\)

In the ring shout the counterclockwise custom echoes Capoeira Angola’s dance movement known as \textit{volta ao mundo}. The time in which a \textit{volta ao mundo} is executed is usually when a person has been hit or when the game is said to be moving too fast. Then, both \textit{capoeiristas} walk around the \textit{roda} while dancing in a counterclockwise motion. Even though the movements of ring shout are not similar to the dance movements in Capoeira Angola, they both signify a form of unified celebration. The ring shout celebrates and worships. However, Capoeira Angola’s predecessor, \textit{n’golo} dance demonstrates the ceremonial rites of passage. Both symbolize celebration through dance.

Furthermore, the \textit{samba} circle has values of Africanisms, which are similar to the counterclockwise movements in the ring shout dance and \textit{volta ao mundo}. The \textit{samba} circle or \textit{samba de roda} is a collaboration of African influenced music and dance that is

done in Brazil. In the Ngangela language of Angola, *kusamba* means 'jump of joy, skip, gambol' to the Bangi of Congo-Brazzaville *somba* means to 'to dance the divination dance.'

The researcher witnessed a *samba de roda* in Salvador, Bahia. The circle consisted of approximately forty people that included people of all ages. The music consisted of drums, and *call and response* singing. One at a time, the dancers entered the roda and did the *samba* dance, moving around the inside of the roda in a counterclockwise motion. The dance is highly energetic and involves the feet moving only a few inches off of the ground, while simultaneously moving one's hips and moving the arms to the rhythm of the music. Once the dancers were done they chose other dancers from the roda to take their place.

On a separate occasion, the researcher witnessed other *samba de rodas* in Salvador, Bahia in which a man and woman danced together in the roda, as opposed to solo dancing. Additionally, the researcher observed a *Candomblé* ceremony in Salvador, Bahia in which the members also danced in a circle that also moved counterclockwise motion. These movements seemed to be similar to the ring shout, which involved the shuffling and dragging of their feet.

In the Kongo burial ceremony, mourners dance to the drum rhythm while dancing in a counterclockwise motion representing the transition into another world. The counterclockwise motion represents the succession of the sun, and represents the

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progression of spirit of rebirth among the Kongo. The dancing and singing are intended to give thanks and praises to the African ancestors and gods.\textsuperscript{35}

The researcher observed elements of spiritual symbolic powers as an observant participant in a Capoeira Angola event that took place at a Yoruba ceremony in Atlanta, Georgia. Not much information was given in regards to the type of ceremony that was being celebrated. The class was asked to arrive after the ceremony and present the history along with a demonstration of the art form before the ceremonial dinner. All of the attendees wore all white clothing and the demonstration took place outside in the backyard of one of the Yoruba member’s home. The Capoeira Angola demonstration began after the teacher gave a brief description of the artistic expression. The audience exhibited the same type of excitement that was relayed at the African festival in Raleigh, North Carolina. The call and response at the Yoruba ceremony was similar to the African festival, in that everyone joined in without any assistance from the Capoeira Angola students. Significantly, it is to be noted that the majority of the audience members at the Yoruba ceremony consisted of African Americans, approximately 40 individuals with only 4 people who were of non-African decent. The crowd interacted with the combat dance by clapping in unison to the rhythm of the music. The onlookers also joined in the call and response portion of the Capoeira Angola songs. The ladainha that was sung at this event did not have any reference to Africa.

The song was based on the religious aspects and places in Salvador Bahia. The ladainha that the teacher sang is as follows:

Igreja do Bonfim, Igreja do Bonfim  Church of Senhor do Bonfim
E Mercado Modelo  And the Mercado Modelo
Ladeira do Pelourinho  Ladeira do Pelourinho
e baixa do Sapateiros  And the suburb of Shoe-makers
Por falar em Rio Vermelho  To speak of Rio Vermelho
Eu me lembrei do terreiro  I remember the terreiro
Igreja do São Francisco  Church of Saint Francis
Igreja do São Francisco  Church of Saint Frances
E a praça da Sé  And the plaza of Sé
Onde ficam as baianas  Where the women from Bahia stay
Vendendo acarajé  Selling acarajé
Por falar em Itapuá  To speak of Itapuá
Lagoa de Abaeté  Lake of Abaeté
camarade  comrade

As a result, the researcher asked the Capoeira Angola teacher why he chose to sing that particular ladainha and his explanation was centered on spirituality. He felt that because the ceremony was based on the Yoruba religion, it was important to sing about some of the spiritual facets in Salvador, Bahia. Furthermore, the researcher inquired about the ladainha Catholic subject manner. He explained that the song was not meant to disregard any other religion nor was the song completely about Christianity. He then briefly explained the existence of syncretism in correlation to the African Brazilian religion known as Candomblé. He also explained how both Capoeira and Candomblé withstood persecution from the authorities of Brazil at one time in which both African-centered arts forms were illegal even after slavery. Needless to say, enslaved Africans created their own space to practice their religions free from persecution. The Yoruba ceremony was a creation in which time and space was created in order to practice the religion with celebration that they no longer had to hide from the authorities.
Moreover, Yoruba ceremonies and Candomblé religion retain a similar doctrine, which gives even more credence to the teacher's *ladainha* choice. Furthermore, the word *Candomblé* comes from a dance that was common among slaves on coffee farms or plantations. The tango dance developed from *Candomblé* and was transformed by European dance styles. However, this dance is an Afro-Uruguayan tradition. Scholarly text makes no reference to this dance and the connection to Brazil besides the fact that the slaves were dancing the *Candomblé*. But the slaves who were “dancing the *Candomblé*” could have been actually been practicing *Candomblé* religion having no reference to the Afro-Uruguayan dance.

The researcher witnessed a *Candomblé* ceremony in Salvador, Bahia. The ceremony was held in a *terrerio*, which is house where the members of the *Candomblé* worship. During, slavery in Brazil, the *terrerio* was held away from the plantations. This ritual celebrated the *orixa* *Nana Buruku*; she is the eldest *orixa* and the mother of all the *orixas*.

However, many other *orixas* were recognized before *Nana Buruku*. Among various dances and colors, the rhythm of the drum changed for each *orixa*. Interestingly there are only two variations in rhythms in the drum used in Capoeira Angola. Unlike *Candomblé*, the importance of the drum encompasses numerous drum variations for its *orixas*. It appears that the *berimbau*’ role in Capoeira Angola takes the place of the role of the drum during the worship ceremonies in *Candomblé*.


Along with religious examples of Capoeira Angola’s African retentions the Africaness of Capoeira Angola instruments play an integral part in the artistic expression. For example, the lyrics of the songs were improvised along with the sounds of the instruments. The researcher was a participant observer at a Capoeira workshop in Atlanta, Georgia, where a Capoeira Angola mestre from Salvador, Bahia taught a class on the berimbau. The atabaque kept a steady rhythm while the other instruments played in a polyrhythmic arrangement. Without losing the rhythm of the song, the berimbau began to improvise and communicate with one another with polyrhythm. The largest berimbau is the gunga and the smallest is the viola. The gunga has a deep tone while the viola has a higher pitch, so the musicians complemented each other by allowing one instrument to play a set of rhythms, while the other played another set in response. This was a form of call and response with the instruments, because the sounds were in concurrence with one another. This represents a nonverbal language that is found within the culture of Capoeira Angola.

The nonverbal qualities are found in the bateria. The bateria are the people who play the Capoeira Angola instruments. The bateria consists of the atabaque (drum), reco reco (bamboo with stick), agogo (bell), and the pandeiro (tambourine). These instruments must keep in time with the most important instruments of Capoeira Angola, the berimbau’s and the atabaque. The capoeistas playing in the roda must listen to the berimbau because they tell you when the game begins, ends, and correlates the speed of the game. That atabaque is vital in to the music of Capoeira Angola just as it is critical in the African culture.
The *berimbau* and the *atatabaque* both play important roles in Capoeira Angola; however, the role of the *berimbau* may prove to play a larger role in the culture of Capoeira as opposed to the drum. The drum in African society is integral in ceremonies, celebrations and traditions. However, the function of the drum is not as complex as the role of the *berimbau*.

The researcher has attended Capoeira conferences in Atlanta, Georgia, Washington, D.C., and Raleigh, North Carolina and Salvador, Bahia given by several different *mestres* and after the movements of the dance are shown it is usually followed by a *berimbau* workshop. The *berimbau* workshops sometimes include the following: the various rhythms, the etiquette of playing the *berimbau* during a game, and building the instrument and all of its many appendages. There is no emphasis on the drum. However, this is not to say that the drum does not have an important role in Capoeira Angola, it just may be that the *berimbau* is a more complex instrument to learn. The three *berimbaus* communicate with one another with the variant rhythms. For instance, the gunga may play a rhythm known as Angola, while the *medio* will play the opposite rhythm known as *Sao Bento Grande*. The researcher has observed at all of the classes and *rodas*, did not allow beginner students to play the drum nor the *berimbau*. These are instruments that require the most skill. If the person playing the drum makes a mistake it is very obvious due to its sound. However, there is a sense of communication with the drum and the *berimbau*. When a mestre wants the *bateria* to speed up, he or she will quicken its *berimbau* rhythm and look to the drum to make sure that the drum has sped up because this will help the other instruments to follow suit.
The Africanisms in the *bateria* are mostly found in the drum and the *berimbau*, however, it seems that there is a slight sense of role reversal that takes place between the two instruments. In African society, there are situations in which the ceremony has three drums that communicate with one another through sound and rhythm. Just as in Capoeira Ar.gua role with the *berimbau*. However, the phenomenon of “drum signaling” is made possible by phonemic tone present in many African languages. These are both forms of nonverbal communication. Without the drum, the Capoeira game the music would be incomplete and void of bass and rhythm.

There are elements of religion that are found in Capoeira Angola. They range from the instruments, lyrics, and the attire. The instruments in *Candomblé* are the same except the rhythms are very different. However, the instruments used the most include three drums, the *agogo*, *ague* or *xequere*. The ague is an oversized rattle, that encloses are Cowrie shells, rocks and dried seeds. The drum plays the major role in *Candomblé*.

There are a few Capoeira Angola songs that have the lyrics of the religion of *Candomblé* because of the mention of *orixas* such as Ogun. An example of a Capoeira Angola song that praises Ogun, the warrior deity, is as follows:

`s[olo]: e Ogunhe tata que malembe`

c[hours]: ologue$^{39}$

This particular song comes from a Candomblé chant.$^{40}$ However, the attire in Capoeira Angola varies from one Capoeira academy or class to the next. The general colors of


Capoeira Angola are black and gold. However, some classes may allow their students to wear white shirt and black pants, white shirts and blue pants. But the most consistent of all the Capoeira Angola classes in the United States and in Brazil must wear all white for the rodas that celebrate an occasion, but usually are worn on Sundays.

Also, there are also instances in which the religious attributes vary from one’s own personal beliefs that may not necessarily have anything to do with African beliefs. The researcher observed members in Capoeira Angola classes who wore chains with a cross around their necks and before they play the game, they proceeded to kiss the cross and made the sign of the cross. The researcher also witnessed players with colored Candomblé/ Yoruba beads around their neck which represent their spiritual guardian or orixa. They too made the sign of the cross before they play the game. This similarity in gesture in regards to one’s religious affiliation may have to do with syncretism of Catholicism and Candomblé. Some Capoeira players raise their arms in the air making reference to a higher being or god, especially when the chula is sung. The chula is followed by the ladainha and it is a form of call and response that pays homage to those that merit such respect, such as God, leaders, and revered places.

Another form of Africanism that is sometimes associated with Capoeira Angola is a dance known as Maculelê. The dancers hold medium sized sticks in hand and hit the sticks together and along with their neighbors’ sticks to add to the rhythm of the three drums that accompany the dance movements of Maculelê. The only instrument in this dance is the drum or atabaque. The dancers are also in a roda or circle. This dance also has a form of call and response as well. Maculelê has the tendency to be viewed as a mock combat dance using sticks. It is believed that Maculelê originated from the
sugarcane plantations where the slaves would gather and practice this mock combat for a rebellion.

Based on the participant observations analysis, Capoeira Angola does reflect African esthetics. This occurred through the elements of music and dance. Regarding the music, the instruments such as the *berimbau* proved its form of communication of *call and response* through the sounds of the instrument, similar to the jembe drum. The retentions are also evident in the *berimbau* relationship with the jembe drums and the orisa Exu. Additionally, the dance provides evidence that African continuity is instituted in Capoeira Angola by the means of nonverbal communication. Storytelling and African folklore is an example of the retentions that are located in both African culture and Capoeira Angola. The modern dance of breakdancing mimics the movements of Capoeira Angola. The ideology behind the counterclockwise circle in both forms including other African entities such as Candomblé, and ring shout also illustrate the connection between Capoeira Angola’s roda and other African cultures. The theory of epic memory is a major theme that emerges in the impact of the elements of *call and response* and *drama*. Epic memory may possibly be the very reason behind Capoeira Angola’s retentive existence and also proves the critical African aesthetics in Capoeira Angola.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the African aesthetics that impact the African retentions of Capoeira Angola. It is crucial to explore this African Brazilian art form as a part of African culture due to its similarities in African tradition and dance that are parallel to Capoeira Angola. Since this competitive dance was brought to Brazil by enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade, it is inconceivable to examine Capoeira Angola as an entity separate from its African origins.

Additionally, Capoeira Angola originated from the n'golo dance which was created by the Bangala people of southern Angola. Stylistically, the n'golo and Capoeira Angola movements are identical to a zebra’s movements. Certain researchers tend to give credit to the Brazilians for the creation of the dance; however, it appears difficult to refute data that validates its African lineage. This research utilized primarily an ethnographic approach, including participant observation on the subject of Capoeira Angola and African aesthetics and retentions. Moreover, the research findings are that the African retentions are present and valid in Capoeira Angola.

The literature that expresses the connection between Capoeira Angola and Africa is sparse and, therefore, underscores the importance of this study. While the study adds to the limited available literature it demonstrates the importance of African retentions that are in the expressive art form. Academicians have studied Capoeira from Western, Eurocentric, and Brazilian viewpoints. This study of Capoeira is significant because it
examines the disregarded, yet critical characteristics, of Capoeira Angola from an African perspective. This research also adds to the history of Capoeira because it functions as a context that describes African people, history, and culture. Thus, several themes related to understanding the relationship between Capoeira Angola and the retentions of Africans traditions emerged. These included African aesthetics of *call and response*, *drama*, time and space, community, rhythm, and symbolic spiritual powers.

The African aesthetic values of *call and response*, and *drama* were investigated as a part of the history and aesthetics of Capoeira Angola. *Call and response* was chosen as a reference point in the study because it is an element that is largely utilized in African culture and within the black community. For instance, the aesthetic value of *call and response* can be verbal and non-verbal usage seen in the music and dance. The verbal aspect is studied through Capoeira Angola songs and music, while the non-verbal facet is examined by the means of body movement or dance.

The African retentions in Capoeira Angola are established in African characteristics of music and dance. The research findings indicate that the music of Capoeira Angola, which includes the instruments and songs that are critical elements to the dance are related to the African traditions. The instruments, particularly the *berimbau*, play an important role in the *call and response*. The three *berimbau* communicate non-verbally through the various improvisational rhythms. The communication that occurs through the *berimbau* are meant to keep the rhythm and pace of the Capoeira Angola game. In terms of African culture, the nonverbal instrumental communication occurs in a similar manner through the *jembe* drums, which is also a three drum ensemble. The *jembe* drums also engage in a form of *call and response* that provide the critical rhythm in
traditional African ceremonies. There are also specific rhythms which include moments of improvisation in which the drum player responds to the other drummer with a specific rhythm.

The *berimbau* also play an important role in the African aesthetic of *call and response* through body movements. The researcher observed that *berimbau* tempo decipher one’s body movements in the game of Capoeira Angola. Consequently, the Capoeira Angola players execute their dance movements in a slow motion if the *berimbau* plays slowly. Furthermore, the most experienced person playing the largest *berimbau* which is known as the *gunga berimbau*, plays a specific rhythm that “calls” the Capoeira Angola players and they “respond” to this rhythm by ending or beginning their game.

In terms of African culture, the role of the *gunga berimbau* is similar to the deity or *orixa Exu* in the Candomblé or Yoruba religion. *Exu* is a deity that represents a messenger and communicator. The *gunga* is the messenger between the other Capoeira Angola instruments and those individuals dancing in the Capoeira Angola roda. *Exu* also symbolizes the life or energy force called *Axe*. According to the beliefs of Candomblé, without *Axe* there would be no life force. Similarly, Capoeira Angola is void of the *berimbau*, there would be no Capoeira Angola. This is also a form of nonverbal communication because even though the messages are not given orally they are expressed through the instruments.

The dance or specific body movements provide evidence that African continuity is established in Capoeira Angola. The dance movements encompass elements of *drama* which are parallel to the African aesthetic of *call and response* because it utilizes verbal
and nonverbal communication within the culture of Africa and Capoeira Angola. For example, Capoeira Angola’s dance movements and expressive body gestures such as exaggerated hand movements and facial expressions signify interpreted into a specific message that is usually only understood by those individuals that are involved in the expressive African art from.

African symbolic spiritual powers are found in the inverted dance movements of Capoeira Angola. The inverted dance movements represent the world of the dead or the kalunga which are found in the African cosmological paradigm known as Yowa which represents the “continuity of human life”1 and embodies two worlds which represents the world of the living and the world of the dead or African ancestors. When the Capoeira players are dancing they are not only continuing the traditions of the n’golo dance in which the inverted movements are symbolically creating a connection to the world of the African ancestors. When the players are in an upside down position they are placing themselves in the world of the ancestors. In the themes of rhythm and symbolic spiritual powers, the concept of Africanisms are established in the Capoeira Angola lifestyle in malicia, which also is executed through daily life within the black community. One must appear calm, hence, to be calm and collective prevents one’s weakness from exposure. Capoeira is a way life and should not be separated from the physical world or everyday life.

Furthermore, Welsh-Asante theory of family aesthetics, examines the traits that are common in a group, while the individual simultaneously sustains one’s own individuality. The results of the research are that the dance movements in Capoeira

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Angola stresses self expression. An African Brazilian mestre believed that the people involved in Capoeira Angola should maintain the individuality by adding one’s unique style to the established dance movements, such as ginga.

The family aesthetic has proven to be important within the African retentions because it introduces the African aesthetic of drama. Drama is associated with the creativity of one’s nature to be free mentally, physically, and spiritually. Malicia is an example of drama, because it demonstrates no separation from the everyday life and what goes on within the roda of Capoeira Angola. In the aesthetic of drama there are also theatrical mannerisms that are found in Capoeira Angola and African culture. Africans and African Americans improvise through music, storytelling, dance and art, in which they are also able to communicate nonverbally with one another through the use of physical gestures and expressions.

Lastly, the findings denote that the notion of epic memory is unconsciously reflected in the culture of Capoeira Angola. Epic memory is a theory that suggests that individuals of African descent naturally posses the ability to stay connected to the African culture. The term epic memory is equivalent to race, culture or ethnic memory as well. For example, the popular dance known as breakdancing has retentions of Africa and the black community and it may have elements of epic memory. Breakdancing movements are similar to those of Capoeira Angola and are usually executed in a circle, as seen in the n’golo dance, just as Capoeira Angola. These traditions are African and do not follow the linear formation utilized by the western counterpart. Even though many break dancers claim to never have witnessed the dance movements of Capoeira which
came for the *n'golo* dance, there may be occurrences of epic memory involved with the dance movements in breakdancing.

The researcher was involved in three performances at predominately white institutions in Atlanta, Georgia; where the audience members sat motionless and silent. They were given lessons on how to sing the songs; however, the audience was unable to grasp the concept of *call and response*. Nevertheless, there was not a need for any instructions with the people at the African festival in Raleigh, North Carolina where the audience members were either African or African American. The audience had never witnessed Capoeira Angola; however, they appeared to understand the concept of *call and response* and sang along with the Capoeira Angola players. They also showed their enthusiasm by shouts of joy when viewing the African Brazilian competitive dance.

Furthermore, the audience may have been familiar with the dance and music because of African traditions witnessed in the past or through epic or race memory. The concept of epic memory suggests the mental and emotional connection that may be associated with Capoeira and Africa.

The black church is another example in which African retentions are similar to the culture in Capoeira Angola. For instance, Africans and African Americans engage in the aesthetics of *call and response*, and *drama* within the church through dance, preaching and music. The *drama* is associated with the creativity of one’s nature to be free socially, physically, and spiritually. For instance, ring shout, which is also an example of Africanisms that are seen in dance elements of Capoeira Angola through the counterclockwise motion. The ring shout celebrates and worships. However, Capoeira Angola’s predecessor, *n'golo* dance demonstrates the ceremonial rites of passage. Both
symbolize celebration through dance. The samba circle has values of Africanisms, which are similar to counterclockwise movements in the ring shout dance and *volta ao mundo* which is a movement in Capoeira Angola. Additionally, the Kongo burial ceremony, mourners danced in a counterclockwise motion representing the transition into another world.

Spirituals have elements of Africanisms or retentions that may be similar to Capoeira Angola songs. Spirituals are songs that express religious faith and provide critical information that advocates survival of enslaved African Americans. Spirituals were a tool of rebellion due to the coded language. The codes were similar to the African tradition of storytelling, in which African told stories, myths or fables that had information in the story.

The research findings reflect Welsh-Asante’s theory of African aesthetics that are elements of symbolic spiritual powers or spirituality that are found in Capoeira Angola. The component of spirituality is found in the instruments, lyrics, and the attire. The instruments in Candomblé are the same except the rhythms are very different. There are a few Capoeira Angola songs that have the lyrics of the religion of Candomblé because of the mention of *orixas* such as Ogun. However, the gestures remain constant regardless of one’s personal beliefs in the game of Capoeira Angola. Hence, Capoeira Angola demonstrates through its music dance, themes of calla and response, *drama*, time and space, and community that there is a continuum of African retentions.

Furthermore, the field research exemplified issues of race and identity within Capoeira Angola. For example, the people of African descent wanted to have a Capoeira Angola conference that was exclusively for African Americans or people of African
descent. These are individuals that were in search for community and space that would allow for immersion in the culture of Capoeira Angola.

Lastly, there may be other races that are in search of community or culture within the ethos of Capoeira Angola. The research has found that some individuals of non-African descent or those that refute the African origination of Capoeira Angola may be the reason that the African traditions of the art form are disregarded. For instance, the researcher witnessed on several occasions the intentional mistranslation of Portuguese dialect that involved information about the African culture of Capoeira Angola. There are many questions for future research that have developed from these types of incidents. Questions such as: If people other than those of African descent play Capoeira Angola does it impact the African traditions? Will the culture be usurped by European American or Western society? Is there an enhanced form of authenticity once the ideology of Africanism is eliminated from the culture of Capoeira Angola?

In conclusion, this research fulfills a need for information about the Africanisms that are found in Capoeira Angola. Capoeira Angola is often acknowledged solely as a form of self-defense; however, fighting is not the only aspect of the African artistic expression. This study explored the often ignored characteristics of Capoeira Angola from an African perspective. This research has added to the body of knowledge of the African continuity of Capoeira Angola.
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