

**THE HERITAGE OF
MESTRE BIMBA**

**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND LOGIC
OF CAPOEIRA**

BY A. A. DECÂNIO FILHO

TRANSLATED BY SHAYNA MCHUGH

SÃO SALOMÃO COLLECTION

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Shayna McHugh

Although I believe that all capoeiristas should eventually learn Portuguese and read these texts in their original language, I also believe it important for the words and wisdom of the great Mestres to be accessible to everyone. My goal in translating this work into English is to enable those capoeiristas who are not yet proficient in Portuguese to benefit from the words of Mestre Decênio about the history, philosophy, and practice of the original capoeira regional. The Portuguese version of this book is available for free on Mestre Decênio's website, <http://planeta.terra.com.br/esporte/capoeiradabahia/>

The book was originally written similarly to a poem, with a phrase on each line; however, when I began to translate, I found this format to be far too fragmented when in English. Thus, I have changed it into prose for the sake of easier reading.

All the numbered footnotes (1, 2, 3, etc.) are original footnotes in Mestre Decênio's text; all the asterisk footnotes (*) are my own additions.

There are probably some errors in here; I didn't proofread or revise too carefully. Comments or corrections on the translation are welcome; please e-mail me at guerreira17@yahoo.com

Enjoy!

Muito axé, camaradas!

Shayna McHugh

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São Salomão Collection

1. **A herança de Mestre Bimba (The Heritage of Mestre Bimba): R\$20,00**
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Additional information

We accept orders in return for advance payment of the value of the purchase plus the shipping charge in deposit into the Banco Itaú, Salvador/BA, neighborhood of Mercês, benefiting Angelo A. Decânio Filho (Bank 341, agency 0226, c/c 21772-7

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TWO WORDS ABOUT A SINGULAR BOOK

JORGE AMADO

Suddenly, all at once, the theme of capoeira surrounds me and wraps me up. It is more than the theme; it is capoeira in its complete reality – the history, the causes and consequences, the unforgettable mestres, the classics of capoeira angola, the dissidents of capoeira regional, the ethics, the dignity, the fervor, the commentaries, the questions and answers – all a series of research projects about the martial art born in the *senzalas** of the African slaves, having grown, during the passage of time, into an incomparable ballet that is internationally known today.

Suddenly I see myself in the middle of a capoeira roda, no longer a game of literary study or cinematographic documentation. It is capoeira being performed at the bottom of the Mercado Modelo** that I watch, and I marvel yet again at the unique spectacle. Who can escape its charm? At my side are Monique and Jack Lang, famous French people visiting Bahia. Jack Lang, a master of culture and intimate of the most erudite art and literature, knows and loves popular culture as few do. Not just the French and European popular culture, but also the Brazilian, which he learned to esteem and value during his various trips to Brazil.

A journalist who accompanied Lang in the streets of Bahia asks me to participate in a documentary about Mestre Bimba. Valdeloio Rego tells me that the Editora Maltese of São Paulo is going to publish a new edition of his classic and defining book Capoeira Angola. Toninho Muricy, a filmmaker, comes to record a statement of mine regarding Pastinha for a film about the

* Slave quarters

** A famous market in Salvador

unforgettable figure of the Mestre of the Pelourinho.* And now, with my foot in the plane that will take me to Bahia, I finish reading The Heritage of Mestre Bimba – The African Philosophy and Logic of Capoeira by Decânio.

The one who first told me about Doctor Decânio and his book (still in preparation at the time) was Víctor Gradin, a Bahian with deep ties to the culture of our land, to literature and art – he is the husband of Grace, the admirable potter who last year dazzled the Spaniards with her Yemanjás** and other mysteries of our mixed-blood culture. Three days ago, Caribé entered the room, gave me the proofs of Decânio’s book and told me: “Read it and write two words of preface.” Caribé does not ask, he orders. I took the book, read it, liked it, and I am writing the two words that the author will use as preface if he likes it. To begin, how should I classify the book: Essay? Biography? Historical analysis? Discussion of ideas? Exposition of theories? Study of a rare personality?

All this and much more, because this is a singular book: it does not fit in one category, it defies labels. From what Caribé tells me, it must be like the author, a unique doctor. How can I classify the book that I have just finished reading? It is impossible to summarize such a rich and varied book in one word. The diverse parts that make up the book (from “confession” to “catechism of capoeira,” passing through chapters about “ginga and genealogy of capoeira movements,” the “parables of the Mestre,” perhaps the most beautiful part of the book, about “facts and lessons from life,” the very curious chapter of “reflections,” the “technical supplement” and the “physical fitness through capoeira”) find their unity in the extremely poetic treatment that the author gives

* The historical center of Salvador where Mestre Pastinha had his academy

** Yemanjá is a female orixá (deity in the Afro-Brazilian religion of candomblé), the goddess of the sea

to his writing – even the book itself is composed graphically as if it were a long poem.*

On the concept and definition of capoeira, Decânio writes, “capoeira in its origin is just one... each mestre creates his own style...” This truth is so evident that in this book about Bimba, the mestre of capoeira regional, Decânio praises Pastinha, the Mestre of Capoeira Angola. This is a book written by a doctor of life, but lived and conceived by a young student. It is a singular book, and from now on it is essential to the study of capoeira.

* I have changed this in order to make the English version easier to read; see Translator’s note.

PRESENTATION

ESDRAS MAGALHÃES DOS SANTOS, “*DAMIÃO*”

I saw Decânio for the first time in 1943, with Brazil in full state of war with the powers of the Axis. I studied in the Colégio 2 de Julho (the old Ginásio Americano) in Salvador, Bahia, where he gave physics classes to the first-year students. Until then nothing was more natural, except for the presence of that uniformed youth, an aspiring army officer in the Reserve Officer Training Center, handling the chalk on the blackboard with ease and explaining – with the utmost elegance – the material to his students.

During the break hour, we asked our colleagues, “Who is this guy?” The responses were unanimous: “He’s a genius,” “He studies medicine.” “Studies medicine and teaches physics?” we refuted with a certain mocking disbelief. The fact, however, was spread through the school, and there were always various avid students peering into the windows of a certain classroom in order to see that young medical student, with the greatest tranquility, hold the attention of the whole class with his explanations. Mr. Baker, the college director, always cited him as an example to be followed.

But time passed... I left school to go and fight life’s battles. In 1946, I enrolled in Mestre Bimba’s capoeira academy, and one day I overheard a conversation between two more advanced graduated students: “Decânio is fire in clothing,” “You have to be careful when fighting with him,” “His martelo, his jumping benção, and his rasteira are practically indefensible.” And I, curious: “Who is this guy? Why doesn’t he appear?” The response was clear: “He comes two days per week, those two days that you don’t have class.”

I satisfied my curiosity by coming to visit the academy on the days of his presence. I remember that upon arriving I saw a soft-spoken guy of medium stature and average build seated on a bench speaking animatedly with Mestre Bimba. I greeted the Mestre and he introduced me as a new student. Upon gazing at the guy, I had no doubt, it was the young professor. I questioned him: “Did you give classes in the Colégio 2 de Julho?” The response was affirmative and he asked: “Were you my student?” I replied, “No, it was my brother, who looks like me.”

Not being my day for class, I sat in the corner watching the new students training the sequences without the accompaniment of the berimbau. I soon came to discreetly observe the affectionate, even paternal manner with which Mestre Bimba treated Decânio. Later I came to perceive that, in the course of this relationship, Decânio had the privilege of being the only holder of the secrets and the tricks of the mestre and of capoeira.

This supposition was based in the way that Decânio fought and in the existence of a routine cooperation since 1938, in which the student gave his mestre filial attention, medical care, help with issues related to the Academy’s administration, study of new blows and counterattacks, and the establishment of norms and rules for the perfection of the teaching of the art.

I believe that only Cisnando (who has passed away), an old student of Mestre Bimba during the period of Regional’s creation, who Mestre Bimba often talks about and praises, must have enjoyed such consideration and appreciation from the Mestre.

Decânio practiced a capoeira regional in which no one could identify a defect. He was very agile and endowed with a polished technique, which allowed him to apply attacks and counterattacks within the swaying of the ginga, as well as tremendously crafty dodges, with rare efficiency. He rarely fought while teaching beginners. When he did, it was with the care and attention of a professor. His strength, however, was in the “hour of *esquenta*

banho”^{*} upon fighting with the graduated students, under the consent and attentive eye of the mestre, in what we called the “hot roda.”

The reason this training existed was so that we would learn to fight for “the fight itself.” It was tough self-defense, training under the stimulus of one of the “pearls” included in the academy’s regulations by Decânio himself:

“It is better to get caught in the roda than in the street.”

Upon reading the book that is now being edited, I rejoiced to see a true anthology about Mestre Bimba and his capoeira Regional. In addition, the author demonstrates with ingenuity and art in the pages of his book that **the past is not what happened**, as some generally think, but instead **what remains of what happened...**

Decânio, whose résumé at the end of these books reflects the excellence of his professional graduation as a student of Hippocrates, put all his scientific and philosophical knowledge, as well as his knowledge of popular culture, in service of one of the most authentic manifestations of Brazilian nationality – capoeira. He presents us with a work that, in the words of Jorge Amado, is “a singular book, and from now on essential to the study of capoeira.”

Like the melodious song of the *uirapuru* bird, the prose of this genius of our literature demands silence.

About this art, I have nothing more to say...

* Esquentar-banho literally means “warm-up for the shower” – since there was only one cold shower in the academy, the students practiced a rough capoeira in order to keep their bodies warm while waiting their turns for the shower

ETERNAL COMPANION!

BEL...

I always loved you...
In all past eternity!

I waited for you my whole life!

Thank God I found you...
In this incarnation!

In time to receive...
Your life...
Your love...
And...
My new life!

Nothing will separate us again!
In all future eternity!

My Soul-Sister!

DEDICATED



**TO THE ETERNAL PRESENCE
OF HE WHO LEFT...
BUT REMAINS ALIVE IN ALL WHO
HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF KNOWING HIM!***

* The picture was missing from the original. I assumed it was Mestre Bimba, so I selected a picture of him to put in.

REVERENCE

IN MEMORY OF CISNANDO LIMA

Who called himself an atheist by principle and logic, who made
of Medicine a Priesthood, and of life a Path that led him to
Christ!

IN GRATITUDE TO PASCOAL SEGRETO SOBRINHO

To whom we owe the recognition of capoeira
as Sport and the beginning of its Regulation!

IN HOMAGE TO FAUZI ABDALA JOÃO

The link that united Capoeira to the Brazilian Fighting
Confederation, thus turning the dreams of the Bahian Capoeira
Federation and the Brazilian Capoeira Confederation into reality!

THANKS

To all who **directly**, by sporting practice, in the physical training of the academy; **indirectly** in demonstrations that I had the joy of watching; **by personal teaching** in conversations on the academy benches and during chats around the happy tables – **to all who enabled the accumulation of knowledge that we try to preserve here!**

WITHOUT EVER FORGETTING

“MANCHA,” Moacir Chaves Neto, for the figure of the Mestre that enriches the cover

“JAIRZINHO,” Jair Carlos V. Braga Filho, for the hours that he robbed from his loved ones in order to guide me in the world of the *“sofis”*

And finally, returning to the beginning of everything...

GUEL, MIGUEL ALMEIDA GRADIN, for the affection and human warmth that fueled the engine from the beginning to the end!

CONFESSIO

That which is written here lives with me in my soul, body, blood, instinct, memory, and behavior!

Purposefully, I did not consult other writings; I did not mix water from other sources with the river of my life!

It is my “way of being” in the Universe of Capoeira!

It is my “truth,” which, after being dispersed in the paradigm of this age, will simply cease to be – to return to the Spirit of Capoeira!

THE PROMINENCE OF MESTRE BIMBA, MANOEL DOS REIS MACHADO, IN THE SOCIO- CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF BAHIA

Mestre Bimba's presence in the history of Bahia is much more significant than just being the creator of a method for teaching capoeira quickly!

He is the divider of waters between a *period of great individual representatives* of this Bahian cultural activity – who were made famous by their mastery, which transformed them into popular myths – and the *professionalization of the mythical figure in a mestre!*

He is responsible for the evolution of the *apprenticeship of the craft* in the popular capoeira roda to the *systemized teaching* of capoeira in a physical education course recognized by the Minister of Education!

He is the introducer of African customs *to the heart of Bahian society's elite in the 1930s*, succeeding so well that Salvador's academics puffed up their chests from pride *of being Mestre Bimba's students!*

He is the great leader who initiated the public demonstrations of African socio-cultural activities *that were previously prohibited and persecuted by society*. His pioneering work was transformed into a great international attraction; **he transformed Salvador into a great theater** *where tourists from the whole world know, admire, and honor the manifestations of the African peoples!*

Bimba's value did not escape Dr. Antônio Carlos Magalhães! *He was one of the fundamental rocks on which the work of the*

great governor was built; he brought the Historical Center of the City of Salvador to recognition as a cultural inheritance of humanity, enriching the world with its jewels that beautify and elevate our ancestors!

With his expressive words and gestures – in a typically African way, sinuous and reticent like the art that he practiced – *he transmitted African Wisdom to us* by the narratives that we call **“THE PARABLES OF THE MESTRE.”** This is our precious **“socio-cultural heritage”**: Capoeira’s philosophical fundamentals and African logic of the art as a **Way of Being!**

THE LEGEND OF CAPOEIRA

One day, Cisnando told me the legend of capoeira's origin according to Bimba's words during Cisnando's first times in the "roda"¹ of Curuzú.*

Cisnando "*painted his skin black*"² (as Paulinho Camafeu would say!) and spoke with the sinuous style unique to capoeiristas. *Even today I don't know how to distinguish with clarity, in the to-and-fro embellishments of his prose, that which belongs to Bimba, the verbal arabesque of the narrator, and the mythological nucleus of African tradition, "from what came from inside my imagination or from my heart!"*

**"It was me
It was my mestre
It was my mestre and me
We exchanged ideas
And I no longer know who my mestre is
Nor who I am!"**

*In things of the orixás, accuracy matters little; history itself is made sinuous and enigmatic like the serpentine movement of the capoeirista in the "jogo de dentro"³
"To please everyone"?! or "to deceive everyone" ?!*

It is thus that in a beautiful twilight Solomon, the wisest of kings, went tranquilly along the path of life "without thinking... without

¹ Popular gathering around an open circular space, where the players practice capoeira in a festive manner, under the command of a mestre and to the rhythm of the orchestra

* Curuzú is a region of the predominantly black neighborhood of Liberdade in Salvador

² Assumed the African cultural habits

³ Inside game, capoeira game at a short distance, simulating a fight with a cold steel weapon

imagining” dangers?! The hour of Exú?!?!? – when he was surprised by nightfall and questioned by a crossroads that sang from the bulge of a cabaça, the rhythm marked by the *caxixis*, intermingled with the jingle of the “*dobrao*,”⁴ under the baton of an *arco*⁵ commanded by an “*arami*.”⁶

“My berimbau is an instrument of just one cord!” And a sad, clever voice continued through the middle of the night, enchanting the traveler, singing him to sleep, an invitation to dream! – ***beginning a game, a fight between Consciousness and Dream! Between Magic and the Self! Even today I continue dreaming a marvelous ballet! “The black Saci,** grappling with the target São Salomão, like cobras on the ground, to see who was stronger! Iê-ê-ê! The capoeira ballet of Bahia!***

* Exú is another orixá, the messenger between gods and men, and has the reputation for being clever/mischievous/evil

⁴ Old copper coin used by berimbau players to modulate the sound

⁵ Curved branch that stretches the steel wire of the berimbau

⁶ Arame, steel wire, stretched as the string of the musical instrument

** Saci is a figure of Brazilian mythology typically represented as a one-legged black man with a pipe and red cap. He is a solitary, lives in the woods, and known for being playful and mischievous.

THE ORIGIN OF CAPOEIRA

During years on end, I researched the origin of capoeira, analyzing the data at my reach: the rhythm and the melody, the orchestra (berimbau, caxixi, pandeiro, atabaque, agogô, reco-reco) songs and chorus, environment, movements, ritual, tradition, philosophy, geographical and social distribution, social class, profession, race, economy, and relationship with social activities of African origin (candomblé, maculelê, samba, conga, voodoo, afoxé, rumba, etc.) Through reflection, analysis, chats with the greatest authorities of capoeira, among other research methods, **I reached the following conclusions!**

After studying the rhythms of candomblé, I perceived that the basic rhythm of *Logunedé*⁷ on Luiz da Muriçoca's disc corresponds to the pandeiro beats in capoeira; or, in other words, **candomblé is the mystical source from which the magic of capoeira springs!** This coincides with the observation of Mané Rozendo (who was “feito,”⁸ “de santo,”⁹ “pai de santo;”¹⁰ who at the end of his life established a candomblé temple in Cosme de Farias) **of the ginga's similarity to the movements of candomblé's ritual dances.** *This similarity appears as a genetic and cultural trademark in the elegant movements of our Afro-Brazilian paradigms, whose gracefulness and lightness we tried to reproduce, and thus the similarity persisted.*

⁷ One of the orixás, son of Oxum and Umbualam, androgenous, a male hunter for six months of the year and a woman “of the waters” for six months.

⁸ Initiated in candomblé

⁹ Orixá

¹⁰ Babalorixá, caretaker of an orixá

In candomblé, the rhythm of the atabaques and the nexus between the *Orixás*¹¹ and the *Vodunce*,¹² **and in capoeira the style of the game**, accompanies the musicality of the rhythm! Some mestres who are *technically weak* but *musically well-developed* manage to form students of excellent quality by the subtle teaching from the berimbau rhythms!

From this, we conclude that, in concordance with the legend of capoeira, **the monotone toque of Exú is what creates the capoeirista!** It is the same way that “*São Salomão*”¹³ developed the “*art-and-skill*” with which he faced the “*traps*”¹⁴ of the “*devil of the crossroads*.”¹⁵ **I spent years of obstinate perseverance** and persistent conversation with the Mestre, until one beautiful day I heard: **“That’s right! But don’t tell anyone! So that I don’t lose my source of income!”**

The origin of the rhythm now established in candomblé, we now seek information about the existence of the berimbau, of a game or fight identical or similar to capoeira, in the African roots of the peoples brought as slaves by the colonizers. The famous professor Dr. Edson Carneiro personally confirmed the presence of the berimbau in Africa, but *not the presence of capoeira!* Our colleague Jesus, a capoeirista, exhaustively researched the existence of capoeira in Angola during a trip to Africa. He found berimbau, pandeiro, viola, chula, samba de roda, and candomblé, *but did not hear of capoeira!* We thus establish the presence of the berimbau, pandeiro, and other instruments, **and the absence of capoeira in Angola!**

“Pastinha went to Africa to demonstrate the capoeira of Brazil!”

¹¹ African ancestors who are deified and worshipped in candomblé; human spiritual archetypes

¹² Sons of saints

¹³ Saint Solomon, a fictitious entity representing wisdom and justice, like the Biblical King Solomon

¹⁴ Trick developed in order to deceive or to cheat someone

¹⁵ Exú

Pastinha also *did not find capoeira in Angola!*¹⁶

This is a strange fact, given the recognized strength of African traditions and their ability to survive all the social, economic, cultural, even religious pressures. How? Through disguise? Syncretism? Acculturation? Or **persistence in the ancestral philosophy?** Hundreds of years of Diaspora did not extinguish the strength of the culture, of the religion, or of the mother-tongue?

How can one explain or justify the disappearance of the African source of capoeira without leaving oral or symbolic traces? We unsuccessfully seek *signs of some activity similar to capoeira* in New World countries in which the black race managed to maintain their traditions and culture. We find the preservation of candomblé and the cultural activities derived from it in the great majority of the Latin-American countries. **But no game, dance, or martial art similar to capoeira!**

The name of the art itself does not exhibit a semantic or etymological link with African language; instead, it hints at the Brazilian landscape where it was initially practiced as a diversion, hidden from the masters and lords who were more interested in profiting from forced labor than in the quality of life of their source of wealth! All the data lead to the conclusion **that capoeira in the form in which we know it, although its mystical, musical, and choreographic roots lie in the ritual dance of candomblé, was created in the Bahian Recôncavo! From there, it spread to the other regions of Bahia, of Brazil, and of the World!**

¹⁶ During his trip to Dakar, Mestre Pastinha did not hear any oral reference to capoeira

The denomination of “*angola*”¹⁷ and of “*angoleiro*,”¹⁸ to describe the popular style practiced in the streets of Salvador (in contrast to the “*academic*”¹⁹ and “*regional*”²⁰ style of Mestre Bimba) derived from the tradition of the strength, courage, and bellicosity of the slaves originating from that region – *I never found this in the narratives of the oldest people in cities of the Recôncavo in the 1940s!*

Because of racial pride, the natives of Salvador who did not flaunt the title of “*regional*” came to be called heirs of the tradition of the *angoleiros*’ courage. They came to wear a gold earring, like their *supposed* ancestors – as a symbol of bravery... not of femininity! They valued this name of “*angoleiro*” and accentuated even more the dichotomy and the **unjust** discrimination of the young students (who were supposedly of better cultural, technical, racial, and economic qualification) against the *capoeiristas of the people*, “*of the street*,” the “*catchers of money with the mouth*”²¹ of the popular festivals.

The old students of Bimba – *lamentably!* – loved to abuse the simplicity of their street brothers, *using movements prohibited in capoeira angola in order to close the roda... thus capoeira’s initial unity was fragmented!*

¹⁷ Style of capoeira created by Mestre Pastinha

¹⁸ Practitioner of Mestre Pastinha’s style of capoeira

¹⁹ Student of Mestre Bimba’s style of capoeira

²⁰ Style of capoeira created by Mestre Bimba, called the Luta Regional Baiana (Bahian Regional Martial Art)

²¹ Allusion to the maneuver of “picking up money on the ground with the mouth,” an exhibition of skill in the game of capoeira

***IJEXÁ* RHYTHM OF CAPOEIRA**

I asked Fatumbí Verger about the relationship between the rhythm of capoeira and the toque of Logunedé. He said, “in the land of the *Ilexás*²² in a temple of Oxum, the mother of Logunedé, I was invited to demonstrate on a local drum (*ilú*) the rhythm of *ijexá*, which was soon identified...” Continuing, Fatumbí stated that he did not find a practice similar to capoeira, nor a traditional or modern oral reference to the art, nor the existence of the berimbau. He established the presence of the berimbau in the old Belgian Congo, which is today Zaire, a geographically and culturally distant area that was the territory of the Bantus. *The toque of capoeira is the union of an ijexá rhythm with a Bantu musical instrument.* Therefore, it can only have been generated in the coexistence of those original elements, **which was not possible in Africa**, given the cultural and spatial distance between the two nations!

In Bahia these two peoples encountered each other. It was a closer, more peaceful approximation under the heat of a common enemy and a shared slavery! Their shared pain extinguished their differences, which were minor compared to the suffering common to all. Closeness was inevitable in the ghetto of the *senzalas*; it was possible to share customs without stereotypes, which had been dissolved by the common oppressor. It was thus that **the Recôncavo in Salvador was the melting pot where the “musical liturgy” was founded** that would unite men “in the joy of capoeira” as Canjiquinha would say in his song.

Upon revising these notes, Fatumbí added, “...one afternoon in the Corta-braço...” listening to Mestre Valdemar on the berimbau

²² Yoruban people who inhabited Ilexá, a city in what is today Benin

while the *ijexá* rhythm rang throughout the square, he clearly perceived the identity of the rhythms. *The monotone notes in synchrony with the beat of the ilús* marked out **the musical source from which capoeira flows!**

WHY IS CARIBÉ BAHIAN?

Caribé, touched by the narratives of Jorge Amado, resolved to verify the authenticity the famous author's stories. A citizen of the Argentinian-Brazilian frontier, Caribé – Italian by his European roots, like myself – came to Bahia to see, different from Júlio César and São Tomé. He arrived, he saw, he believed, and he stayed. It is thus that *“Bahia won, capoeira won, candomblé won, Africa won, the Whole World won, the best painter from the negro!”*

In 1938, in the same year as me, Caribé entered into Bimba's *regional* course. He began his steps in the *“art-skill of São Salomão”* on the patio of a mansion in the Largo da Piedade in front of the Gabinete Português de Leitura. His *“post-graduation”* was done in *the academy of Mestre Pastinha* in the Pelourinho. **He lived the convergence of the two great rivers that flowed into the Great Bahia of Capoeira and of All the Orixás.** He was musical, graduating in berimbau and pandeiro; he was the perfect person to state with body... soul... blood... pen and pencil... that **CAPOEIRA IS JUST ONE!**

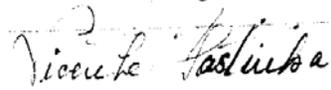
Cada mestre é um estilo,
A Capoeira é uma só e
quem comanda o jogo é o
Berimbau com os mesmos
toques e cantigas.
Carybé
95



Translation: Each mestre is a style. Capoeira is just one and he who commands the game is the berimbau with its own rhythms and songs. Carybé.

THE HONORABLE MESTRE PASTINHA**Also thought that...****...“CAPOEIRA IS JUST ONE!”**

“I, as an old capoeirista, felt badly about the path that capoeira was taking. No one talked about capoeira angola anymore, only about regional. The mestres were no longer famous, they only loved Sundays, in whatever way they wanted, but without correcting their errors of being subjugated by the whims of regional: which is the same style as capoeira Angola; there are no changes that make it lose its precious value. It's defense of our integrity, my mestre used to say when he taught me, in a circus...”

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vicente Pastinha". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CAPOEIRA SYMBOL

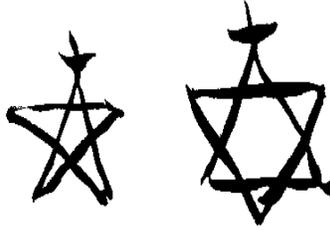
*Dedicated to all the mestres who “passed on,” but “remained”
eternalized in our traditional songs!*

According to the **legend of capoeira**, we are deeply linked to the *biological origin* of man as flesh, to the *divine nature* of man as spirit, to the *magic* of the berimbau’s rhythmic melody, and to the *wisdom* represented in our popular culture by a mixed figure – an Afro-Semitic-Christian hybrid – the Biblical King Solomon, “*feito*,” “*São Salomão*,” canonized to the Christian path through the Afro-Brazilian mixing!

Our people, especially those dedicated to hard work, and capoeiristas in particular, who have a deeply religious nature, *confident in the power of word and image*, **created a symbol** – *universal because it does not belong to any belief or culture* in particular – **that harmoniously, syncretically, and smoothly united** their cultural roots: white, Amerindian, and African!

King Solomon, **Biblical Xangô**, who so frequently appears in capoeira songs (perhaps because of his legendary link with the Queen of Sheba, of Ethiopian royalty) contributed to the five- or six-pointed star as a *symbol of wisdom, justice, and royalty*. **The mixed-blood Brazilians** crowned the Jewish star with the cross of Jesus, expressing deep respect and belief in the Nazarene, while the **Negro do Pixe**, who instills and emphasizes the magic symbol of protection, represents the **Afro-Brazilian that designed it**, peacefully uniting such disparate cultures!

The star and cross...



*Which traditionally mark the path and destiny of our people
Juxtaposed in the symbol of our “art-and-skill”²³
Merit consecration as our protector symbol
Tattooed in the heart!*

²³ Allusion to capoeira

THE ORIGIN OF THE “HYMN”

The first “white”²⁴ students of Bimba were tremendous enjoyers of life, typical of the students in those days! They were a full crowd of lovers of life, drunk on liberty, devoted to pleasure as conduct and religion! In that era Bimba performed a pure prank through playfulness, through trickery, to exhibit his musical qualities. It was a *monotone rhapsody* suitable for musical exercise, inappropriate for the game of capoeira, adequate for the trick that Cisnando jokingly called “**the hymn of capoeira.**”

The *white boys* put together a dirty lyric birthed from “*bad judgment*” as Mestre Caiçara would say!

“... *panha laranja nu chãu...*
 ... *ticu-ticu...*
 ... *meu amô vai s'imbora...*
 ... *eu não ficu...*
 ... *minha tualha di renda...*
 ... *di bicu...*
 ... *botei prá secá...*
 ... *caiu nu pinicu!*²⁵”

It is a classic example of the capoeiristas’ style: *in the to-and-fro flow of the sentences, the clever surprise appears!* The very name of *hymn* is already a joke: the name of a symbol of respect and honor given to a dirty trick!

Moral of the story: “*In the subjects of the berimbau, as in those of the atabaque, one must be intelligent so as not to confuse a joke with a hymn!*”

²⁴ Belonging to the dominant class

²⁵ Pick up the orange on the floor, little bird. If my love goes away... I won't stay... My towel of lace... I hung it up to dry... It fell in the potty!

THE ORIGIN OF THE SHIELD OF THE CENTRO DE CULTURA FÍSICA REGIONAL *

During the long period of fighting for the regulation of capoeira by the Brazilian Fighting Federation, in order to frame the “*academy*” in the legislation of the time (which did not permit the use of the term *academy* or *school* in sporting entities) I suggested the substitution of the classical name for “**Centro de Cultura Física**” – which was more expressive and wide-reaching – supplemented by the attribute of “**Regional Baiano**,” which alluded to the Bahian regional martial art.

For the occasion of my class’ graduation (Decânio, Nilton, and Maia) the graduation uniform of Mestre Bimba’s academy was white pants, a striped blue and white shirt, and white tennis shoes, as can be observed in a photograph published in various capoeira literary classics.

* Center of Regional Physical Culture – Mestre Bimba’s academy



On the left is Lacerda, a capoeirista and the best pandeiro player of the group, with the pandeiro under his left arm. Next is Maia, a trader, known for his agility and cleverness. To the right is Decânio, still with black hair in those days. Between the heads of Decânio and Maia appears Vicente, the official viola maker of our class, and a great pandeiro player. With the berimbau is my friend Brasilino, who was a specialist in the inside and low game, and had incomparable agility and flexibility. In that era, Bimba only accepted as berimbau players Atenílio, Brasilino, Manoel “Apicum” (he took much crap from Bimba because of his dragging rhythm), Manoel “Batuqueiro” and some others. During festivals, Bimba commanded the capoeira performance with the whistle hanging from his fist. At Brasilino’s side stands the giant figure of our Mestre. Note that Bimba is distinguished as the figure of the Mestre by not using the capoeirista uniform (white and blue striped shirt, white pants and tennis shoes). Nilton “Onça-Tigre” stands to the right of the Mestre, in his typical

position, crossed arms, and finally Rui Gouveia, the best of the time and my idol.*

Our *graduation list*²⁶ included my friend Luizinho, a bricklayer's assistant, his left hand crushed by an accident at work, belonging to the group of *country students*,²⁷ who were older and graduated without ceremony.

We chose our *contramestre* Ruy Gouveia as our *padrinho*.**
Luizinho was a living testimony that physical disabilities do not impede the practice of capoeira as long as they can be overcome by the **will** of the practitioner.

He died tragically in an accident at work, while painting the Elevador Lacerda, when he fell from the scaffold without the protection of a safety belt... In a desperate attempt to catch himself, he scrambled at the rough walls of the construction, which wore away his fingers and wrist. *He arrived at the awning where he ended his career as a worker and an athlete without hands*, whose fragments marked his protest on the concrete of the building with blood and pieces of flesh.

There was some difficulty in acquiring striped shirts, which were sold in batches of 11, all one size, to be used by a soccer team

* **Translator's note:** This photo, to which the text refers, was not included in the original text of the book. However, I retrieved it (as well as the caption) from Mestre Decânio's website "Capoeira da Bahia": <http://paginas.terra.com.br/esporte/capoeiradabahia/>

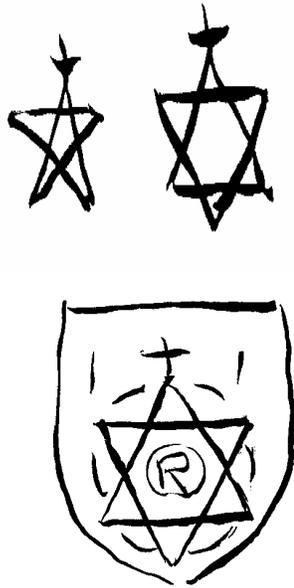
²⁶ List with the photos and names of the graduates, patrons and honored people, in a way similar to the custom of higher-education schools. It doesn't always correspond to the year of graduation, because we waited for 4 or 5 students to complete the list, so in the same list we can find students of various terms.

²⁷ Who did not belong to higher-education schools

** Godfather

with reserves and goalkeepers; this caused us to seek a less difficult solution. Around 1945 Mestre Bimba, following my suggestion, decided to adopt the white cotton shirt for graduates, *conserving the old blue and white striped shirt as distinctive for the mestre.*

To complete the uniform and break the monotony of the white shirt, I then designed a shield with the *sign of São Salomão* according to the tradition of capoeiristas, which I had become accustomed to seeing engraved by the cart-drivers on their cargo vehicles. I changed the five-pointed star to the six-pointed star because it looked better, and added a small circle containing the letter **R**, abbreviation of *Regional*, in the center.



I opted for the six-pointed star, formed by the superposition of equilateral triangles, because of its symmetry inside the area circumscribed by the shield, a shape which better expressed the desired aesthetic effect. In the spaces between the stars' points I drew blue arcs, circumscribing the central star and, in the top part

of the shield, two vertical lines to break the monotony of the white space.

I designed various models, with different frames, as well as symbols and acronyms. From these drawings, the capable hands of Dona Berenice, my **Mãe Bena** (*Queen and Lady of Bimba's House*) manufactured the prototypes: models of average size, embroidered by hand in blue thread on white fabric. Among these models, the Mestre and students unanimously chose the current shield.

The unfolding of the **legend of capoeira** according to Cisnando reinforced the choice of the *sign of São Salomão*. For the best aesthetic effect, the shield should be used on the left side of the chest – “on the side of the heart” – because of the sentimental symbolism!

The cross drawn on top of the image of the star is the demonstration of the *innate ability of the African culture to accept foreign concepts without losing its authenticity, and thus survive in a hostile environment!*

By Christianizing the Wisdom of Salomão by the coronation of the cross, the Brazilian people created a symbol, the “*Star of São Salomão*,” which is capable of pacifying the meeting of two conflicting cultures, and could unite all the capoeiristas of the world!

THE GINGA AND THE GENEALOGY OF THE CAPOEIRA MOVEMENTS

GENERALITIES

GINGA

Ginga is the fundamental movement from which all the components of the harmonious whole of capoeira emanate!

The **ginga** is intimately related to the rhythm-melody of the berimbau. It is the dynamic balance of the capoeirista's body and level of consciousness. The **jiçá** (rhythmic movement of the shoulders) allows the tuning and enriching of the *floreio** movements of the upper limbs. The **toque of the berimbau**, or in other words, its rhythm-melody, marks the cadence of the oscillating movements and the level of relaxation or the depth of the dive in levels of consciousness!

The **dynamic balance of the body** is linked to the *body's center of gravity* or *center of balance*, which roughly corresponds to the waist. The practitioner's state of balance depends on **the relative position of the body's center of gravity** and its movement in relation to the points of support on the ground. **The level of consciousness** depends on the *concentration of attention* and on the *body's obedience to the berimbau toque*, without creating mental resistance to the natural rhythm of the instrument or to one's partner's game.

* Floreio literally means "flourish." In contemporary capoeira it has taken on the meaning of a flip or fancy movement; however, Decânio uses it throughout the book as meaning arm movements designed to confuse one's opponent and disguise one's true attack.

The movement of the ginga is naturally born from the oscillation or swaying of the body to the beat of the berimbau, *despite the beginners' tendency to make movements starting from the lower limbs, with a rigid spine. It is fundamental to insist from the beginning of teaching that the ginga is born from the waist; it spreads through the trunk and the spine to reach the head and the limbs in a harmonious way*, without losing the naturalness, the elegance and spontaneity of the flourish, characteristic of obedience to the toque – which must be maintained above all.

The relaxed spine and constant movement *enable one to accompany the variations of the body's center of gravity without losing the dynamic balance*, which would certainly occur if the center of gravity were projected outside the line of the base or of the feet's support on the ground.

THE CADENCE

The cadence of the berimbau must be accompanied by all the parts of the body, *starting from the waist. The movement of the feet on the ground must accompany the rhythm of the toque*; every step of the feet marks the beat of the berimbau's rhythm-melody. It is similar to the *atabaque player* who manifests the musicality that springs up from his deepest parts through all the parts of his body, from the heart to the fingers, and transmits it to the instrument!

Cisnando always emphasized, with the Mestre's approval, **the importance of practicing samba in order to obtain lightness in the movement of one's feet**, which is an indispensable component of the ginga! This led us to insist on the *introduction of samba* in the preparation of our capoeiristas, as was previously accepted and incorporated in practice by the *academics*.

The **knees** *are always bent* lightly in the high game, and the bend becomes more accentuated when the game descends. Relaxed, the

knees must move in rhythmic relation with the toque. **The waist and the spine**, including the neck and the head, must be maintained in constant oscillatory movement or swing synchronously with the melodic tone of the berimbau!

The movement of the upper limbs: the shoulders are born from the spread of the spine. The movements are similar to those of the *jicá* in the ritual dance of candomblé, which is the mystical root of capoeira. **It even spreads to the hands**, to manifest the dynamic polymorphism of the *floreio* in the charades of the hands and fingers!

THE BODY'S CENTER OF GRAVITY

The notion of center of gravity, or of center of balance, is very important in the assessment of the ginga. **It is fundamental that the body's center of gravity stays above the line of support during the movement. Only thus can we use any of the points of support on the ground to escape or attack.**

Obviously, support on both feet secures more dynamic balance than support on just one. We must emphasize that the **support of the feet on the ground** must be on the front third of the sole, **never on the heel!** By avoiding supporting ourselves on the back third of the foot, we avoid the *hypertension reflex* of the lower limb and of the spinal column, *which would bring about the backwards dislocation of the center of gravity and the unbalancing of the body*, **thus slowing the dodging and attack movements!**

LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The capoeirista's level of consciousness can range from the clarity of the full consciousness of wakefulness to the deep trance of cosmic integration as described in the Vedic language of the transcendental meditation by Maharishi!

The level of consciousness depends *on the concentration of the attention and on the obedience to the berimbau toque*, without creating mental resistance to the rhythm of the instrument. This can only be achieved by *conquering fear* and under-confidence, and by adjusting the body to the partner's movements during the ludic complex generated by the musical toque!

There is also the *self-confidence* awoken by the training, the *relaxation* generated by the reduction of mental blocks, and the natural reflexes of adaptation to the game of one's companion.

It is thus that, in a given moment, the Self is integrated with the rhythm/melody of the toque! And we come to belong to the magical world of the capoeira game! Where the duplicity of "you and I" does not exist; where the unity of "us" is founded: vibrating in unison, transfigured in the ritual dance of capoeira!

The whole body – waist, head, trunk, legs, arms, hands and fingers – aims to translate, in ritual and rhythm-dependent movements, the beauty that springs from the Being through the transmutation of the berimbau's energy!

In the rhythm/melody context of that atemporal instant in an infinite space, the following things are manifested: the **experience** of past games, the **technical resources** acquired during the everyday learning, the **perfection of the movements** by incessant, free, spontaneous repetition in the swing of the berimbau by the exercise of transmusical dynamic meditation, **all the deepest reflexes of the nervous system and of the soul's**

state in that historic instant, and all the potential added to the Being up until that moment!

FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENTS

The root of capoeira is the ginga, the fundamental movement from which the many others are derived. From the *ginga* we pass to the position of **cocorinha**, to the request for **arpão de cabeça**, to the **leg movements**, to the **arm and hand movements**, to the **turn of the waist** or **rolê**, to the turn of the **aú**, and to the **cabeçada**.

DERIVED MOVEMENTS

From these “basic movements,” the many components of capoeira are born:

- From the **cocorinha**²⁸ originate

Negativa... defesa in cocorinha... meia-lua de compasso... boca de calça... queda de rim...

Defense in cocorinha²⁹ - by leaning sideways in the direction of the attack movement, planting the hand on that same side on the ground, while the other hand accompanies the attacking limb and protects the head.

Negativa – the extension of one leg in front, the fall of the torso towards the same side, planting of the hands on the ground, the head close to the ground

- From the **arpão de cabeça** we arrive at...

Armada solta... meia-lua de compasso

²⁸ In the cocorinha position the elbows remain supported on the knees and the arms hanging in front

²⁹ Note the difference between cocorinha and the position of defense in cocorinha

- From the **leg movements** spring...
*Meia-lua de frente... quiexada... escorão... benção...
 martelo... rebote... joelhada... rasteira... and banda-
 traçada.*
- From the **arm and hand movements** are born...
*Galopante... asfixiante... quebra-mão.. godemi...
 Dedo nos olhos... leque... palma... cutila... cotovelada
 and costa-de-mão.*
- From the **turn of the waist** arise...
Rolê... vingativa... banda de costas and discóbulo.
- From the **turn of the aú** we pass to...
*Rolê in the aú... leque in the aú... joelhada in the aú...
 corte in the aú... sapinho... tesoura... ponteira... aú
 espichado... aú encurugido... aú fechado... arqueamento
 para trás... and chapéu de couro*
- From the **cabeçada** we evolve to...
*Marrada... cabeçada de açoite... and cabeçada de
 escurrumelo.*

THE PARABLES OF THE MESTRE

DANGER IN CORNERS, DOORWAYS, AND HIDDEN PLACES

The practice of capoeira trains us to constantly be aware of the environment... evaluating: where will danger come from?! It could come in a miscalculated movement, in an inappropriate position, in a treacherous invitation, in a falsely friendly gesture, under an apparently innocent movement! We could be wrong in the analysis of that which we see and hear, or in other words, in the evaluation of the danger hidden by a corner, behind a half-open door or a thick tree trunk, especially at night! The joking stories, accompanied by wide and expressive gestures, left no doubts about the dangers! They prepared us to face ambushes in the *course of specialization*, which we had to attend after our *graduation*. The defense reflexes we learned stayed with us throughout the rest of our lives, “*in the way of Pavlov*,” as Prof. Novis would say from his chair of physiology... “In the blood!” as our Mestre used to say.

We learned the cleverness or awareness characteristic of capoeira by the repetition of dangers at every instant. The games required a permanent vigilance... pulling one's pants down in order to change into the training uniform offered a chance to receive a rasteira while one's legs were trapped by the mouths of the pants. Distracted? Here's a *galopante* as a gift! Careful when approaching someone! Does his abstract, crafty way of walking hide an evil intention? A *banda-traçada*? A *vingativa*? God knows what else! Remember Jesus, our verbose colleague, an academic student of Aeronautics, who upon turning a corner at night received an unexpected stab that pierced the book that he was carrying slung over his shoulder – an example always cited by the Mestre!

“A BIG TREE MAY HAVE MONKEYS IN THE BRANCHES!”

In the *Specialization Course* there was a *Subject* dedicated specifically to *Ambushes*. During the ambush classes, the students were divided in two groups: *ambushers*, a group made up of more experienced people who were responsible for preparing the ambushes; and *students of the current course*.

The process began with the first group's departure to the training area previously chosen by the mestre. The first group's mission was to distribute themselves in appropriate positions for individual or collective surprise attacks on the students of the current course. After a reasonable time sufficient for the appropriate positioning of the first squadron, the second group left; their mission was to cross the area of danger unharmed.

The important thing was not to be surprised: gliding through the area of danger, sly and invisible, imperceptible like a cobra. **The premonition of disguised danger** *is the strongest practical demonstration of the capoeirista's mastery of tactical behavior.* To be discovered and manage to resist the attack, or even to conquer the attackers, does not equal proof of **superiority**, but instead of *technical ability*, **which was a small part of the Way of Being advocated by the Mestre!**

“DON’T SIT WITH YOUR BACK TO THE STREET”

Everyone who frequented the “*academy*” takes care when choosing where to sit in a public place... some did this even when in their houses! It was a reflex of the Mestre’s teaching **never to expose oneself to surprises!** In public locales we are more vulnerable to assaults and such; for this reason it is safer **to keep one’s eye on the points of entry!** The same practice should be adopted when walking in the street. One must be alert and keep one’s distance when passing by dark, hidden places, corners, and other conditions that may shelter an evildoer.

“SIT ON THE EDGE OF BENCHES”

I observed that Lacerda always sat on the edge of benches, with his legs open. I learned that in this position one is ready to react to external stimuli, ready to get up quickly and face an *unexpected* danger, according to the old teachings of the *academy*. Bimba also used to say, “*If you’re sitting on a stool, grab the leg of the stool to use it as a defensive weapon!*” I can add that, *by being in this position, I once escaped having a bottle smashed over my head by a drunken doctoral student during a party!*

“WHOEVER SLEEPS IN ANOTHER MAN’S HOUSE DOES NOT CLOSE HIS EYES! HE COUNTS THE TILES!”

Even today, the stories told by the Mestre serve as living examples, *virtual images of situations faced in real life*, whether directly through similarity or indirectly through logical extrapolation! One of the most instructive, although it did not

seem very probable upon cold analysis of its details, is the following.

One note: *we should not investigate the truth or falsehood of the Mestre's stories; instead we should seek the teachings contained in his parables!* **Even exaggerations transmit subtle teachings!** They are like the “*koan*”³⁰ of the Zen Buddhists – logical absurdities that lead to enlightenment! Some transmit capoeira's theoretical or philosophical fundamentals, which, in the simple lingo and expressions of the old mestre, become difficult to understand if examined out of context, out of the physical situation *of the moment in which they were spoken!* At each instant, an intonation, an elegant rhetoric, a verbal arabesque, a theatrical gesture, *fit the fact in the moment*, as the tailor's able hand adjusts the cloth to his client's body!

In the Northeast – or in Chapada? *Does it matter?* – lived a citizen whose wife gave nocturnal shelter to abandoned bohemians. The husband, convinced but bitter about the charitable nocturnal activities of his cohabitant, protested her behavior in his way, as a stonemason's apprentice, as we will see in the Mestre's story!

One beautiful night with a full moon, a young mestre was chosen as the occupant of the *empty side* of the charitable woman's marriage bed. In the high hours of the morning, after the ceremony of the phallic offering, while the kind woman enjoyed her deserved rest, the mestre was looking at the tiled ceiling, meditative, when he observed a strange ray of silver light through a gap in the tiles. The narrow slit slowly widened... the shimmering silver of the stars was made present... until a dark figure quickly looked down and dropped a “*parallel*”³¹ on the pillow... where the head of the Mestre was no longer found! An opportune *rolê* had saved him from certain death, and had

³⁰ Questions proposed in order to obtain enlightenment

³¹ A rock used in paving, with parallel faces

allowed him to recognize, while he turned, the shape of the *bitter husband*. Thus, **“whoever sleeps in another man’s house does not close his eyes, he counts the tiles!”**

“THE WEIGHTLIFTING CHAMPIONSHIP”

On Amaralina beach there was a wooden shack dedicated to the practice of sports. *An ancestor of modern gyms*, it sat in the trench between the Barracks of Amaralina and the rocks of the “*Cabeça de Negro*.” It is the site where later the now-extinct Vitória Sport Club would be built, and where today the fishing boats sit.

It was the night of the championship, after which a demonstration of the *luta regional baiana* would occur. After the champion was chosen, the steel bar used by the winner – weighing 80 kilograms or more – remained in the middle of the platform. The Mestre called Rozendo and recommended, “*Call Brasilino and take the bar to a safer place.*” Rozendo, wanting to show off, didn’t bother to call Brasilino. He grabbed the bar with one hand and sashayed through the middle of the room... until the Mestre noticed! “*Stupid negro! You’re demoralizing the white men! The champion lifted that with two arms...and you go swinging it around with just one arm! You should have picked it up with two men... and still sweated!*”

Each one should draw his own conclusions! I believe that **it is not proof of intelligence to display all our strength!** We should “*hide a little for a time of necessity.*”

“THE CHAMPION’S BELT”

Like any other normal human being, our Mestre had his fantasies of the “Odéon Park” Capoeira Championship. He carried the bitterness and enormous frustration of not having received the **Champion’s Belt**, the concrete symbol of the title fairly won within the competition rules.

After my graduation in 1947, I traveled to Londrina, Paraná, to work in my father’s health care center. I left with the mestre the uniform belt that I used during my training as an aspiring army official. **In those days**, the free time I had after my hospital and academic activities was spent in the Mestre’s academy as a teaching assistant – *contramestre* – attentively listening to his stories. I believe **today** that *the Mestre used his stories to instill, through parables, the teachings that he could not transmit through physical demonstrations, whether because of the danger of the maneuvers or because of the complexity of the situation involved!* They were stories of bravado that we absorbed without the least shadow of a doubt, entranced by the magical words of our idol! *They were stories of situations that we may face during life, inside and outside the academy, whose memorization is reminiscent of the catechism with deep and unshakable faith!*

Upon returning to Salvador, I was surprised by the proud display of the old piece of military uniform – my old belt! – duly ornamented with a Milky Way of golden brooches, like those used in upholstery! It had been transformed by the Mestre’s magic into a **Capoeira Champion’s Belt!** It was exhibited on his waist or hung from the unpolished wooden hanger on the wall of the “*academy classroom*” as the crown, the glorification of the capoeira king!

This incident **does not diminish the greatness of our Mestre’s figure...** it just demonstrates that **Gods are also human!** I continue to reverence my idol... **the belt be damned!**

“THE TRAP OF THE VILA AMÉRICA HILL”

The Mestre’s stories did not always match up in successive repetitions. *Sometimes social convention covered the truth. Other times, the enthusiasm of his words betrayed the truth in order to better teach the lesson!* We see this, without damage to the proof of capoeira’s efficiency and the Mestre’s bravery, in the well-known version of this story that was published on August 1, 1936 in the newspaper “A Tarde,” which still incited my latent adolescent passion and drove me, two years later, to enroll in the course of the Luta Regional Baiana for CPOR students and officials in Barbalho Fort. The story that I personally heard from the Mestre was more detailed and impressed me much more than the article!

I had heard that a “*friend* (of Mestre) *Lúcio*” bet a reasonable sum on Bimba’s adversary in the Odeón Park Capoeira Championship, despite being advised against it by the Mestre himself. The fight was decided by a *galopante* or *asfixiante* that knocked out some of the teeth of the ex-occupier of the champion’s throne. The match was closed when he declined to compete, but under protests against the violence of the blow and the aesthetic damage! Bimba was proclaimed “champion,” receiving the monetary prize, but the “*golden belt*” became a highly debated object! Apparently, Mr. *Lúcio Barra Preta* disagreed with the way that the Mestre finished the championship and became furious.

One night, Mestre Bimba descended from the Engenho Velho neighborhood by the Vila América Hill. He was running, with his straw hat under his arm, to catch the last tram from Amaralina in order to return to his house. He had been delayed by the delight of running into a beautiful female acquaintance, and he was happy and unsuspecting that his adversary had prepared an ambush in an attempt to get revenge.

Around the area of the Ciriaco candomblé house, the aggressors sprung out of the darkness. They were “*six police soldiers armed with sabers!*” led by “*Barra Preta,*” who wielded a gun. He ended up upside down in a barrel of garbage – without the gun, naturally! “*The soldiers ended up spread out on the ground, without their bayonets, naturally... the gun ended up in my hand!*” The Mestre reached the tram, still with his beautiful straw hat under his arm, all lively, carrying a gun and six bayonets as a battle trophy, which he exhibited in the “A Tarde” article!

I sincerely prefer this version. It better serves the halo that crowns my idol, and still makes me feel almost seventy years younger!

“The truth?!?!... be damned!”

“I DON’T LIKE A THICK NECK... A LONG AND STRONG NECK IS BETTER!”

Mestre Bimba stated that a thick neck brought about thick and slow movements incompatible with the practice of *regional!* According to his opinion, *a long, flexible, and strong neck is ideal for a capoeirista. Bimba did not recommend exercises involving the massive and prolonged contraction of the neck muscles.*

With time I came to notice the importance of neck movements during sporting practice in general: in dance, in running, in swimming, in breathing, even in meditation! It is not insignificant that the *chin held high* is used as an expression of bravery! *It is impossible to carry out the spin of the armada-solta with the neck in hyperextension, nor the backflip without the hyperextension!*

In Judo, I learned that the correct posture of the neck, which affects the rest of the spinal column, is essential in many movements. This justifies the importance that our Mestre gave to

the elasticity and synergy of the neck muscles. *The Wisdom is the same in Africa and in the East! Only the color of the skin and the sound of the language differ!*

“QUICKNESS AND FLUSTERED PANIC ARE NOT AGILITY!”

In accordance with the concept orally transmitted by Mestre Bimba, **agility involves not only the quickness of the movement, but also its exactness in time and space.** The target must be reached with precision at the right moment! *Agitation and fluster are manifestations of disguised insecurity and fear;* they generate pointless, inappropriate movements that can create unexpected and dangerous (or at least uncomfortable) situations.

“What’s important is not the velocity, it’s marking the blow!” We learned to recognize *“marking the blow”* – “mother” to practitioners of judo! – as the sense of opportunity, the precise evaluation of the distance, of the possibility of reaching the target at the right moment, with the adversary in the appropriate position for the perfect fitting of the attack movement with a dodge at exactly the right time.

It is a sense that is instilled, increased, and improved by the constant, frequent, repeated practice of the capoeira **“game!”** **It is not taught; it arises automatically from the whole Being!** Or as our Mestre preferred to say, **“It will become instinct! It enters into the blood and never leaves!”**

“HOT SWEAT IS A SIGN OF HEALTH! COLD SWEAT IS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS!”

The heating of the body by exercise effectively produces a warm, agreeable sweat and a wonderful sensation of well-being. **When the effort – whatever its degree – produces cold sweat, it is a signal that the normal capacity of the organism was surpassed!** The **smaller the effort** that produces the cold sweat, **the weaker the physical ability** of the practitioner! The Mestre's wisdom stopped us from overexerting ourselves. He also recommended that *“The shower after training should be taken with the body hot, so you don't catch a cold!”* Also, *“Don't take too long in the shower! Let the water fall. Don't use soap, so you don't take too long!”*

Cold sweat on an athlete in good physical condition empties his reserves of energy and creates harmful effects, such as the incapacity of the circulatory system to carry nutrients and remove the residues of biochemical reactions! These physiochemical changes, altering the ionic concentrations and pH, impede the functioning of the delicate interaction of the neural system with the vascular system. *Anomalous vasoconstriction* occurs instead of the healthy vasodilatation, which occurs to disperse the heat generated by the increasing of the metabolism during exercise. Those who are *“sick in the heart”* have shortness of breath and cold sweat at the smallest efforts, because their cardiac reserve is reduced. *The same thing occurs with those who are physically unprepared;* just climbing a staircase is enough to make them pant for breath!

“I DON'T LIKE JOINTS THAT ARE TOO FLEXIBLE”

I heard this comment when I admired the flexible joints of a friend, a former goalkeeper and crafty capoeirista, today the illustrious Professor Hélio Ramos. *I only perceived its profundity after later analysis and careful observation, when I noticed that those with very flexible joints trusted in lazy dodges,* involving

simple joint movements without changing the body's position, instead of *escape movements with the whole body!* **Thus, they remained exposed to the attacks that followed!** The dodging and escape movements our Mestre recommended, on the other hand, *developed agility and enabled the fastest counterattacks, unleashed from the very defense and dodging movements!* Thus, “joints that are *too flexible*” are harmful and contrary to the agility which our “*Professor Emeritus*” loved.

“THE LITTLE GUY, THE TOUGH GUY, AND THE CACUMBÚ”

This story demonstrates that **it's not smart to underestimate one's adversary!** Perhaps the setting was a little bar, in a little country town – anything will do! What's important is the “*life lesson*” that the story tells!

In the story, there is a “*little guy*” with a childlike physique who is sad, downcast, and silent, unaware of the movement of the people around him. While sitting at the counter, he is approached by a euphoric man who is strong, uninhibited, and fierce – the “*tough guy*.” The guy orders a shot of straight rum and states, in a thick, loud voice: “*A round for everyone! I want everyone to drink, because it's on me!*”

The “*little guy*,” sitting on his stool, thanks the tough guy, refuses, and explains: “*I'm very sick, and the doctor forbade me to drink!*” The “*tough guy*” walks slowly in his direction and warns, “*no one refuses to drink when I pay!*” The “*little guy*,” with a soft and tired voice, humbly repeats, “*I'm sorry mister, but my doctor forbade me!*” When the guy splashed the rum in his face, the “*little guy*,” quickly like a rattlesnake, lifted his withered arm and put a small, fine, and rusty *cacumbú** from the arc of a barrel into the base of the tough guy's neck!

* I don't know what a *cacumbú* is, but you get the idea.

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 ?????????????????????????????????????????????????????????????
 !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

“A stupid tough guy dies before his time!”

“THE HANDKERCHIEF OF ‘LION’ SILK”

The mestre always described capoeiristas: as “*all in white*,” or with a “*Panamá hat*,” or a “*handkerchief of natural ‘lion’ brand silk around the neck*” – an important detail!³² He didn’t explain where they got the money to dress themselves with such great care, but our guru used to say, with cathedral airs, that “*the ‘lion silk’ turns away the edge of razors!*” It thus defended the neck from mortal blows, becoming an essential part of one’s uniform.

Observation: This image inspired the use of the handkerchief as an indicator of capoeiristas’ technical level in the Regulation Project that I set in motion to the Fighting Confederation via the Bahian Fighting Federation, directed by Dr. Fauzi Abdala João in the 1960s. It was changed and later published after having been adjusted to the interests (or myopia?) of the Technical Commission of the Brazilian Fighting Confederation! On that occasion we proposed the *white handkerchief* as a symbol of the *mestres*, the *red* for the *course of specialization and ambush*, the *yellow* as distinctive of the *contramestre*, the *blue handkerchief* for use on the occasion of the *graduation*, the *green* to identify the *orchestra*. The handkerchief may be more representative of our tradition than belts, cords, or ribbons... at least for the students of Mestre Bimba!

³² ‘Lion’ brand means imported Japanese silk, according to our Mestre

MESTRE BENTINHO

Bimba admiringly cited the extraordinary – in my view, frightening – ability of Mestre Bentinho! *“He did a salto mortal* inside the mouth of a big box of onions...”* Mestre Bimba emphasized the fragility of the box: *“...which was very thin and weak!”* During my period in the barracks, the then-Sergeant Marques (a war hero, later promoted to Major, who I reencountered in the Hospital Santa Izabel, as an administrator alongside Dr. Perazzo) confessed the ability to flip backwards and land in the same place! Mestre Tiburcinho stated that Besouro Mangangá was capable *“of flipping backwards and landing back in his sandals!”* This deed was apparently not so rare among the old capoeiristas... too bad we no longer see scenes like these!

“THE NEGRO OF THE GOLD MARKET”

Until the end of his life, the Mestre mourned the *“twenty mil-reis”*** that he had lost in a bet with the *“big black guy” of the Gold Market!* The Mercado Modelo was in Cayru Square, to the right side of the Elevator Lacerda; the sea still occupied a good part of the “commercial area,” and the Gold Market is still in the same place! There was a porter of strong stature who boasted about his strength in front of the Mestre, saying he could carry five loads of dried meat from the Gold Market to the Mercado Modelo. Bimba paid *“to see.”* And *“the big black guy put one sack on his head, grabbed two sacks with his hands, made me put one sack under each of his armpits, and went off sashaying”* before the astonished eyes of the Mestre, who was worried about his money! The guy went until the front door of the Mercado

* Backflip

** Mil-réis was a former unit of currency in Brazil and Portugal

Modelo, where he dropped his load and extended his open hand “to receive my money!” And the Mestre laughed heartily at himself! **Observation:** “Each sack weighed eighty kilograms!”

“THE DOCKERS’ BREAD”

The Mestre, at around 15 years of age, frequented the docks and ran small errands in order to earn money! One of his duties was carry the salt-bread that the dock workers bought to take home. Bimba received the commodities at the docks, *passed through the police post of Taboão*, and delivered the packages to their recipients in the intersection of the Pelourinho with Portas do Carmo and Baixa dos Sapateiros. He did this **without removing the fish knives** carefully *disguised inside the bread!* **The transport of cold steel weapons was prohibited**, especially by dock workers, who were feared as bullies and troublemakers! **Note:** The police did not distrust the delivery boys!

THE MEETING WITH TIBURCINHO AND THE RECOVERY OF THE MACULELÊ LYRICS

I was introduced to Mestre Tiburcinho in Nestor Carvalho’s house (who was then the prefect of Jaguaripe), on the occasion of weekend travel in the company of *Uncle Bila*, his brother, to help the children of that township. Besides the damage of age and poverty, anemia accentuated Mestre Tiburcinho’s malnutrition... but all this did not diminish his joviality or the agility of the movements that enriched his fluent words! He spoke in prose rich in the facts and deeds of old capoeiristas. Whether his stories were the fruit of coexistence or collected from the words of the oldest ones, they enchanted and entranced!

I took advantage of the opportunity of his sickness and brought him to Salvador, where he spent some days with me, and later in the house of one of his daughters. Sometimes he visited our “Carahiba Club,” and after his general condition improved, he visited the *headquarters of regional* in the Caruano Site, where he spent hours with Mestre Bimba, remembering and reconstituting the lyrics and choreography of maculelê.

Tiburcinho captivated everyone near him – including the withdrawn Mestre Bimba – by his purity and candor. He had the ingenuousness of a child at 70 years of age! *“A little boy with white hair, without evil intent; he only had the malícia of capoeira!”* And thanks to him, a living memorial, our Mestre recuperated the songs and was able to include maculelê in his exhibitions in the Northeast of Amaralina, thus realizing one of our dreams of integrating the Afro-Brazilian riches.

“GRAPPLING? IT ONLY WORKS IF YOU LET YOURSELF BE GRABBED!”

Mestre Bimba did not fear grappling arts, and said that *“armlocks,”* as well as other *locks*, *“only work after entanglement!”* Therefore, *“only if you let yourself be grabbed”* must you escape or do a sudden movement in order to separate yourself from the opponent. Too simple?! But **no one grabbed the Mestre! In the Mestre’s words,** *“distance yourself... the heat of a man is bad...only the heat of a young, beautiful, sweet-smelling woman is good!”*

On the day of our *“graduation”* in the Roça do Lobo – Maia and Nilton must remember, especially my colleague Dr. Nilton, who is today in Goiana – *“Onça-Tigre,”* versed in *JiuJitsu*, asked the Mestre, *“If Ruy Gouveia could escape his headlock.”* The Mestre responded, *“Go ahead and try!”* The result was that the headlock never found the thin and short neck of Ruy, who was skinny but

flexible, agile, and strong, like a serpent! The athletic Dr. Nilton commented, “*I never even saw how he caught me, and gave me so many throws!*” Ruy went around applying successive throws to the strong and heavy body of “*Onça-Tigre,*” using light, quick, successive *throws from the waist, as if it were child’s play!*

“DON’T OPEN THE ARMPITS”

The arms should stay close to the body, relaxed and bent lightly at the elbows, wrists, and fingers. In this position, one can constantly sweep one’s front and sides in order to protect the body. An outstretched arm is an invitation to receive a blow from the opponent’s elbow; a raised arm is an opening for the entrance of a *banda de costas* or *vingativa*, a traumatic blow such as a *martelo*, or a throw such as an *açoite de braço!*

“CLOSE THE ARMPITS!”

Always maintaining one’s arms close to the torso avoids opportunities for the opponent to enter under one’s shoulder. This is common in various fighting styles. It also enables defense from frontal and lateral attacks. Not opening the arms, keeping them in relaxed movement close to the body, is an important characteristic of the *closed guard*³³ often used in the *jogo de dentro* and in *Iuna*, the low game obligatory for the graduated students.

“MAN’S STRENGTH IS IN THE EARTH!”

Don’t jump around! Ginga with your feet on the ground. Maintain the “*closed guard*”; the middle or the low guards are

³³ Defensive posture, with the arms close to the torso, legs semi-bent

the safest! **During jumps, while in the air without support on the ground, dodging or defense movements are slower or impossible!** Applying a jumping benção in order to reach the opponent's face was prohibited in the *roda* because of safety reasons. "*Friend Atenilo,*" who was stubborn like a donkey and slow in body and mind, *disobeyed*. He took a fall and hit his head on the ground. After long minutes of unconsciousness, he awoke with a fright, yelling "*Cock-a-doodle-doo!*" Bimba explained, "*He's possessed with the spirit of a rooster!*"

When my doubts led me to ask Mestre Bimba about the efficiency of the *candomblé caboclo*, I received a masterly response, worthy of Taoist masters! "*The candomblé caboclo is stronger than the African because he works with the roots, while the African works with the leaves!*" He added, emphasizing, "*It's easy to understand, the roots are inside the earth and the leaves are outside the soil!*" These words resound *like shouts from the Far East!*

“NON-RESISTANCE!”

It seems more of an Indian thing, of “Sons of Gandhi” more than “Sons of Bimba” – **Ahimsa!**³⁴ "*Whoever waits too long is a donkey,*"³⁵ or, in the old African way, "*jump!*"³⁶ – as Mestre Bentineho shouted in his lessons to Mestre Bimba! It is a crafty African martial principle, of recognized value in the Orient, *confirmed in modern times by Physics! In the dodge, as in the defense, accompany the direction of the attack* in order to reduce the velocity and power of the blow! **Do not offer resistance! Yield in order to defend yourself!**

³⁴ Indian doctrine of non-resistance

³⁵ Popular saying meaning “flee from danger.”

³⁶ Jump! Mestre Bentineho's command to escape using an *aú*

This represents another meeting of cultures expressed in a universal principle of logic, physics, and mathematics: “Two objects moving in the same direction present to the eyes of an external observer a movement equaling the value of the difference between the two” as Einstein demonstrated! Each culture used its logical reasoning to arrive at the same fact! Though the languages diverge, the truth remains! In Africa, in India, in China, in the Orient, in Europe, in the Americas, in Bahia, in the Old World, as well as the Modern, as it was Yesterday, and Today, and will be Tomorrow!

One of Bimba’s most important contributions in his teaching method, *within the apparent simplicity of his system, was teaching how to fall on one’s feet without losing one’s balance. In this technique there is a powerful and magic secret!* Besides losing the fear of hitting the ground, we are filled with pride *to be able to leap before being knocked down!* It is like hearing Mestre Bentineho shouting from the distant past, *“Leap, my son! Leap!”*

There are also the safety precautions: a mesh shirt and a dry body so as not to slip; supporting the neck during the gravata cinturada alta so as to cushion the impact on the ground; the safety of the balão cinturado, which allows one to land on the floor with softness and comfort; the support on the torso during the balão de lado; and the impulse in the cintura desprezada, which involves a throw from the shoulder during the passage of the aú! All with the simplicity that only geniuses manage to model and transmit in a work of art!

“THE SECRET OF THE NEGATIVA”

The negativa is not understood by the majority of capoeira practitioners. In reality, it is a preparation of the musculature of the hands and legs; in addition, it teaches one to lessen the shock of the sudden almost-free-fall to the ground. I remember that in the beginning I felt strong pains in my wrists, fruits of the violent

shock on the ground; such was the enthusiasm with which I descended in this movement with fear of getting caught! **It's better to hit your hands on the ground than to take a foot to the face!**

After hundreds of repetitions of the negativa, the beginner's awkward movement becomes an elegant and agile descent, as though the player were a dancer... though at the same time it gives the fighter the velocity of a cobra *in the strike of the rasteira!* **The innocent negativa carries the rasteira inside it, as a sheath carries a deadly knife!** Still, **Bimba's teaching method ensures safety!** *The absence of the rasteira in the initial sequence* ensures that the students do not use it too early; this avoids accidents resulting from their lack of preparation for the subsequent fall!

**“DON'T TAKE DOWN A BEGINNER! ONLY
GIVE RASTEIRA AFTER THREE
MONTHS!”**

The Mestre's care for the safety of the newest students was expressed in his golden rule: **“Rasteira on a beginner?! Only with the Mestre's express authorization!”** He then completed cheerfully, *“so that I don't lose my monthly income!”* This was a clever reference to the fact that injured students stop training... **and stop paying!** *Only when the beginner acquired proficiency in the negativas and lost his fear of the impact on the ground in the sequence of throws did the Mestre allow him to be taken down by a rasteira!*

“FRUIT COMES ONLY WITH TIME!”

This was the axiomatic way that the Mestre, in his simplicity, used to reprimand our impatience and oblige us to await the

technical maturity that would ultimately lead us, in a natural way, to the *instinctive* execution of the capoeira movements! Today I feel what he knew! *Under the sonorous energy of the berimbau, the body creates simpler movements, the movements link together and unfold into other more complex movements, in the same natural and spontaneous way as buds become branches and leaves and flowers, in a process similar to that of photosynthesis!* It doesn't make sense to rush the learning! **The student is the compass; his/her own progress** is what guides the mestre – a true lesson in modern pedagogy! “*Natura non facit saltus,*”³⁷ as the ancient Romans would say if they played capoeira... or the ancient Africans if they spoke Latin like Professor Gelásio Farias, *Padre* Ricardo, or Auto José de Castro!

“BANANA TREES DON'T PRODUCE CASHEWS!”

Mestre Yoshida once told me, “*Your basic o-soto-gari is good! Now you need to develop your way of doing it!*” Bimba used to say, “**Each student has his own way**” (a unique, personal, non-transmissible way!) “**of doing his movements!**” Inside the collection of particularities characteristic of each one of us was a facet of our personalities! The Mestre knew, as no one else did, how to encourage each one of us to courageously affirm **our authenticity in each movement!**

“A RIPE GUAVA FRUIT ON THE EDGE OF THE STREET? IT HAS WORMS INSIDE OR A WASP NEXT TO IT!”

³⁷ Nature doesn't give jumps; natural processes evolve with continuity.

Often, the malandro opens a breach in his defense just to *“lure someone to die in the trap.”* **We should distrust things that are too easy**, like an *opening* in a capoeira position that could hide a trap, a *lasso to catch a sucker!* *“Someone who is distrustful stays alive and well! Old holes have snakes inside!”*

“A DIET TO LOSE WEIGHT”

The Mestre had his medical ideas – not always justified! – but integrated in his logic of Regional! Regarding treatment for obesity he said, *“Don’t diet to lose weight; it’s bad for you! Eat everything and play capoeira; I want to see you get fat!”* Sometimes I heard, *“My son! The white man is stupid! He doesn’t know how to eat; he only eats soft meat! What has substance is hard meat with nerves, neck meat, bones with marrow! You need to bite hard in order to have strong teeth!”* He would then explain, *“Dock workers’ food gives strength and heartiness!”* – naturally, with the game of Regional as a dietary supplement. *“Whoever has doubts should try it!”*

“THE SIGN OF THE CROSS”

Every time Bimba opened his mouth in a yawn, he made the sign of the cross in front of the opening, explaining once, *“so that evil doesn’t enter!”* This coincides with the Hindu theory that more than air enters the organism; there are also various energies capable of producing good or bad effects according to their nature! It is the recognition of the energy field that surrounds us! Our beliefs, our behavior, our thoughts, and our words all contain force capable of changing or channeling beneficial or detrimental energies that exist in the environment – **African philosophical thought.**

“HIS!”

When the Mestre referred to some injury or trauma, he used to point to the corresponding part on his own body, and would say, “his!” while quickly pointing towards some distant place! These words and acts were based in African wisdom, which recognizes the *power of the word* – of the Verb that created the world – and which is equally capable of generating evil! It is thus that in candomblé, *a thought, verbal expression, gesture, or act* generates a force, a will, which will act on the chosen target – *the power of the Orixás; the manifestation of Axé!* This corresponds perfectly with Archbishop Leadbeater’s “**forms of thought**”³⁸ to which theologians refer – *yet another cultural, inter-racial, intercontinental, supra-temporal correspondence!*

“THE REVOLT OF THE TRANSVESTITES”

While the academy on Laranjeiras Street was being renovated, the classes were temporarily transferred to a nearby building on Gregório de Mattos, a street that was home to various houses of transvestites. One beautiful day, when I arrived for the evening training, I found the street in an uproar. The Mestre was trying to accommodate the “boys,” who were ready to “*go get their supervisors!*” The transvestites were inconvenienced by the presence of our academy’s students, and they threatened to invade the training room. The group inside was eager to practice the capoeira that they had learned, and ignored the arguments of the more sensible members, who emphasized that after the fight none of us would be safe when we came to the capoeira classes because the street offered many possibilities for the transvestites to ambush us.

³⁸ Materialization of the force or energy of thought, capable of acting on a third party

“Even to be brave, you have to be smart!” It was possible to avoid the *“hunt!”* **Moral of the story:** An untimely safari can become a tragedy! The stupid hunter dies by the paw of the jaguar, or by the antler of the deer* hidden behind a thicket... or behind a garbage can!

THE UMBRELLA THAT NEVER OPENED

The Mestre was never without two things: a felt hat, of an undefined shade of gray, on his head; and a black umbrella, faded by the sun, hanging from his left arm. Another notable accessory was the unlit cigar inserted between the fingers of his right hand – or was it the left? Anyway, regardless of the time, the weather, and the nature of the situation, the Mestre’s faithful umbrella remained attentive and helpful, accentuating the bend of his elbow like a mute and mysterious question mark. The inexplicable observation that *the Mestre never, ever opened his umbrella* circled in my head. Whether noon-day sun or wind and rain, the umbrella remained unused. The furtive attempts to inspect the interior of the umbrella were always frustrated by the Mestre’s eternal vigilance! Such mystery... was it a hidden machete? A disguised cane? An instrument reserved to be used as a club in an emergency? Did the elements of nature offer less danger than certain potential human threats? Was the umbrella old? Broken? Useless? A pet umbrella? ????.

RUY GOUVEIA’S HANDKERCHIEF

Ruy Gouveia, one of the most crafty and skilled students in our *roda*, was light-skinned, small, and skinny with a short neck. He was the devil himself when he entered into the academy! He was

* There is a pun in Portuguese here: the word for deer – *veado* – is also slang for homosexual.

always coughing, seeming as though he were sick with consumption! Upon coughing, he reached into the pocket of his jacket, pulled out a handkerchief, and put it in front of his mouth... to protect us from being sprayed with saliva?

The devil is that once in a while, Ruy took out a razor instead of the handkerchief. The razor passed smoothly through our visual field, and before we had the time to recognize the barbers' tool, it was already back in its hiding place. And Ruy, with the white handkerchief covering his mouth, *used the cough not just to justify the maneuver of taking out his handkerchief – but also to train the faster drawing of his razor!* It's almost like a **Zen** practice in a Japanese monastery!

FACTS AND LESSONS FROM LIFE

CROCODILE TEARS 1

Pedro Gordilho, the Police Chief before the 1930 Revolution, used the cavalry to ferociously persecute African practices – such as capoeira rodas and candomblé temples – *taking advantage of the laws of the time to satisfy his racism!* The horses' strength, speed, and height give the horsemen an enormous initial advantage in battle – thus making it necessary to have an art that dismounts and disarms the riders!

Some of the stronger and more daring capoeiristas, the better fighters, used to dress as Bahian women; they stayed to the side watching their companions and “husbands” playing capoeira. The participants in the roda, apparently absorbed in the capoeira, seemed an easy target for the cavalry, which would burst into the crowd, eager to beat the *“rogue negroes!”* At that moment, the “Bahian women” would interfere, agitated, crying, imploring in loud shouts, *“Not my husband! Please! What will happen to me?”* Some would appear to faint, while others, nervous, would grab the legs of the soldiers while weeping, and throw themselves to the ground, desperate... thus imprisoning the horsemen and delivering them, unarmed, immobilized and defenseless, to the capoeiristas, in order to meet their deserved ends!

CROCODILE TEARS 2

Mané Rozendo told me that on one occasion, he had a quarrel with a tram driver on the bend of the Rio Vermelho line, on the Largo da Fonte Nova. According to Mané Rozendo's version, the driver brandished the *“switch to open the line”* and threatened him ferociously! *“There was only one thing to do... to get down on the ground... start to cry...”* while yelling, *“Don't kill me... Ai!... My children!”* He cleverly approached the driver bit by bit,

until he could apply a *boca de calça*³⁹ and throw him backwards so that his head hit the ground! “*And then, to flee... because whoever waits too long is a donkey!*”

“NEW STUDENTS ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO BEAT UP MESTRES!”

The Mestre used to say that the only solid beating that he had ever taken was from a student on his second class! After teaching the sequence – “*two meia luas de frente and armada*” – Bimba demonstrated the *meia-lua de compasso* and assumed the *cocorinha* position. He then received a heel to the bridge of his nose, coming from the opposite side of the correct movement! The novice had applied a *mijada de cachorro** instead of the proper *rabo de arraia*! **Moral of the story:** *while the mestre tries to protect the student, he forgets to protect himself... the nervous and inexperienced student “invents” unknown and unforeseeable movements, and the mestre gets hit!*

“IT’S NECESSARY TO FALL”

Mestre Bimba introduced the *sequence of throws* so that we would learn to jump with safety, lightness, elegance, grace, agility, and dignity, because “*the fear of falling, like the fear of getting caught, ties up one’s nerves and removes one’s agility!*” And his sayings, which we heard here and there during his lectures – theoretical classes! – between the trainings, alerted us, “**you can fall!** *Just don’t fall with your butt on the ground, or dirty your white pants.*”

³⁹ A throw in which you pull the other person by the mouths of their pants

* This literally means “a dog’s piss” – I’m guessing the new guy kicked his heel straight up and back like dogs do when they urinate.

“You can fall! *Softly like a cotton flower! Fall in the negativa, without dirtying yourself! Leap so that you fall on your feet! Leap, but you have to fall beautifully, on your feet or in the negativa!*” **This is the vaccine against the virus of fear of falling! Moral of the story:** *without the paralysis of fear, the capoeirista becomes loose, quick, light, and free like the wind!*

“THE CADILAC PAINT”

One day, taking advantage of a break between college classes, I arrived at the academy and found the Mestre very satisfied: *“My son! I have just finished doing good business! I bought two gallons of Cadillac paint from a thief for five mil-réis! He said I can sell it at a higher price and earn money!”* I pondered this, and said, “Mestre! I think you bought burnt oil!” He responded, *“but the thief gave me a guarantee that the cans were new!”* The Mestre went to find an old and large screwdriver and we opened the cans. The Mestre commented, *“What a disgrace! He robbed me!”* **Moral of the story:** *even the mestres have their moments of foolishness!* **The naïve side of the capoeira genius!**

“THE HOUSE ON NORTH STREET”

One morning in the Santa Izabel Hospital, I was surprised by a visit from the Mestre. He was very happy and announced enthusiastically, *“I bought a two-story brick house for seventy reis! It’s on North Street and the Amadeu Street, near the house where you used to live. I paid thirty-five and the rest is for the next month!”* I admired, “that’s very inexpensive! Where’s the receipt?” Bimba then showed me a notebook page that said:

“I received from Mr. Manoel dos Reis Machado thirty-five reis as partial payment for the sale of a house on North Street, number such and such, of the property of Mr. So and So.”

Dated and signed,

“Beltrano Malandro” *

.....!!!!!!!!!!!!????????????!!!!!!!!!!!!.....

We then left in my Austin A40 in search of the truth... we found the house empty and locked! The Mestre promised me again, for the umpteenth time, *“Never again will I do business before speaking with you!”* **But he still fell into others...**

“BORROWED MONEY”

Mestre Bimba really liked to get around by taxi. Sometimes he caught a taxi in the Northeast of Amaralina and went to Cabula to borrow a little bit of money! He left the taxi waiting at the door and then returned by taxi to the Northeast! But he never delayed or refused to pay; he was of exemplary behavior! He frequently said, *“The oldest used to guarantee their word with a strand of their mustache! I don’t do this... my word is enough!”* and completed, *“I borrowed some money; I have to pay. I don’t beg!”* **What an admirable world of the old days!**

TEST OF COURAGE

* “Beltrano” means “so-and-so,” and “Malandro” means a wily, street-smart person, or a crook.

Before Cisnando's arrival in Bimba's academy, those wanting to learn capoeira regional were submitted to a test of their courage. They had to endure a headlock from the Mestre for three minutes. *"I don't know which was worse: the squeezing arm or the stench of the sweat!"* A test of fire! *"If they had 'race' and 'endured,'"* they could stay in the group! The only requirement was vigor and courage!

Only after Cisnando appeared did the candidate have to take an *admissions exam* – as in higher education – in order to verify his physical conditions and clarify his social standing: *"Are you a student? An academic? Which school?"* Was his income sufficient *"to pay the monthly dues?"* The social worker was the Mestre himself! The physical exam was very brief and consisted in movements to test the student's flexibility, muscular strength, and balance, because Bimba, like Mestre Pastinha, thought that *"Everyone can learn, the General and also the doctor!"*

THE RIOT OF THE LICEU CINEMA

Around 1932 (?), the cinemas decided to discontinue the 50% student discount. After much deliberation, they reinstated it, with the only exception of the "Liceu Cinema," under the management of Edgard de Barros at the time. The academics of the Medical School, united in General Assembly, decided to have a riot in the installations of the dissident business, at a pre-determined time that would be communicated to whoever was interested.

Cisnando, because of his impetuous nature, bravery, and pugilistic abilities, being a student leader – and even because he liked street riots! – was one of those chosen *"voluntarily" (!?)* to integrate the *"command"* of the intended deed. But on the agreed day and time, the only people who appeared at the place were a *bunch of civil guards*, requested by the cinema's management in order to protect the property.

And Cisnando – self-respecting champion of the Medical School, the most brilliant star of the constellation of “*higher education*” – after consulting his watch to confirm the time, decided to initiate the riot, as determined by the Student Assembly, by himself in the absence of fellow crusaders. Naturally, the *Civil Guard*, which has a more peaceful and civilized rather than fight-like nature, opposed him. It was a short, unequal battle, soon interrupted by the messengers, who brought news that the Liceu Cinema’s management agreed to restore the student discount!

Besides the demonstration of Cisnando’s bravery (or his lack of good sense), the repercussion among the students, and the proof of the efficiency of the *regional martial art* even in conditions of numerical mismatch, the conflict resulted in the appearance of its participants at the neighboring Emergency Hospital, *in whose Medical Record appeared the names of fourteen civil-guards*, previously celebrated for their careful help to the community, and *the name of Cisnando, the academic from Ceará*, with extensive injury from a blow from a nightstick, which was treacherously unleashed by a self-respecting civil-guard who was more alert than brave. They say that the blow didn’t reduce Cisnando’s ardor: the clever soldier had to be carried to the medical post by his friends!

Note: The student communications were responsible for the occurrence... and the marketing advantages were exclusively Mestre Bimba’s!

“BE CAREFUL WITH LEAVING YOUR TONGUE OUT!”

Some students, when anxious or nervous, have the habit of letting their tongue hang out. Aquiles Gadelha’s game was very agitated and rich in quick and violent movements. His younger brother Bolivar’s game was the same way, complicated by the

involuntary extension of the tongue! One day, during one of the throws, Bolivar almost cut off his own tongue when he hit his jaw on his older brother's knee! **The Mestre's Words:** "*Bolivar went to get stitches... and I almost lost my monthly income!*" *Much blood was spilled... it was difficult to eat... time off from training... all caution is still very little!*

“ELITIST?!”

As the first professional capoeira teacher, making his living exclusively from teaching the art and fight, Mestre Bimba maintained “*studying scholarships*” since the beginning of his *courses!* These awards were for those who did not have the financial resources to learn capoeira, but had the merits – courage, strength, agility – or fell in the Mestre's sympathy! I met many – blacks, mulattos, albinos, “phony whites,” carpenters, auto mechanics, tailors, fishermen, soldiers! – a legion of friends, companions, of Smaller Mestres!

I was linked to some of them through the *religious connection* of baptism, “*becoming comrades!*” I was linked to others by a friendship that lasts even beyond their “*passings,*”⁴⁰ in the memories of the “*beautiful game*” that “*I saw, I lived, and I learned!*” From still others, I learned the legends, the heroic deeds that are told, sung, and represented by our tradition, immortalized by our *mixed culture*. I kept a deep memory of all of them, which will accompany me until I meet them again in the eternity of the *final game*.

But, how can the soldier live without his salary? How could the first professional mestre who dedicated his time exclusively to capoeira survive without his monthly pay? If he could not survive, how could he promote his creation? Only the wealthiest would be able to take the place of this necessity; allowing the economic

⁴⁰ Deaths

freedom to teach those who were most in need and those who were most loved! NOTE: My name appeared among those who did not pay the monthly dues, because of the paternal love with which the Mestre blessed me!

“The Mestre was wise, was clever?”

“Oi! Sim! Sim! Sim!”

“The Mestre was an elitist?”

“Oi! Não! Não! Não!”

BIMBA WAS NOT A BATUQUEIRO?!

During lectures with Bimba, I heard references to the ability of his mother – a black woman from Cachoeira, the daughter of Africans – in the practice of *batuque*.^{*} The Mestre used to say that his mother was considered, among *batuqueiros*, as “*good with the legs*”⁴¹ Women from Cachoeira were respected for their combativeness, as the Portuguese of Colonial Brazil said under the testimony of Maria Quitéria!

Bimba spoke of his father as a “*batuqueiro and champion!*” but *he did not make references to his own activity as a batuqueiro!* He always referred me, when I insisted on obtaining information about the steps of this black **pastime**, to Manoel Batuqueiro, who had an abnormal accumulation of fluid in his scrotum the size of a *jaca* fruit and avoided performances because he could not close his thighs – a movement indispensable to the practice of *batuque* – besides being hypertensive and having cardiac problems!

Cisnando found some active *batuqueiros*, with whom he learned to apply the *dourada* and *bandas traçadas*, blows in which he

^{*} *Batuque* is an African dance form that is largely extinct today. Some say that Bimba added some trips from *batuque* into capoeira regional.

⁴¹ Skilled in *batuque* and samba.

exhibited great skill! Thus, even today I am not sure of the direct link of *regional* to *batuque*.

ORIGIN OF THE LUTA REGIONAL BAIANA

The luta regional baiana is directly linked to certain historical facts in the 1930s – to the arrival in Salvador of **Cisnando Lima**, a man from Ceará who was passionate for martial arts, who searched capoeira rodas for a mestre capable of teaching him the warrior dance of the Bahian negroes, the fame of which had reached Ceará! It is fitting to add that the future Dr. Cisnando – renowned psychiatrist, director of a mental hospital, political militant, and president of the Council Chamber of Feira de Santana – was versed in *jiu-jitsu*, which he had learned from Master Takeo Yano. Cisnando also had exceptional physical vigor, increased by weight exercises: according to personal information, he had practiced weightlifting with rocks instead of iron weights since his adolescence.

In a capoeira roda in the neighborhood of Curuzú, he met a gigantic black man called Mestre Bimba, who he soon chose as his master! Cisnando was impressed by the abilities shown and by the clearly superior technique of all those who were present. He submitted to the proof of courage and resistance required to enter Mestre Bimba's roda, and **was the first white student of the dominant social class in Salvador**. He became an exceptional fighter because of his agility, courage, and strength.

We should emphasize that Mestre Bimba always presented capoeira as a "fight," although practiced disguised as a "game" or "playing around." This fit very well with his temperament and behavior during his youth. He used to say that he spent his twentieth birthday in prison – for fighting, naturally.

An idealist by nature, a poet and dreamer, of great intelligence and culture, Cisnando soon induced Mestre Bimba **to enrich the**

fighting potential of the African martial art *by the addition of movements originating from other African cultural processes, as well as other rare movements from other origins*, thus increasing its fighting resources. He also encouraged Mestre Bimba **to register it under a new name, a baptism that would disguise its origin from a legally prohibited activity!** In that historical time, that was the appropriate path for capoeira's introduction into the social structure of the era! **He did not make any modification capable of discharacterizing capoeira itself, or alter its established rituals.** Instead, he made an adaptation to the existing laws in order to protect capoeira's practitioners against the law-enforcers' abuses of power!

In the post-1930-revolution period, the **Sergeant Juracy Montenegro Magalhães** "*was named sergeant inspector,*" as a popular song sang. Magalhães, like Cisnando, was from Ceará, and the two shared friendship and trust. He consented to an exhibition of the "*luta regional baiana*" in a government building. In the 1950s, as State Governor, he permitted another exhibition of Bahian capoeira during a visit to the President of the Republic at the Acclamation Palace.

Dr. Getúlio Vargas was excited and supported the *Luta Regional da Bahia*, as capoeira was presented to him. He allowed himself to be photographed shaking Mestre Bimba's hand. This photograph is kept in the old teaching headquarters on Laranjeiras Street, where it remains displayed for the pride of the black Bahian community. **It is thus that capoeira, under the name "Luta Regional Baiana," won the title of citizenship, escaping marginality and acquiring the right to be freely taught and practiced!** In 1957, in order to frame capoeira within the existing laws, the Mestre was entitled *Instructor of Physical Education* by means of an official diploma signed by Dr. Gustavo Capanema, the Minister of Education at the time.

Note: The only way to include capoeira in the realm of legality, eluding the entanglement of the penal code, was to introduce it

under another name! **The true reason for the young Cisnando's work was the dream of spreading that amazing African martial art among his companions, and to undo the unjust legal discrimination by the dominant social class against a traditional cultural activity of a marginalized majority group. The result was that capoeira won legality at the cost of a convenient baptism, which did not change the African tradition, nor modify its ritual.** Through Mestre Bimba's charisma, black culture was introduced into a western culture and embraced with enthusiasm by the dominant class! It was a work of valorization of African culture and life philosophy, whose fruits we are still collecting!

In this same period, it became fashionable for academics of Higher Education in Salvador to *frequent Mestre Bimba's classes*, which they came to call the "*Academy of Mestre Bimba.*" They created a sporting society, called jokingly "**Club of Unity in Refinement**" – a veiled reference to the old naughty acts of its associates, most of whom were from the land of Iracema (the origin of the tradition of bravery of people from Ceará)!

The practitioners of African descent trained side by side with the youth of the wealthy class. I remember many – Lacerda, Vicente, my friends Brasilino and Atenilio, Manoel Apicum, Manoel Batuqueiro, Compadre Luizinho, my graduation colleague – **ancestors of a species perpetuated in a long sequence**, among which we highlight Suca, Jacinto, Edinho, Bomfim, Edvaldo, Cripim, Geraldo, Braz, and so many others who I can't remember! *We used to admire those descendents of noble African lineage because of the natural elegance of their movements (apparently linked to genetic factors) while we tried to accompany them in the perfection of the practice!*

The implantation of capoeira in Brazilian society was an occurrence that deeply marked our youth, filling our imagination and behavior with the smooth African cultural

perfume! Some of us proudly received the sacraments of the *orixás*, and we religiously continue to fulfill our ritual obligations! **Capoeira did not change to fit our society; instead, society was transformed by the African philosophy enclosed in the rituals of capoeira and candomblé, which clearly originate in black culture!**

“PARROT BEAKS”

Mestre Bimba had Paget’s disease,* and he was a clinical case that demonstrated that it was possible to live with the disease and maintain sporting activity – capoeira, naturally! One beautiful day, Mestre Bimba “*did a number on his knee... had water in the knee.*” I took the Mestre to Dr. José Sobrinho, *Zico*, Chief of Radiology Service of the Santa Izabel Hospital. He suspected Paget’s disease, and confirmed the diagnosis with radiography of the pelvis, spine, and skull. The Mestre’s hat had already started to get tight, and he had already bought a bigger one. His spinal column was filled with “*parrot beaks*” – it was already possible to retire to the “*institute*”!

...and the capoeira classes?! In despair, we took over the classes and began to use high doses of medication (Primanabol, 1 pill per week) in addition to local treatment and rest, naturally. In this way, we managed to slow the progress of the sickness. The Mestre regained his mobility and returned to capoeira practice with the recommended prudence to avoid pulling out new students from then on! – by my medical recommendation!

Apart from a *sneaky little pain when he got up from the hammock* from which he gave his speeches and enjoyed a cigar in our headquarters at the Caruano Site, Bimba did not show evidence of spinal pain until his last days here in Salvador! It is a case for

* Paget’s disease is a metabolic bone disease characterized by the formation of soft bone, or excess bone.

study, a proof that *“there’s no point for a parrot to poke his beak into the spine of a capoeirista,”* or in other words, *“play capoeira, and live happily!”* Or, as our old Mestre would say, **“capoeira also works wonders for the spine, Mr. Doctor!”**

“YOU LIKED HER? YOU CAN HAVE HER!”

The Mestre went to the South for presentations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with the goal of *“picking up some small change,”* already a common fact in the life of the *“Liberator of Capoeira.”*

This wasn’t out of the ordinary for his wife, who was the only one to receive the blessing of the Ecclesiastic ritual and the approval of the marriage authority, with the right to a pure wedding dress, sermon, speeches, presents from friends and students, etc.

Bimba had gone over to a candomblé temple, where he enjoyed spiritual and nuptial assistance in a new union. The clever *pai de santo* waited during the Mestre’s prolonged absence; obviously the occurrence brought us great apprehensions. Bimba’s jovial reaction, however, offered us a lesson of serenity and justice worthy of *“São Salomão”*:

“Since you liked her, you can have her... I don’t want her anymore!” He left the older woman in the *pai de santo*’s door and found a younger, more beautiful, *“more sweet-smelling”* woman, *“to take care of the girls!”*

Nevermore did I want to know, either as a priest or as a judge, about his conjugal relationships!

THE PROFESSOR OF SURGERY

The prejudice of the dominant class against African activities did not disappear despite the acclamation of capoeira by the academics of Salvador – especially among the famous, cultured, educated members of the Councils of Higher Education – until at least the 1960s! The fact that we are about to narrate was true, and upsetting, because of the restriction of the free practice of a healthy activity like our capoeira.

In a *graduation party* at Caruano, which was filmed by a local TV station, *a professor of surgery* appeared during the exhibition, *playing capoeira among his medical students and other practitioners of the clever art!!!* This was reason enough for another professor in the Department of Surgery to call a meeting of the Administrative Council in order to dismiss the professor for lack of “*teaching decorum*”! If not for the intervention of the School Director (a man who loved sports, youth, and life in general) the School would have lost its most famous capoeirista!

The director recovered the Council’s good sense by highlighting the fact that Prof. Botelho (at the time, the greatest South American authority on pathology) had started his conference at an International Congress of Gastroenterology one hour late because he had lost track of time while practicing his favorite sport – *judo*, which is a martial art like capoeira!

Many serious people criticize others for that which they do not have the courage or strength to do themselves! “Whoever doesn’t have joints cannot play capoeira!” as the Honorable Mestre Besouro Mangangá would say!

THE ARRIVAL OF THE INATTENTIVE (BETRAYED) HUSBAND*

The obedience that we gave to the mestre resulted from our belief *in the sincerity that impregnated his words!* The story of Humberto, our contemporary in the old Bahia Gym, is a marked example. *Humbertão*, as the newest students affectionately called him, was a large, intelligent, and very quick athlete. He distinguished himself in all the sports, including boxing and in exercises with machines. He trained capoeira in a private class on the second floor.

One beautiful day, while the Mestre strung the berimbau, Humberto asked calmly, “*Mestre! If you were here with a woman, and her husband suddenly arrived, what would you do?*” Mestre Bimba, without lifting his head, responded, “*I’d jump out the window.*” – “*From the second floor?!*” – “*Of course!*” The Mestre heard a thump, lifted his head, looked and did not find Humberto in the room. He went to the window and looked down, and heard Humberto say, limping a little: “*Mestre! It’s possible!*”

THE “SPEAKER”

During my whole time as a student, I was the “*official speaker*” of Bimba’s events; sometimes I was also the businessman, other times the salesman. Bimba made a point of clarifying the origin of capoeira – especially of regional – and the concept of candomblé! “*Candomblé isn’t folklore! It’s a sect! It’s a religion! It merits respect!*” Eventually, my teaching and medical duties prevented me from taking these opportunities to learn and communicate with the visitors of the “Caruano Site.” The role remained “*ad hoc*,” being filled by Medicina, Alegria, Zezito,

* In Portuguese, it says “dis...traído.” *Distraído* means inattentive, and *traído* means betrayed.

until a famous Law student – who possessed refinement, purity of language, and oratory skills – took the job! *It is thus that Jaffé was my successor in the “confidence” of the Mestre!*

THE CELL OF THE PARTY

Mestre Bimba did not have a political position... outside his brilliant aspect in the field of martial arts, he was characterized by a child-like naïveté! This led his good faith to be exploited, whether in the economic aspect (as in the case of his *capoeira CD*, which we will explain later in a separate document) or the political aspect (in which he was almost involved by one of his students, who, fascinated by Marxist doctrine, installed a communist cell in the *regional* headquarters without the group’s knowledge, using the charismatic figure of our mestre to benefit his own political ideals).

Noticing the consequences of the permission that he had given to this student, the Mestre sought us out and asked our opinion about the subject. We recommended that he *not let himself get involved* in politics, since our group was a sporting society independent of the political position of its students – and the Mestre sensibly withdrew his authorization! Oh, frivolity of youth that the wind carries away, and that age extinguishes.

I must highlight that **the Mestre did demonstrate a political tendency in some respect!** Even though he had some students who sympathized with Marxism, **his “party” was always “regional”!** His life was always guided by a single objective – capoeira, the regional martial art – under whose light all facts were perceived and understood!

THE CAPOEIRA FESTIVAL

Under the presidency of Mr. Fauzi Abdala João, the Bahian Fighting Federation, interested in the union of all the schools and styles of capoeira, promoted a festival for the reconciliation of the capoeira schools and the awarding of Medals of Honor to Mestres Pastinha and Bimba for their relevant work in capoeira's development. *The intention was to close the rifts of capoeira into discordant groups.* This had already been negotiated through Perez, a prominent student of Pastinha and member of his academy's administration, who was intelligent and dedicated to his Mestre! We had already managed to play in other Mestres' rodas, especially those of Mestres Valdemar and Traíra, who were the most democratic and receptive without the traditional irritations! Mestre Pastinha also accepted our presence in a friendly manner! The only thing remaining was the final approximation between the two oldest and most stubborn mestres. So we went to the Bahian Fighting Federation and watched **the Mestres deliver the medals to each other, with a final handshake sealing the pacification.** The event was very well organized and peaceful, with open doors, each school presenting and exhibiting what they did best! Bimba put the medal around Mestre Pastinha's neck and shook his hand, respectful and disciplined as always!

THE MUNICIPAL BUROCRACY

Sutursa maintained a tourist service on the "Belvedere" and brought visitors to capoeira *rodas*. They preferred, however, the exhibitions of a company employee to Mestre Bimba's. This embittered our Mestre, who felt unjustly discriminated against, since he was an ex-gym-colleague of the Superintendent. At the Mestre's request, I went to find him, confident in the Superintendent's friendship and honesty, in the hope of rectifying the situation. I was surprised with the statement that *the Mestre's*

capoeira was just a disfigurement of the real, “folkloric” capoeira, and should never be shown to the tourists. Myopia?! Astigmatism?! Elitism?! Stupidity?!

And the Mestre, not understanding, mused, “*Why not me! Who recuperated and raised up capoeira! Who removed capoeira from under the hoof of the ox!*” With his naïveté, the Mestre could never perceive the web of various interests – human, emotional, political, economic, religious, whether justified or not – that surround our acts, ideas, and ideals! He was limited to suffering, bitter and perplexed, the efficiency of the socio-economic system! **Deception and bitterness were the fuels that fed the motors that drove him far away from his beloved Bahia!** *The dry fog of the tears that he did not cry darkened his vision of the world, hid the horizon, and drove him to the grave!*

THE PARTY IN MATARIPE

“Vermelho” always enjoyed a special place together with the Mestre. In the *roda*, he was recognized by the beauty of his choreography and by the efficiency of his technique! His smooth and leisurely way of speaking – very much the manner of people of the Bahian bay area, and of capoeiristas! – reflected the rhythm of his game: clever, cunning, serpentine! During the preparations for the Mestre’s trip, he organized in Mataripe the last public demonstration in Bahia, *the send-off that became “goodbye”!* The income from this demonstration was given to the Mestre; it was *the students’ help and gratitude to the mestre* who was leaving! The Mestre had chosen Vermelho as the mestre who would be able to handle the responsibility of overseeing his *academy*, showing abounding proof of his trust!

Vermelho did not induce the Mestre to travel. He did not take advantage of the Mestre’s unhappy situation; he did not receive the *academy* in exchange for money. Bimba’s decision to travel was a free one, so Vermelho should not be criticized! I believe

that, if the Mestre had returned to Bahia, Vermelho, faithful as always, *would return the “chair” to the Mestre or to his heirs, as their right! Even for the name that ennobles it!*

THE TRIP TO GOIÂNIA

The Mestre’s move to Goiânia, which I prefer to call a ***flight from bitterness and disillusionment***, was rooted in his deep displeasure from the lack of recognition of his historical and cultural importance by our public powers. In his naïveté, *he believed piously that*, given the value of his work in the field of Bahian folklore – for the recuperation of the maculelê tradition, for the development of capoeira, for the spreading of candomblé in the academic environment of Salvador and in the Northeast – *the public power should provide his support and enable the necessary means for his work!* Every day his frustration and bitterness grew, to the point of darkening his appreciation of daily life. During years, I lived with his resentment; during years, I tried to comfort him in repeated private conversations. I tried to dissuade him from the fixed idea that tormented him; I appealed to the filial love that I had for him after so many years of accompaniment and teaching. I always reaffirmed the promise that *“Wherever you are, I will treat you as my father!”* so much had I learned to love him and respect him! After so many years of our relationship, he had no reason to worry about the future!

The trip occurred after months of elevated expenses, forced by the collection of four or five *yaôs* in the *roncô** of Mãe Alice, resulting from lack of payment of the cost of his *obligations*. The extreme good behavior of the mestre, his respect for the *Orixás*, and his faithfulness to ancestral beliefs obligated him to assume the burden. The Mestre insisted, *“The tourists come from the South to appreciate the exhibitions... if I lived there it would be*

* I don’t know what this phrase means; sorry. Something to do with candomblé, obviously. If you know, e-mail me.

easier to do demonstrations!” He dreamed of “*installing a temple in the south for Alice to read shells and do her work...*” and emphasized, “*in Goiânia the mayor got up on stage to shake my hand... here?! The mayor doesn’t even know me! If I do a demonstration here, the cinema doesn’t fill up like it does there!”* **None of his students encouraged his trip;** all the advice was against it.

His fascination for the trip was so much that he sold the headquarters, rented on weekend nights, for five hundred mil-reis per month, for some few reis to be paid in monthly installments of five hundred mil-reis... and of these payments he received only two! On the day before his trip, I was in Nair’s house and I met with Osvaldo – the sponsor of Bimba’s move – who confided in me that he was worried about the Mestre’s survival, given the number of people – **twenty-three!!!?** – who were going to accompany him. ***It is not fair to blame Osvaldo or any other student for Bimba’s move to Goiânia!*** Bimba always told me, “*The capoeira academy is like a man’s house... it can only have one lord! The academy can only have one mestre!*” and the Mestre left to teach in Mestre Osvaldo’s academy. When he left here, I was certain that I would never see him again!

The information collected by Mestre Nenel, who I consider my brother, show that the mestre’s death has its roots in a remote past. Mestre Bimba had asthma, which Dr. Cisnando taught him how to treat with the injection of adrenaline, as was the custom of the time. Bimba continued to use this medication secretly, despite my warnings, because it provided immediate relief. He didn’t pay attention to the medication’s hypertensive effect, because it didn’t affect him when he was young. In Goiânia, bitter, tense, poor, with enormous expenses, his blood pressure was elevated, and the old heart no longer supported the burden imposed by hypertension and depression. *Upon perceiving an asthmatic attack, he once again resorted to the habitual medication.* It is also possible that the initial “*lack of air*” was provoked by a purely emotional hypertensive crisis aggravated by the

epinephrine, which triggered the cerebral condition that brought him to the grave. **It is not fitting to blame anyone for the Mestre's death...** only to lament the fatality!

REFLECTIONS

CAPOEIRA IS JUST ONE!

We are all capable of recognizing a capoeira game by the collection of movements, rhythm, and melody, despite being a multifaceted, eminently individual process filled with distinguishing characteristics that give it a unique and unmistakable individuality! **“Each capoeirista represents a new style!”** This is easily understood with the knowledge that capoeira is a motor activity *that exteriorizes the individuality* of each practitioner, in all his/her neuro-psycho-socio-cultural complexity. Each one shows his/her identity *in the collection of movements and in the details of each movement!*

Mestre Bimba used to say, *“Each one has his own way of giving his blows and doing his movements!”* and responded, when I asked about someone’s game, *“it’s his way!”* Other times he told me, *“If you remove this defect, another appears!”* **Capoeira itself, because it is primarily a style of living, a philosophy of life, a way of being, because it is included in a social environment, because it exists in a determined historical moment, receives socio-politico-cultural influences, and modifies its environment in a continuous dialectic process!**

The capoeira that I see today still pleases me, even though it is very different from the capoeira that I watched and practiced in my youth! I can even think that – and this is a quirk of old age! – *“in my time it was better!”* In reality, *better and worse do not exist – just different! – in a historical and cultural evolutionary process that changes every moment!* In the same way, if we observe a capoeirista *over the course of his life*, we will certainly find **variations in his conduct, his philosophy, and his movements, without losing his personality!** These things change because **the historical environment is no longer the same!**

These considerations permit the conclusion that **each mestre**, being an individual personality with his own identity, **creates a style** that he transmits to his descendents. We can even conclude

that socio-cultural influences add details into the capoeira paradigm of capoeira of that era! *Despite its great men*, humanity has its own trajectory. We live at each instant, breathing and incorporating into our conduct imponderable elements *from all those, great and small, who preceded us* in the long path that history makes us travel!

It is thus that in a certain historical moment it was necessary to *disguise capoeira under the mantle of a Bahian regional martial art* in order to elude the existing penal process. It is a similar thing to what happened in *candomblé, with the acceptance of Christian nomenclature of its orixás* **without losing its authenticity!** *It is the price of survival for both cultural processes! The ritual, the heart of the matter, in both cases remains intact until today. This testifies to the wisdom of African conduct and philosophy, of indirect resistance, of dodging, of disguising one's purpose – characteristics of capoeira!*

“CAPOEIRA IS THE MOTHER OF ALL MARTIAL ARTS”

*Homage to Ney Berimbau, the passion for the art of capoeira!
To Emo, the dream of capoeira!
And to Paulo, the awakening of India!*

This masterful phrase of the Mestre really expresses the potential enclosed in this playful game of Bahian blacks, as we will try to demonstrate by the analysis of his way of being. We can see by simple everyday observation in the rodas *that the hallmark of capoeira as a physical activity is the obedience to the rhythm and melody of that which conducts its movements – the berimbau! The cabaça vibrating in resonance with the single chord prolongs and modulates the dry sound of the impact of the vareta by the lengthening of its duration, thus permitting the harmonic fusion*

of successive notes, without harming the rhythm of the caxixi or the toneless beat of the pandeiros! As if each note brought inside it a little bit of the previous note and echoed the next, uniting the “Past” and the “Future” in the presence of the “now”!

Africa and India side by side in search of the Unity of Being, singing “THE FUTURE IS NOW!” “I-ê-ê- viva Krishnamurti! Camará!” Independent of the nature of the movement, of its intention or way of doing it, as long as it fits in the rhythm-melody line, like a verse in poetry, thus conserving “the harmony of what passed and what is yet to come,” “it is capoeira... yes sir!”

Seen in this way, the movements of all martial arts and dances, **all the movements that arise from the human body** – naturally like rain from the cloud, like breeze from the air, like waves from the sea – in concordance with the rhythm-melody of the berimbau, “are capoeira! Yes Sir!”

“THE MOTHER OF ALL MARTIAL ARTS!”

THE METAPHYSICS OF CAPOEIRA

Capoeira is reminiscent of ritual dance since it is a form of physical expression of the Being as a unit! The gestures, the movements, and the attitudes reflect what is going on inside the Being, even on a subconscious or unconscious level. They express the current will, which does not belong to just one practitioner, but instead to the collection of beings under the reign of the music. The process occurs as though there were a fusion of the beings participating in the game, in a way in which both know in some way the current state of the other, in a non-temporal and non-spatial communication similar to the satori, or integration on a spiritual level!

The will of each Being is to affirm his superiority through the ritual dance. There is an interaction on a subconscious or unconscious level between the two participants that permits the affirmation of the *dominant will* through gestures, movements, and attitudes that are capable of making the *dominated will* adopt gestures, movements, and attitudes that demonstrate *the dominion of the dominating will!* By personal experience in the practice of capoeira, I can state that **it is possible to lead the other player to put himself in a position that is favorable to the application of a certain blow, to make him lose the capacity for defense or attack,** as occurs in the “*cornering*”!

The **cornering** is a situation created in a capoeira game in which one of the players is put in a situation similar to that of an animal driven to the corral by the cowboy, through gestures, maneuvers, or commands of another nature – with the characteristic that *to the one cornered there is no alternative but obedience!* Under the martial arts point of view, it corresponds to the *immobilization (gatame) in the ground fight (newaza) of judo*. It is differentiated by the subtlety of the *cornering*, which is the fruit of ritual gestures rather than the direct use of force and technique by contact! In both sporting activities **exists the meeting and fusion of Beings whose wills oppose each other!** In both, the phenomenon of *direct perception and prediction of the other’s behavior* can occur – this too I know by personal experience!

When I reached a certain level in the Japanese martial art, *I noticed that I did not observe or sense the opponent’s presence of movements with the typical sensory organs; I just knew what he was going to do.* Mestre Yoshida clarified – cheerful, happy, smiling – “*you learned judo! More or less seventh dan!*” After the initial phase of shock and natural euphoria, I remembered that in capoeira it was the same thing: to “*arm the lasso,*” *one must know what the other player will do... to “corner,” one must anticipate what the other player will do...* The Japanese state that their martial art is the path (*do*) of learning softness (*ju*)... the

Brazilians recognize that **capoeira is the path of learning the way of being!**

PARTICIPATION OF THE AUDIENCE

Bimba, faithful to African customs, always insisted on the *audience's participation in the chorus*. He emphasized *accompanying the orchestra with the beat of clapping hands*. As a young man from a Catholic culture, unaccustomed to socio-tribal refinements, I did not notice the African subtlety! Today, the broader conception of the universe (*multidimensional!* says Modern Physics... *multivibrational!* add the metaphysicists) reveals the old ones' depth of perception!

By the chorus of clapping, the Mestre made the audience into a gigantic amplifier of the capoeira roda's vibrations, thus generating an immense energy field that surrounded us. *It was an atmosphere of unison, building in all the peoples' hearts a great community through the integration in one spirit. The singing in chorus, the clapping on beat and the rhythm/melody of the berimbau* surpass the limits of matter, reaching by harmonic vibration *the supreme ecstasy, the global consciousness, the collective trance.*

Zenafricanism?! African Wisdom?! TRANSPERSONAL CAPOEIRA?!

APPLIED PEDAGOGY

Bimba was much more than a simple mestre of capoeira. He was a great psychologist, a genius capable of grafting into the heart of a young man **the fascination with courage alongside prudence** in order to defend himself against the *malícia* that awaits him at each crossroads of life! His stories, his humorous sayings, and his

unique gestures magically transported us *to the theater of life where we lived his experience without the costly suffering of practice!* **In each story there was an example!** – a danger to be skirted, a warning, an alert, a teaching – **in each saying there was a lesson to be lived!**

He went years on end without emptying his repertoire. I spent hours entranced, accompanying his narrations, *always learning about human nature and situations of life!* It was an enormous shadow that often protected me in dangerous conditions that I had already experienced in the magic of his stories!

“Even being brave has its time!”

“A stupid tough guy dies before his time!”

THE MESTRE’S HUMILITY

Despite the false halo of “*ferocity*,” our Mestre had great humility, which allowed him to learn with our constant questions, suggestions, and such things. **The only thing he didn’t like was “if”!** When he heard, “*if I did this or that, to get out of this or that?!*” **without demonstrating in practice**, he would let loose a burst of laughter and sarcastically comment, “**If! If! If?! That’s the speech of a cicada!**”*

There was Cisnando, Rui, Galba, Delsimar, Mané Rozendo, Brasilino, Jacinto, passing to Aquiles, Maia, Luizinho, Rubinho, Edinho, Clarindo, Augusto, Geraldo, Helio Noronha, Norman, Zezito, Adib, Camixa Roxa, Humberto Noronha, Filhote de Onça, Cascavel, Saci, Piloto, Jesus, Acordeon, Itapoan, Vermelho 27, Miranda, and so many others! All conversed, discussed, and innovated names, techniques, throws, sequences, equipment, exercises, movements, stories, humorous sayings, playfulness,

* Makes more sense in Portuguese: the word for “if” is “se.” Thus, “se! se! se!” is reminiscent of the chirping of a cicada.

and anecdotes, which the Mestre heard, thought about, gave his approval or not, and integrated into the repertory or not! A facet of *“African wisdom... Humility... to be able to learn with everyone!”* Thus *“regional” never stopped growing... and evolving!*

“TURN OF THE WORLD”

African Wisdom, like that of Lao-Tsé, is full of allusions to the opportunity of acts, attitudes, and words. “Wait for exactly the right time!” It is the **insertion of the part in context, of the instant in time:** *“it’s his way... fruit comes only with time!”* **Situations succeed each other in a circular continuum, the bipolar cycle,** *“the turn of the world”* – beautiful and dangerous, playfulness and fight, flourish and attack, escape and counterattack, easy and difficult...

Like *Modern Physics*, capoeira gives a place to the **principle of uncertainty:** *“Who knows?” “Who goes there?” “Do floreios to hide the blows...” “The mandinga...” “The malicia...”* “every movement is born from one before it...” **“and who knows what comes after?”**

“THE GOLDEN KEY”

Dedicated to all who played in the capoeira roda, who lived capoeira in the roda of life – as though life was just a game, without winners or losers – for the pleasure of the game, having “THE MESTRE” as “REFEREE”!

Bimba used to close capoeira parties and exhibitions with a special game among the best participants – *“the golden key”* of that event. *It was an apotheosis involving the whole audience, a glorious demonstration that the soul of capoeira is born in the*

heart of the capoeirista, is sung in the voice of the berimbau, resounds in the orchestra, animates the capoeiristas, and, by the magic of communication, transforms the audience into a cosmic entity – our own divine origin!

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WHISTLE

During all the years that I accompanied the mestre's activities, although I was used to seeing the *whistle* hanging from his neck or wrist, and seeing it used in the command of the orchestra and the control of the beginning and end of each "*round*," I didn't pay attention to its importance! In reality I wasn't fond of its use, because it reminded me of a samba school, a traffic inspector, a night guard, or a soccer referee. Perhaps this dislike prevented me from seeing its importance clearly, as I do now.

The absence of the Mestre and the memory of his presence make a contrast that allows me to distinguish small nuances in the development of today's rodas, which demonstrate the whistle's importance. I will try to explain its relevance and highlight the reasons for its use, comparing the modern unfolding of demonstrations and trainings with that which I was used to seeing.

During classes, the Mestre played the berimbau and *did not use the pandeiro or the whistle*. **In demonstrations**, he did not play the berimbau; *he used the whistle and required the pandeiro*. **In classes**, the toque of the berimbau controlled the duration of each round. The Mestre, attentive to the players' movements, when he perceived that one was tiring, or any other reason that would require the activity to stop, **he suspended the toque** and stopped the game! Obviously, the beginning was marked with the berimbau toque, except for the **sequence of throws**, which obeyed a *verbal command*. The smaller number of participants and *the absence of an audience and of external interference in the students' behavior* justified this practice. Secondly, we should

consider the fact that the students were under the direct control of the Mestre, attentive to the learning, **under a calmer rhythm** guided by the Mestre himself, *without the excitation of the corridos, of clapping, or of the orchestra*. This generated a **calmer behavior**.

In demonstrations, the leadership of the Mestre extended to the students, the audience, and the orchestra, besides having responsibility for the demonstration itself. *This required a series of adjustments for better control.* The first method adopted was **to delegate the toque of the berimbau to others**; the cost of professional players *obligated the mestre to reduce the number of instruments to the minimum!* The second measure was the **use of the whistle** to command the beginning of the toques and avoid the interruption of the orchestra when each game ended. *At the first sound of the whistle, the orchestra began to play, and it would only stop when the mestre gave a long whistle and raised both arms – the Mestre functioning as maestro!* The capoeiristas waited at the foot of the berimbau for the signal of “*volta do mundo*” in the Mestre’s song, or the *short whistle* that authorized the **beginning** of the game. The **interruption** of the game was commanded by *the mestre giving a long whistle and raising one arm – the Mestre functioning as arbiter.*

The necessity of the shrill sound of the whistle is evident when we consider the total sum of the orchestra, the singing, and the enthusiasm of the participants. We highlight that the risk of accidents *due to the tiring of one participant that goes unperceived by his partner* can only be avoided by the attentive eye of the Arbiter – as Bimba did! *The Mestre interrupted the game upon observing tiring, incitement of violence, or exaggerated acceleration of the orchestra rhythm because of the excessive enthusiasm of the players, thus avoiding possible accidents!*

The whistle was also used as a signal of beginning and end when we trained rapidity of movements in the course of specialization.

In the practices of *suffocating* and of *taking a weapon*, the whistle was indispensable! It was thus that the whistle **was a big factor in the safety of regional!**

ADDENDUM

Prof. Pierre Fatumbi Verger offered me a copy of a tape recorded in the Republic of Benin, in the city of Ilexá, in a Temple of Logunedê, in periodic meetings of Babalorixás for the teaching of legends and stories, the relating of community news, and the reinforcement of the basic cultural foundation of the social group. In this tape we find passages of various ways of speaking about the current subject, demonstrating the tonal rhyme and meter of the diverse ways of elocution and chant. Besides the rhythmic-melodious richness, **we find the use of the whistle to command the ceremony**, interrupting the orchestra at appropriate times and demonstrating the origin of the whistle's use in the command of the orchestras of samba schools, folkloric musical groups, and capoeira orchestras. **In truth it can be treated as an African tradition that has survived throughout the times – yet another reason for its preservation in our days!**

TECHNICAL SUPPLEMENT

Dedicated to the mestres who live day-to-day teaching the *art of São Salomão...*

To the “oldest ones” who practiced capoeira and who still feel the swing of the berimbau and desire to return *to that time!*
What a beautiful time!

To all the laymen with our apologies for the dullness of the obscure descriptions, which require practical demonstrations in the presence of a mestre!

**LETTERS-RESPONSES
TO MESTRE NENEL**

1. HOW AND WHEN DID YOU ENTER IN THE ACADEMY?

In the youth of my epoch, capoeira excited a fascination resulting from the legendary figures that emerged from the era of slavery as heroes, semi-gods sculpted in ebony by the oral tradition of our Recôncavo, celebrated because of their bravery in defense of the slaves and their ability to escape from the executioners. They were symbols of humble people's resistance to the oppression of the slave masters, and they were honored for their ability to escape the ambushes of "police soldiers" and those called "capitães do mato."* The villains of those legends were my idols – *secretly!* – since they were forbidden to be admired by the Christian culture of Portuguese origin in which I was born and raised!

At 18 years old I enrolled in CPOR, where Major Freitas, our Commander, had installed a course of *Luta Regional Baiana*. I communicated to my "superiors" that I was signed up for a course of "Luta Regional" in the "Barbalho Barracks." "Capoeira!?" ... "Never!" my superiors would say. I paid 2000 reis for the enrollment. I took a fall backwards and hit the back of my head on the ground, earning a praise – "Branco raçudo!"** – and the friendship of the man who for me was a model of behavior, bravery, strength, loyalty, and intelligence, alongside the naïveté, purity, and spontaneity of a child. "A little heart of Erê*** in the magnificence of an Orixá." Here and there I was treated like a son by a myth incarnate, who still represents the image of Friend, of Father, of Mestre! I didn't "enter" into the academy... I "stayed" in the academy; I "entered" into the family of he who was and always will be **the Idol, the Mestre, the Guru... in whose shadow we will always be Eternal Followers!**

* "Captains of the forest" – those sent to re-capture escaped slaves

** Loosely translated as, "White guy with guts!"

*** The *erê* is the part that links a human being to his orixá

2. WHAT WAS THE SYSTEM AND TEACHING METHOD LIKE?

Upon arriving in Mestre Bimba's roda, I found his system and teaching method already established. The "*Creation*" was complete; soon the "*Evolution*" would enter into the scene, as Darwin would say, if he was Bahian like Dorival Caymi!

The **system** was based on three fundamental points. **The first pillar** was *frequent, careful, respectful, and disciplined practice, obeying the dominant medical-sporting precepts of the time.* There was nothing of excess, because "*too much exercise is bad for your heart!*" The dominant medical doctrine affirmed that too much effort overexerted the heart muscle without increasing its microcirculation, creating an anomalous situation, as the studies proved... and all said, "Amen"!

The Mestre sat us on the bench "*to rest,*" in agreement with "*the doctors,*" "*in order not to lose my monthly income.*" Although this medical advice was prescribed by the dominant European culture and Mestre Bimba was, above all, black, he still cared for the sons of the fine flower of Bahian society, and he was definitely not stupid! All caution was little! It was a rigid supervision, one firmly rooted in Medicine that Cisnando brought from the University to the *Academy* – "A conviction of modernity," as we would say today.

The second pillar was *rhythm.* The innate musicality of the Mestre and of Tradition made the berimbau into the center from which radiated the capoeira that dominated us. There was a general preoccupation with learning the toques and the conviction that *without knowing the toques, no one could learn capoeira.* Everyone bought berimbaus and was instructed in how to handle them, although not all of them succeeded in dominating the art!

The third pillar was the development of marking blows. The repeated practice – without violence – of the teaching sequences, as well as the frequent games with various partners, solidified one's reflexes and one's ability to visualize possible situations. It was enough for us to notice that we could have applied the hit. We disguised the attack movement in a collection of floreio movements, so that our partner would not discover our true objective in time!

The Mestre's wisdom was manifested in the philosophy that it's better not to hit; when the opponent gets you, learn and prevent it! **"It's better to hide your game, so that you can use your attack in a moment of necessity!"** We called this strategy of disguise "cleverness" or "mandinga" – "to arm the lasso to catch the other player!" **The highest level of skill was to acquire the certainty of our technical superiority without the opponent even noticing!**

Thus, it was enough for us to see, by the "marked blow," the "hole" in the opponent's "guard"; to conceive the viability of the attack; to disguise our potential attack with floreio movements so that the opponent did not notice and defend himself or counter-attack. *The iúna* is clever, when it is on the water fountain, it was smart, it was quick, but capoeira caught it! Camará!* Summarizing, **whoever hit others was stupid!**

The blow only had to reach the other player in order to teach him to cover an opening in his guard! It was doing him a favor – showing him a defect in his defense – a proof of consideration and trust!

Whenever there was distrust – since we also had our quirks, our differences, our dislikes, our schisms – we kept secret the things we had noticed, "for a moment of necessity!" This was the "system" that guaranteed the success of the "method."

* An iúna is a bird.

The “*method*” was clear, simple, healthy, and effective: *to begin with isolated, simple, and safe movements in order to develop the muscular strength and balance necessary for the practice of the sport. Other simple movements guaranteed the safety of the dodges and helped one get accustomed to descending quickly without fear of reaching the ground, and finally, to accompany the attack movement, escaping the impact. There was a last group of movements that prepared the students to leap in the appropriate direction before the threat of being thrown, and thus lose the fear of being knocked down! “It’s necessary to leap before being knocked down!”*

3. WHAT DOES THE EXPRESSION “CAPOEIRA REGIONAL” MEAN TO YOU?

Capoeira in its origin was just one. The figure of Mestre Bimba provoked a split from the roots *with the creation of the Luta Regional Baiana in order to escape the prohibition of its practice by the penal code!* Caribé’s expression, “*Bimba is the Lutheran of capoeira*” describes the greatness of his figure well. Despite the modification in the initial conditions, respect for our tradition obliges us to conserve the name of *capoeira regional* – a strange name, but one that is consecrated by its use for the style created by Mestre Bimba.

4. HOW DID REGIONAL ARISE?

Capoeira was classified as *vagrancy* by the penal code, *and punished with prison. Until the law was modified, there was no way for its public practice to be allowed.* With the complaisance of the federal government, the *Luta Regional Baiana* was registered – similar to capoeira in everything *except the name*. Since it was not called “capoeira,” it could be freely

practiced. The Ministry of Education limited the teaching of Physical Education to licensed professors and instructors – but **yet again Dr. Getúlio Vargas supported the *Luta Regional Baiana!*** Mr. Manoel dos Reis Machado received from the Ministry of Education the necessary diploma of *Physical Education Instructor*, necessarily signed by Dr. Gustavo Capanema! *The first “Academy” of the Luta Regional Baiana* thus arose, marking *capoeira’s liberation!* It is thus that even capoeira of the Angola style benefited from the creation of Regional!

5. WHAT WAS REGIONAL LIKE WHEN YOU STARTED TO PRACTICE?

When I began learning capoeira and idolizing the Mestre, we joyfully obeyed his commands; I can say that I had the pleasure of observing the **Golden Age of Regional!** The general scheme of the practice of “*regional*” in that time is described in these texts.

6. HOW WAS THE GROWTH OF REGIONAL?

It obeyed the line indicated by the constant wisdom and leadership of the Mestre – except for small discrepancies, like the separation of Mestre Senna and the appearance of Mestre Aristides, ***the first capoeira regional generated outside Bimba’s Academy and the confirmation of the value of Bimba’s style in the capoeira community.***

Carlos Senna, whose presence in capoeira’s evolution is significant, carried out the first official capoeira competition *as a martial art*. It occurred in the Bahian Tennis Club, and we participated as representatives of the Bahian Fighting Federation

and its President, Fauzi Abdala João, and as part of the Arbiter Commission. In addition, Senna established a *system of graduation*, capable of stimulating the study and development of capoeira, and initial work on the regulation of capoeira as a sport. He separated himself from the regional style and created a technique for collective training – **Stylized Capoeira**, similar to the Eastern arts, modeled on Military Physical Education classes. This style was later improved upon by Mestre Acordeon and Mestre Onça, in São Paulo and later in the United States. Senna – with his idealistic, impulsive, controversial, passionate and extroverted temperament – installed in the U.S. a sporting complex, *SENNAVOX*, where he developed a fruitful and tenacious work for the propagation of capoeira, with the tone of military discipline. If he had given greater emphasis to the presence of the berimbau, the repercussions of his method would be greater and better!

Mestre Aristides was not a direct student of Mestre Bimba, but he adopted the *regional* style since the beginning. He developed a pioneering work, *teaching the regional style to children* in elementary schools under the reign of the berimbau. He has been a key player, together with Mestre Itapoan, in the implantation of capoeira in education!

With Mestre Bimba's disappearance, capoeira regional lost its compass and suffered a transformation, which doesn't seem to me to be good. *It began obeying the impulses of false efficiency by the speed and violence of the movements, without the protection of dodges and the prudence that are only developed by playing the close, inside game under the aegis of the berimbau!*

7. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL?

I believe that the predominant style of today in the rodas of *capoeira regional* diverges from the traditional teachings of the Mestre in the following points:

Disobedience to the rhythm of the orchestra
 Ginga outside the beat
 Jumping ginga
 Lack of marked blows
 Inopportune and violent blows
 Excessive separation between the competitors
 Useless, harmless movements outside the rhythm of the berimbau
 Exposure of vital areas of the body during the movements of
 attack, defense, dodge, and floreio
 Ginga with the guard open
 Lack of the low game
 Lack of floreio movements in ginga
 Poverty of sequences, floreio, and “throws.”
 Tense and hard musculature

Since my epoch, the stereotype of “fight” included violence, the wear and tear of the true capoeira by the practice of brutality, although curbed by the authority and discipline of the Mestre!
Violence generates hard, sudden movements that are outside the berimbau’s rhythm; these damage the ginga and impede the technical progress of the student!

The students fearfully separate from each other during the game. They lose the ability to mark blows, which is necessary for the close play of the inside game. Secure in the inefficiency of the attacks, protected by distance, the practitioners end up skipping around spastically while they wait for the chance to release a quick, violent, treacherous – but frightened! – blow.

*Because they are out of reach of their partner, they feel authorized to do flips, turns, and other movements that are inappropriate, awkward, and rhythmless. **The efficiency is lost, the elegance is lost, the beauty is lost, the marked blows are lost, the agility is lost, the elasticity is lost, the self-confidence is lost... the best of capoeira is lost!** This process is worsened by the instructor's lack of authority. **The greater the separation between the partners, the worse the qualifications of whoever is running the training!** Only a good mestre transmits self-confidence, which is the only force capable of bringing two opponents close together in attack movements and defense maneuvers!*

When two fighters separate themselves, it is fear that separates them! *The separation of the fighters transforms an exhibition of ability and courage into a grotesque spectacle of isolated acrobats, practicing purposeless individual contortions, without any link to the toque of the berimbau, which is the king of the spectacle. "Circus acrobatics!"* as the Mestre would say. We cannot even conceive of an evolution in the direction of the Eastern martial arts, which are guided by technique, ability, persistence, loyalty, discipline, and above all by courage! *"Death before Flight"* determines the law of *BuShiDo!* By the very definition of capoeira, we can accept any name for this practice, except the **GAME OF CAPOEIRA!**

8. WHAT WAS THE GRADUATION LIKE IN YOUR ERA?

After the Mestre's approval in a true "*admissions exam*" – verification of the prospective student's joints, balance, backbend, etc. – the beginner was accepted at the level of **NOVICE**, and sat on the bench to watch! In the next session he received his first class. The Mestre used to take both hands of the *novice* and *pull them* in the dance of the *ginga*. Later, he let go of the student's

hands, and demonstrated the “*high-guard*,” raising his hand in front – *without covering the eyes!* – while the other hand descended back in protection of the flank, maintaining balance! The *novice* then repeated these movements, *without losing the Mestre from sight*, according to a solemn warning. Continuing on, the student learned “*defense in cocorinha*,” demonstrated by the Mestre, *without forgetting to protect his face and flank!*

An old chair, fearless and immovable, stayed in the middle of the room while the Mestre *agilely drew the trajectory of the Milky way with the white of the sole of his foot above the back of the chair, returning elegantly to the initial position – the cocorinha* – with the face guarded by one cupped hand and the flank by the other arm. He thus demonstrated the “*meia-lua de compasso*,” the Christian name of “*rabo-de-arraia*,” by the baptism accepted by the laws of the white men! Upon trying to reproduce the movement, the novice often used the wrong leg – “*a dog’s piss*,” in Bimba’s lingo. The “*post*” was the Mestre’s head. The Mestre told us that a beginner had broken his nose during one of these classes, and highlighted that *the movements of the beginner are always impossible to predict; they can even manage to hit the careless instructor!* After the *meia-lua de compasso*, the Mestre continued to the “*negativa*,” descending on the same side as the extended leg, supporting oneself on the hand on that same side, almost laying the face on the ground, *without forgetting to catch the opponent’s heel from inside his legs* in order to try to knock him down...an essential preparation for the perfection of the *rasteira!*

Thus, movement by movement, the student completed the learning of the “*sequence*,” collection of the basic teaching elements, and continued practicing *without the berimbau* during the necessary period to learn the **basic movements** of *regional*.

The prime work of the Mestre was the brilliant conception of this sequence of “fundamental” or “teaching” movements, which permits capoeira to be taught and spread in an incredibly

short time. In only six months, he managed to prepare a well-formed capoeirista, ready to enter in a *roda* without shame, and without getting caught a lot!

When the novice acquired the agility, reflexes, and ability to mark blows which made him capable of preventing accidents, he was “*baptized*” to the sound of the berimbau in slow rhythm, “*pulled*” by a good-natured “*graduated student*.” **Violence and takedowns were not permitted, especially the rasteira!** The student then received a *nome de guerra**, generally linked to a *distinguishing characteristic* of his personality, behavior, or name. *It was a very personal reference*, a mark of fire that lasts even after death!

After this, the student’s new category was that of **BAPTIZED or NEW STUDENT**. *Preguiça, Macaco, Borracha, Caveira, Medicina, Saci, Onça, Oncinha, Brabo, Zoinho, Vermelho, Cascavel, Pinico, Camisa Roxa, Camisinha, Canhão, Cabelo Louro, Suca, Boinha, Louro, Kangurú, Milk-Shake, Macaco, Escurinho, Itapoan, Alegria, Ziquiué, Tenilo, Edinho, Soló, Gordo, Pintado, Damião, Zé Grande...* the list goes on and on and out of sight!

A link between the *Godfather* and the *Godson* was created, a friendship with the Mestre was sealed, a companionship that persisted throughout life. It was an affectionate linkage, a link of comradeship, *which made one unit out of the group!*

With the passage of time – generally about three months of practice afterwards – when the student **was an expert in falling without hurting himself**, the Mestre would promote him to **VETERAN, and he could then be taken down with the rasteira!** The honor of the first rasteira was conceded to the **GODFATHER** – a wise precaution of the Mestre! It avoided

* Capoeira nickname; literally, “war name”

accidents resulting from the abuse of technical superiority, which some cruel students stubbornly practiced.

After six months, the *Veteran* was submitted to a final evaluation by the Mestre. He waited for four to six students to reach this point and then held a **GRADUATION** with the right to bring a **TIJUBINA**⁴² – generally a girlfriend – the **GODMOTHER**. The *nome de guerra* was confirmed and the student received the title of **GRADUATED STUDENT**, with the right to play to the toque of *Iúna*, with *throws* and everything.

Sometimes the Mestre would warn us, “*He’s graduated! But... he’s new!*” in order to tell us to be careful with the newly-graduated student. Other times, he would *grab the more experienced player by the hand*, bring him to the center of the *roda* and say, “*He’s graduated, but he hasn’t shown up for a while.*” **The Mestre was always concerned with preventing accidents!**

Some students distinguished themselves by the quality of the art, by their regular attendance, and by their teaching ability – these students were elevated to *contramestre!*

9. HOW DID THE MODERN GRADUATION SYSTEM ARISE?

The recognition of capoeira as a sport required its regulation, without which we wouldn’t be able to hold competitions, which are characteristic of athletic activities. Regulations were necessary to evaluate the technical abilities of the competitors; this is the only way to establish standards of quality. The classification of the athletes into categories is fundamental in the proceedings of a competition. *The race between the hare and the tortoise is not*

⁴² Young beautiful woman

included in sporting practices, because of the inequality of the competitors. We can only choose the reddest apple among a collection of red apples! **It is impossible to compare different categories!**

The categories must consider age, weight, level of technical development, time of training, style, besides specific requirements for capoeira. First of all, to include only capoeira practitioners, recognized by an official entity, for safety reasons. Although the *Regional* style adopts the term “*graduated student*,” *we must adopt the official nomenclature.*

Carlos Senna’s style, stylized capoeira, with a base in the garments of the black slaves and in the Eastern martial arts, chose colored cords in order to distinguish the categories of athletes.

In the *Regional* style, we had adopted *colored handkerchiefs* to show the graduation of our athletes, instructors, and mestres. We chose handkerchiefs according to the tradition that the old capoeiristas had worn handkerchiefs of natural silk (*Lion brand!*) around their necks as defense against razors, which were often used in street fights. On the occasion of the *graduation*, the athletes received a *blue* handkerchief symbolizing the initial graduation. Upon completing the *Course of Specialization*, he came to use a *red* handkerchief. The *berimbau players* used a *green* handkerchief. The function of *instructor* was distinguished by the *blue* handkerchief. Those who were “*contramestres*” were authorized to use the color *yellow*. A *white* handkerchief, *bigger* than those used in graduation, with the “*sign of São Salomão*” embroidered in *green* in one of the corners, identified the *Mestres*. The various categories of athletes were thus distinguished by colors for the purposes of competitions.

Symbolism: *Blue* = the color of regional; *green* = the musical aspect; *sign of “São Salomão”* = wisdom; *white* = the purity and perfection of the Mestre.

10. WHY QUADRAS AND CORRIDOS AND NO LADAINHA?

The response is that the very musical base of *Regional* is incompatible with the genre of the *ladainha*, which was too slow and melancholy for Mestre Bimba's temperament. **The berimbau imposes its rhythm on the practice of capoeira;** changing the toque causes a change in the style. *A new style of capoeira could not be created without creating a new toque.* It is impossible to play the *Regional* style with a toque from the *Angola* style. The modification of the toque thus required a new model of songs and accompaniment. This fact is similar to that found in the dance and practice of candomblé. The toque of the atabaques imposes its vibration on our nervous system, and the movements of the corresponding *Orixá* manifest themselves in agreement with the rhythm, melody, and chants!

11. WHY IS ONLY ONE BERIMBAU USED IN REGIONAL?

In Mestre Bimba's capoeira roda, the constitution of the "orchestra" varied according to the number of players available. The number of melodic and rhythmic instruments had a minimum and maximum limit, inside which the exact number was up to the Mestre, who was always preoccupied with the purity of the rhythm "of *Regional*." This rhythm was faster, hotter, and stronger in comparison to the rhythm "of *Angola*" which was slow, clever, smooth, and almost affectionate, in the Mestre's words. It was important for the practitioner to *feel the beat of the pandeiros and the fluctuations of the berimbau rhythms*, which command the movements of the "evolution" in the style of game.

Cavalaria – Hard, heavy, violent game.

Iúna – Low, clever, cunning, wise game; choreographic, exhibitionist... a return to the playful style!

Banguela and **Banguelinha** – Inside game, body-to-body, close together, training for defense against bladed weapons.

Idalina – High, loose, clever game, rich in movements.

São Bento Grande – Regional-style game, strong, quick, more violent than exhibitionist, virile without losing the malícia!

São Bento Pequeno⁴³ – Smoother game, body-to-body, with more footwork and malícia!

Santa Maria⁴⁴ – A simple but fast toque, allowing a high and loose game, with many floreios.

Amazonas – A creation of the Mestre, difficult to accompany.

Such was the richness of rhythms and the subtlety of the melodic variations that few capoeiristas managed to obey the musical commands. Rarer still were those who could execute them on the berimbau.

Thus, *the minimum was one berimbau*, and the maximum was three – one or two *gungas*, one or two *violas*. One berimbau kept the “beat,” maintaining the rhythm, while the other did variations in the style of *jazz!* *The same way with the pandeiro* – one was too little, two were good, and the third began to be overkill!

Bimba's was concerned with the clear perception of the basic rhythm – while one instrument varied, the others maintained the beat. His obsession for the purity of the rhythm was so much that *the Mestre reduced the number of “bells” on the pandeiro* so that their jingle wouldn't cover up the basic rhythm. Or perhaps he did this so that the pandeiros would be more reminiscent of the atabaque's sound?

⁴³ Bimba described it as “*upside-down São Bento Grande*,” disregarding the information that *regional* does not include this toque.

⁴⁴ Disregard the information that Bimba called this toque the *hymn of regional*.

*While we were developing Capoeira regulations, at the request of Pascoal Segreto Sobrinho, the president of the Brazilian Fighting Confederation, I suggested, with the Mestre's approval, that **one berimbau and two pandeiros** be adopted in order to facilitate the perception of the rhythm, thus adding another parameter to evaluate the technical level of the practitioners.*

12. CAN THE TOQUE OF CAVALARIA BE PLAYED IN THE RODA?

The toque of “*CAVALARIA*,” which mimics the sound of horses’ hooves in a “*musical onomatopoeia*,” was used during the phase of capoeira’s prohibition and police persecution in order to alert the players to the arrival of the Police. When it was played, *the capoeira roda camouflaged itself in a samba roda*, with the participation of the women, lending a festive and innocent tone to the legal infraction. Later, Cavalaria was used as authorization – or recommendation?! – of the hard, violent game, in order to make an example, or to drive away some undesirable (or simply unknown!) person who was interested in participating.

“*Lori Ôpa!*” of hard, fast, and hot rhythm; its game is violent and quick, which makes it *not appropriate for sporting practice*. When the partners played too fast, disobeying the slower toque, Bimba used to muse, “*I’m wasting my toque*,” and changed to Cavalaria, which better matched the stupidity of the flustered students!

13. WHAT CAN WE DO TO CONSERVE THE HERITAGE OF OUR FATHER AND MESTRE?

Obedience to the principles in which “The Mestre” based his teaching system will preserve our precious inheritance without impeding the individual evolution of each athlete.

“Each one does the movements according to his way!”

“Fruit comes only with time!”

“Banana trees don’t produce cashews!”

“When you remove one defect, another appears!”

“It’s his way!”

“All the blows are born from the ginga!”

14. CONCLUSION

*Capoeira Regional is the best demonstration of the hybridization of African traditions with Brazilian customs. It is the fruit of the meeting of a direct descendant of Africans with an academic of Portuguese ancestry from Ceará. The humble vocabulary of a semi-literate man, enriched by the pedigree of a medical student passionate for the classics of our language, gave origin to the terms that we use without questioning their source: *academia, calouro, veterano, formado, formatura, curso de especialização, aluno novo, godemi (God’m it!), suicídio, arpão de cabeça, asfixiante, balão arqueado, meia-lua de frente, meia-lua de compasso, batizado, paranifo, quadro de formatura, diploma, homenageado, exame final, demonstração...* * The only things that are lacking are *master’s degree, teaching, thesis, chair, research, oral exam, audience...**

* In English, the list is: academy, novice, veteran, graduated student, graduation, specialization course, new student, *godemi* (derived from God damn it!), suicide, harpoon of the head, suffocation, arched throw, front half-moon, half-moon in a compass, baptism, patron, graduation list, diploma, honored person, final exam, demonstration...

Cisnando's white finger, pointing the resplendent trajectory of a black monolith, between two cultures that met in a peaceful field! The white hand of Cisnando, opening the doors of the Acclamation Palace to the Ebony Giant, in order to show the black race's strength and warrior abilities to the highest authorities of the State and the Republic! The shoulders of Cisnando, carrying the academics of Higher Education to Mestre Bimba's "*Physical Education classes*"! ***IT'S THE VERY PORTRAIT OF MIXED-BLOOD BAHIA!***

NeNel! Formiga! Luizinho! All ex-students of Bimba, "*the Sons of Mestre Bimba*"! It is enough to maintain and spread the directives we inherited in conversations and advice, in stories – **whether truth or fiction!** – in the facts and observations registered orally, or in written media, or by more modern means... and we will have preserved our heritage!

This phenomenon of respect, conservation, and perpetuation of the customs of our people *is what we call* **TRADITION**, *or, by the better and more academic word,* **CULTURE!**

PHYSICAL FITNESS THROUGH CAPOEIRA

“The *TaiQiChuan* with dendê!”
... Tito...

**To the oldest ones who still love Life
And want to live more and better
With the practice of Capoeira
The blessings of the Mestre
And of “São Salomão!”**

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Capoeira in slow rhythm *can be practiced individually with the goal of improving one's aerobic capacity.* At the same time, it accomplishes integrated respiration with the corporeal dynamic, and mental relaxation, allowing wide movements exercising the abdominal musculature. Evidently, we will have to individually choose the movements and adjust their intensity to the age of the practitioner.

We can practice to the rhythm of the berimbau or to our internal rhythm. The use of the berimbau is preferable as a marker of the beat. The most appropriate toques depend on the objective of the training, whether it be the maintenance of physical fitness, development of technique, or physical preparation for competitions. The slower toques, especially the ones richest in melodic variations within the Regional style – Banguela, Banguelinha, Idalina, and Iuna – are the most recommended because they allow movements that are richer in floreios and footwork. They also allow *greater mental concentration in each movement.*

The duration of the practice should be adjusted to the intended objective and to the functional capacity of the athlete; it is advised that the practitioner's level of physical fitness and technique be evaluated beforehand. The oldest practitioners should prudently obey their doctors' advice regarding physical activities. The majority of the "*oldest ones*" used the practice of capoeira to keep themselves in good shape, "*in order to not be ashamed in front of the kids!*" who were always eager to "*catch*" one of the "*oldest ones*" – it was a pleasure to take down one of the "*oldest ones*"! Some practiced the basic sequence and leaps accompanied by a rhythmic jumping, in the way of the warrior dance of the *Watutsi*⁴⁵ including repetitive training of their favorite movements. Others practiced "*special secret training*" which

⁴⁵ A people of Ruanda

they obviously kept to themselves. On two occasions, I used the sequence of physical fitness upon finding myself in bad physical condition, including with intermittent viral infections. On both occasions, I recovered completely. These experiences convinced me that *recuperation is possible, even in grave states, as long as the progression of the exercises is gradual and smooth and the duration of the sessions short and slowly increases.*

It is essential to remember that **with the advancement of age, the immediate effects and the metabolic corrections of exercise are delayed.** *The first sessions leave a deceptive sensation of well-being, which after 36 to 48 hours gives way to joint pains and general fatigue, irritability, and insomnia, indicating that we have surpassed our current physical capacity.* Thus, **it is necessary to be prudent in the initial sessions,** which should be of short duration, with natural, relaxed movements, *without great muscular contraction or shocks to the joints.*

Personally, I adopted the ginga movements in slow rhythm, high or middle guard, combined with *cocorinha, meia-luas de frente and de compasso, arpão-de-cabeça, giro de cintura baixo, false meia-lua de compasso, discóbulo,* movements of floreio with the arms, during three minutes a day for the first week. We must highlight the importance of *breathing naturally,* through the nose, maintaining a regular rhythm. When we notice *increase in the frequency of breathing* upon panting or feeling suffocated, we must return to the ginga, high posture, in slow rhythm, and try to *recover normal respiration,* so that later we can return to the other exercises. We must always remember that it is very important **not to surpass the limits imposed by age and by a low level of physical fitness!**

PHYSIOLOGICAL FUNAMENTALS

The results of the individual practice of capoeira result *from the body-mind unity* and from the general repercussions *of the contraction of the muscular fibers **under the command of the mind.***

The contraction of the muscular fibers reduces the volume of the excess liquid in the body, thus bringing the metabolites and other residues to the blood vessels. It also helps circulation in the peripheral blood vessels. We must highlight that *massive muscular contraction* provokes undesirable effects – *increase of peripheral resistance, reduction of blood flow* – by which we conclude that **smoothness and slowness of the movements** *are the objectives that we should seek!*

Smoothness involves the use of the smallest possible number of muscular fibers. Using the minimum muscle necessary produces *delicate and elegant movements under the control of the mind*. It allows the draining of liquid to nearby regions and the *aspiration of nutrients during the subsequent release of contraction*. The use of the smallest number of muscular fibers for a certain task is the same as the increase of work with an identical metabolic effect as that of the use of weights as a burden for a greater number of fibers.

*The **slowness** of movement increases the efficiency of the aerobic muscular process and facilitates the mental supervision of the movement!* **The association of smoothness and slowness to exercise movements** increases the total potency of the muscles and improves the control of the nerves, integrating the whole Being!

*The most useful movements are those that begin in the extremities of the limbs and progress towards the respective roots, conducting *Qi* (life energy), blood, and liquids towards the *Zang* organs (solid organs and their functions) and the *Fu* organs*

(hollow organs and their functions), fulfilling the role that led Barlow to nickname the muscles as the “*peripheral heart*”!

The movements of the waist massage the organs, especially the abdominal ones. **The movements of the upper back** develop diaphragmatic respiration, improving respiratory productivity; they also indirectly improve cardiac productivity because the lungs exercise an auxiliary circulatory function by hastening the filling of the auricles.

Summarizing the general effects: *in the energetic body*, we verify the increase of the flow of *Qi*, from command of the central nervous system from nutrition and defense (*Wei* and *Yong*). *In the physical body*, the muscular contraction brings about overall improvement in circulation resulting from the increased flow of organic liquids (*Jing*), blood and lymph fluid.

The functional organic adaptation in the path of physical fitness passes through an *initial pneumo-circulatory phase*, in which the main sign is the *lack of air*, and a *later phase* in which *cold sweat indicates the threshold of fatigue*. **The improvement of physical fitness is not a linearly evolving process** in which each day we improve a little bit. Instead, it is an *oscillatory process with periods of well-being alternated with those of being badly off* according to the phases of the organism’s adaptation to the changes induced by the practice of the exercises! *Physical effort in old age* produces an accumulation of metabolites that are manifested after 48 to 72 hours. This makes it necessary always to use *small burdens* that should be *increased with time*. **Whenever it is necessary, we can suspend practice for one or two days for recuperation.** *It is more prudent to start with sessions on alternating days, with an additional rest each week.*

GENEOLOGY OF THE MOVEMENTS

GINGA

In the same way as sporting practice, working out for capoeira depends fundamentally on the ginga. It is the matrix-movement from which all the others arise, the trace of unity among successive movements. From the ginga results the lightness and naturalness of its evolutions. In practice, *there cannot be interruption between successive movements*; this **discharacterizes capoeira!**

The ginga practiced slowly, during about three minutes, **visualizing each movement**, *executing all of them that can be initiated from it*, **functions as a method of warm-up, mental relaxation, and muscular stretching!** We should emphasize that *the ginga should be practiced sliding the feet on the ground smoothly and delicately*, **with the body ready to move into a dodging or an attack movement**, **always supported on the ground** during the swinging movements. The trunk should **lean lightly forward**, *thus facilitating the dodging movements* backwards, to the sides, and to the ground. **Leaning one's torso backwards makes one's movements slower** *because of the unbalance that it causes.*

FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENTS

From the *ginga* is born the **cocorinha**, lowering the trunk by the bending of the lower limbs – this is the second source-movement. *By descending on one leg, with the other stretched forward, while the trunk falls to the side of the extended leg, one hand supported on the ground and the other protecting the face, we leave the ginga and enter into the negativa.* The third source-movement is the *turn around the longitudinal axis of the body*, which leads to the **request for arpão de cabeça**, *from which emanate all the movements that involve the axial rotation of the body.* This turn can be done on foot – as in the **request for arpão de cabeça** – or while crouched in *cocorinha* – as in the **false meia-lua de compasso**. From the **ginga** we also pass to the fourth key movement – the **aú** – by projecting the body in an aerial turn around the head with the support of the hands, to the side of the initial position.

SECONDARY MOVEMENTS

From the four movements described above, which we will call **initial posture or position**, we pass to the description of each of their derivatives. *Jumping during the ginga delays the attack and defense movements, wastes energy uselessly, and brings panting for breath, agitation, and insecurity instead of agility and expertise!*

An important part of the process is the creation of an imaginary opponent, who will attack and defend at each instant. Without this, the method loses a great part of its efficiency. Depending on the practitioner's capacity for concentration and level of technical and mental development, **various imaginary opponents can be created**, thus increasing the potential of the training. We emphasize that this proceeding **will extinguish all the existing images in the mind**, *like in the meditation during bodily movement*, identically to the *zen* of Oriental martial arts.

This process, despite its important psycho-somatic effects, comes to be unnoticed in our midst, despite being implicit in the practice of sports.

The most appropriate ginga for this application is the ginga in *low or middle guard*, because it allows greater amplitude of movements and greater burden of effort, with the additional beneficial effects on respiration and on the circulatory system. *The posture of the ginga and the duration of the exercises should be adjusted to the practitioner's conditions of physical fitness.* It is prudent to start in the high guard, which is smoother, more economical in terms of effort, and easier to execute. The variety of movements allows *all the muscles of the body to be exercised simultaneously with the mental processes of creation, projection, and control of the images of each position.* In this way, we reach the *Perfection of the Being, the psycho-somatic integration, Body and Mind united by the melodic magic of capoeira, experiencing the "Eternal Now" at the same time.*

The mental concentration in the perfection of the movements' rhythm removes tension and stress from our consciousness! The swinging movements of the arms cover or sweep the whole area of the body – head, face, chest, trunk, flanks – in defense of attacks to each one of these regions. The wrists lightly flexed, hands cupped, in circular movements, divert to the sides or to up or down the imaginary blows. These movements begin in the shoulders, *which must be relaxed*, and are accompanied by the swinging of the vertebral column. The *ginga* can originate a movement of lateral rotation, with simultaneous flexing of the lower limbs, similar to the preparatory movement for throwing a discus, as we see in the "*discóbolo*" as we came to call it henceforth. Given the importance of its functional effects, we distinguish it in a special section.

The Discóbulo is a movement derived from the ginga, by the lateral rotation of the waist, lateral flexing of the spinal column, bending of the lower limbs, aiming to put the hand that goes back

on the heel of the opposite side. This movement requires flexibility and strength of the broad muscles of the abdomen. It also involves rotations, bending, and stretching in the various segments of the spinal column. During the practice of the *discóbolo*, the more pronounced descent allows the support of the hands on the ground on the side of the body, the passage to the *negativa* position by the extension of the leg on the same side, bringing the side of the face very close to the ground. With practice and with the improvement of physical conditions, we can go from the position of the *negativa* to the *queda de rim* on the same side.

The Arpão de cabeça: *the call for the arpão de cabeça* exercises the sense of balance and prepares the body for spinning movements, which are so common in capoeira. It improves the vestibular function, possibly by training the ocular reflexes and the movement of the fluid in the semi-circular canals of the inner ear. It consists of a full turn around the body's longitudinal axis, supported on the front third of the foot on the same side as the movement. The arms are separated from the trunk and the neck is lightly flexed forward. It is essential to maintain one's view directed towards the imaginary adversary during the entire rotation, complemented by the crossing of the hands and the joelhada* in defense from the opponent's cabeçada, finalizing with the negativa and return to the ginga.

Negativa and Cocorinha are the next elements in the order of importance. They must be done with the utmost care, attention, and coordination, involving the muscles of the abdomen and the lower limbs.

The *Cocorinha* is a well-known position in our environment. It is the resting position of our people, made famous by Monteiro Lobato in the story of Jeca Tatú. *It is a crouched position, with feet separated and pointing forward, trunk leaning forward,*

* Knee strike

elbows supported on the knees, hands hanging forward, eyes directed directly forward. It was used in the initial evaluation of those who wanted to enroll in our *Academy*. The Mestre summarized it in a crude way during each student's first classes: "*the position you use to take a shit in the woods*" – and everyone immediately understood! They smiled because the crudeness of the Mestre's words, things of a "*family guy*"!

During the capoeira game, using the cocorinha in defense involves taking the crouched position with the light leaning towards one side, planting the hand on the ground while the other arm protects the face on the side of the attack movement.

The Mestre emphasized, "*the soles should be well-supported on the ground, the knees heavily bent, and the trunk leaning forward,*" completing with the observation, "**DO NOT let your trunk lean backwards, nor put two hands on the ground!**" He clarified that **planting both hands on the ground and leaning one's trunk backwards made low dodges more difficult, not to mention getting up** – which is easily proved in daily practice! In the correct position, the body's center of gravity falls in the middle of the imaginary line that connects the centers of support of the feet, practically corresponding to the vertical line that passes through the athlete's center. The arms are in front, supported naturally upon the knees, the hands, semi-flexed, hang forward. From this position, if we lean the trunk smoothly forward and support our hands on the ground, we pass to the position of **pinto**,* characterized by the body's dynamic equilibrium over the two hands, the center of gravity falling in the middle of the imaginary line that connects the centers of the palms.

* Chick. Later, Decanio describes this same position as *pinto catando milho* – chick pecking corn, since that's what it's reminiscent of.

From the *cocorinha*, as advocated by capoeira regional, it is very easy to pass to the counter-attack with a *meia-lua de compasso*, a *rasteira*, or an *armada-solta*, among other movements.

From the *cocorinha*, we go to a more advanced movement, characterized by the accentuation of the dodge. We support both hands on the ground while extending the leg on the same side, lowering the head and the trunk close to the ground – this is the *negativa lateral*. *It is an excellent movement to strengthen the muscles of the abdominal waist, the lower limbs, the shoulders, and the wrists.*

Another component of the group of *cocorinha* derivatives is **Ruy Gouveia's giro de cintura**.^{*} Ruy Gouveia was known for his exceptional game of the waist. The movement consists in launching the body backwards and towards the side of the rotation, with the support of both hands on the ground, soon returning to the initial posture of *cocorinha*, en route to the same movement on the other side. *This movement becomes more complex and efficient* by the elevation of the trunk in the manner of a *queda de rim*, simple or complemented by *rolê*.

Besides developing the sense of balance, the flexibility of the waist, and the intrinsic muscles around the spine, this movement strengthens and develops the muscles of the scapular torso, especially the chest and dorsal muscles.

The transition from **cocorinha**^{**} to **Ruy's giro de cintura** is done in three stages: support of the hands alongside the body, lowering of the trunk towards the same side, from which point one can return to the *cocorinha* by the rotation of the waist with pushing off from the hands on the ground. We should accentuate that the support on the front third of the feet makes this movement much

* Turn of the waist

** As long as I'm translating names of the movements, I might as well explain *cocorinha*. 'De cócoras' means to squat, which is linked to the word *cocô* (poop).

easier. If the feet are too close together, it becomes more difficult. The effect is improved if we do without the impulse of the hands. The exercise becomes more efficient, reaching its fullness, if we manage to arrive in the *queda-de-rim* position and maintain it for some time.

We can also pass from the **cocorinha** to the movement called **boca de calça**,* performing the simulated gesture of grabbing the mouths of the imaginary opponent's pants and pulling them towards the middle of our legs while we lift the hands up in a circular motion, as if we were projecting the imaginary adversary backwards, with his head and back hitting the ground.

We must have in mind the possibility of the imaginary adversary trying to hit our external genitalia, so the grabbing must be strong, impeding the leg movements of the guy who we intend to throw on the ground.

A complete crouched turn, starting from the cocorinha and returning to the initial position, identical to that done in the meia-lua de compasso, but without outstretching the leg, is an excellent preparatory exercise for the execution of the rabo-de-arraia. Doing this turn without breaking the rhythm or losing balance is called the false meia-lua de compasso. It corresponds to the request for arpão de cabeça, in a crouched position.

The negativa is a complex movement. It is difficult for beginners because it requires leg strength, flexibility of the waist and spine, and elasticity of the wrists in order to deaden the shock on the ground. **It is one of the most powerful capoeira exercises** because of the muscular development that it causes, the joint flexibility it develops, the coordination of movements that it requires, and the psychological effect. It causes one to lose the fear of falling, gives one a sense of being able to escape from danger, and instills self-confidence. We used to call this descent

* Mouth of the pants

“**falling on the springs**” because it was reminiscent of the action of a vehicle’s springs in its shocks, cushioning against the irregularities of bumpy roads. Being a relatively vulnerable position, it requires the practitioner to assume *the psychological position of readiness to leave it, which develops quickness and agility*.

An important detail in its exercise is the position of *getting very close to the ground*: floating, being as low as possible, without hitting the floor, with the side of the face very close to the ground!

We can practice the negativa to the front (*frontal negativa*) or to the sides (*lateral negativa*). Both can be performed repeatedly (*iterative negativa*) or in isolation (*simple negativa*). We used to strengthen our muscles for the negativa by the successive bilateral movement of descending on one leg with the other extended, while in front of a chair or bench used for support of the hands, on the same side as the extended leg, in an outline of the negativa lateral. The support on the bench or chair allows one to descend more slowly. This allows a more prolonged contraction of the muscles of the lower limbs and of the scapular region, which serve as support, besides making the movement easier and safer! It is a complex exercise involving, besides the muscles and joints of the lower limbs, the abdominal waist, the vertebral column, the shoulders, and the upper limbs. It requires great effort from the circulatory and respiratory system because of the great burden of work.

Bananeira and Parada^{*} are the positions of standing upside down. The position with support on just the arms is called **parada**, and if the head is also used, it is called **bananeira**.

The **bananeira** can be reached gradually by practice against a wall. One can put a little pillow on the ground to support the

* Bananeira means banana tree. Parada means stop or pause.

head. The practitioner puts his back against the wall and gradually lifts the legs until he can stay with his body close to the wall. A similar practice, with the appropriate modifications, can be adopted for training the **parada**.

The Aú consists in an upside-down turn to one side, with the support of one or both hands on the ground, the body vertical, and subsequent return to the *ginga*. The transition of the **ginga** to the **aú** can be done by first putting the hands down to the side of one of the feet, and jumping by elevating the opposite leg, until the practitioner is capable of *leaping in the aú* and completing it with the *rolê*.

Arqueamento:* the training for arqueamento can be initiated starting from a standing position, with a wall approximately 80 centimeters behind. The legs should be a normal distance (20-30 cm) apart. One lifts the arms over the head and plants the palms of the hands on the wall. The exercise consists in bending the spinal column backwards, with support on the wall, beginning the movement by bending the neck – naturally supported in the lumbar-sacral joint – backwards. It is important that the ground – and the shoes, when used! – are not slippery, thus offering satisfactory friction and avoiding accidents. This exercise can also be practiced in the middle of a doorway, with the legs parted and semi-bent, the two hands holding the corners of the wall. I prefer this second way because it is safer.

Muzenza: movements in the “*muzenza*” position are practiced with a *deep knee bend*, accompanied by the bending forward of the trunk, hands almost touching the ground, swinging the shoulders in the *giká* movement. The shoulder movements are similar to those of the *muzenza* choreography in the “*saida de yaô*” of the initiation ceremony of *candomblé*. The main effect of the *muzenza* is increasing the burden on the lower limbs. It exercises the circulatory and respiratory systems, while the semi-

* Arching

crouched position enables better use of the thorax-abdominal impulse. **This increases the potency of the traumatic blows, and makes easier the dodges to the sides and downward.**

ADVANCED MOVEMENTS

To both sides!

The meia-lua de compasso should end in *cocorinha* and *aú* with *rolê*. The *rolê* at the end of the turn is better, because it simulates the defense from a *ponteira* directed at the face.

The benção should be practiced as a traumatic blow, hitting and immediately removing the limb – the faster the better – aiming not to lose one's balance. The movement is finished with *cocorinha* or *negativa*, the second one being preferable.

The quiexadas can be accompanied by exits in *aú*, with or without *rolê*, depending on the corresponding imaginary counter-attack. These movements should be repeated frequently, with the goal of preparing the musculature and the nervous system for the *armada-solta*.

The armada-solta is completed by the *cocorinha*, *negativa*, or *aú* (with and without *rolê*). *Cocorinha* assumes that we are descending in defense of a high counter-strike, *negativa* corresponds to the defense from a *benção*, and *aú* simulates the escape from a *rasteira* or the exit from a *negativa*. The frequent repetition of the request for *arpão-de-cabeça* makes the lightness and balance essential to the turn of the *armada-solta* much easier. One should avoid turning on the heels and also being afraid of falling – two potential enemies of the beginner.

The meia-luas de frente are complemented by *negativas*, *cocorinhas*, or other defensive movements, as in the teaching sequence.

The martelos should be initiated with the knees bent and finished with the whip, aiming to reach the opponent's flank or head, depending on the practitioner's flexibility. The support of one hand on the opposite side of the attacking leg on the seat of a chair, as Bimba used as a teaching method, facilitates muscular development and the elasticity of the thigh joint, as well as the balance necessary for the correct execution of this movement. This method also allows one to train the movement slower, thus augmenting its final effect... although **during the capoeira game** the attacking leg should be retracted instantaneously, allowing the quick and safe return to the initial position without giving the opponent the chance to grab your leg and kick your sexual organs or apply a rasteira as counter-attack. **During the individual workout**, *the movement should be slow, so that it can be visualized, analyzed, and perfected.* The toes should be lightly bent and the muscles of the foot contracted, given the impact that will be realized with the top of the foot, in order to avoid breaking one's toes. It is a movement that doesn't exactly fit in the capoeira dynamic because it does not bring the automatic dodge characteristic of this martial art. *In each attack movement, there is the potential of an elegant and easy escape. This is the mandinga, the secret of the capoeirista's invulnerability: always dodging, always fleeing, unreachable.*

We must not omit the attack movements with the elbows and hands from all positions: *cutilada, godemi, galopante, asfixiante, eye poke, straight and crossing punches, strikes with the palm and the back of the hand, garra de onça, etc.*

The **quebra-mão**,* necessarily accompanied by the *rasteira de lado, vingativa, banda de costas*, should be remembered, because we may need it in self-defense.

* Break-hand

In a more advanced step, we can include *the simulation of entrances and dodges* in **projection movements**: *vingativa, banda traçada, banda de costas, balões, saltos, roles, arqueamentos, cruzilhas, cruz*, and personal creations *ad infinitum!*

These more complex movements are of more difficult mental creation; they require a precise sense of timing.

The lack of a real opponent complicates their execution even more, even in slow steps of the imaginary dynamic frame that includes the presence of a virtual adversary in a complicated movement, exact in time and space!

*This growing complexity enriches and valorizes this phase of the workout, stimulating mental processes, creativity, attention, and the practitioner's interest in capoeira, uniting the Body and the Mind, **integrating the Being!***

INITIAL TRAINING

Let's consider the hypothesis of an *old capoeirista*, today at a *more advanced age*, not having practiced sports for a long time and desiring to return to his old form or improve his physical fitness.

Those who have not yet practiced capoeira will have natural difficulty in understanding the movements described here; this is why a *mestre* is essential for learning and accompaniment.

The training should be preceded by a medical exam to evaluate the practitioner's current health and physical fitness conditions, and accompanied by a specialized trainer.

In the first capoeira lessons, Mestre Bimba used an *old wooden chair* to represent an imaginary adversary and demonstrate the first movements of the sequence. This made the learning easier in the method of physical fitness for capoeira. **The mestre's chair**, besides symbolizing the opponent, serves as support for the exercises. Being an obstacle in the visual field, it centralizes the practitioner's attention, thus developing the ability to mark blows, the confidence and courage to carry out the movements, and guaranteeing the safety of the practice.

The first phase of training is based in the practice of the ginga with many flourishes, with movements of the upper limbs. The arms must sweep the whole front of the practitioner, from the head to the knees and from the center to the flanks. The movements must be loose and the attention concentrated on each step of the training.

It is advisable to begin with the high guard, which is easier, and progressively lower it until one reaches the low guard, as in the *game of Iúna*. Each movement should be accompanied by the mental image of the opponent threatening an attack. We protect ourselves from him by dodging, by smooth blocking that deflects the blow to the sides, according to its direction in order to diminish the effective force, thus preventing the attack from reaching its objective.

In this phase we can introduce the *request for arpão de cabeça*, which is the base of the **spinning movements around the vertical axis** of the human body. This component is frequently found in the *dodging and attack movements* that are characteristic of capoeira. These apparently innocuous turns train the semi-circular canals of the inner ear and the ocular reflexes of maintaining balance. They are also the origin of attacks and dodges such as *meia-lua de compasso*, *armada-solta*, *rolê*, etc.

It is very important not to turn on the heels, which will lead to *hyperextension of the vertebral column* and a more unbalanced

posture. **The feet should always carry one's weight on the front third of the sole.** The ideal is that the balls of the feet slide **smoothly** on the floor in a continuous movement around an imaginary point in the middle of the sole of the foot.

During the beginning of the turn, it is imperative to pay attention to the position of the *imaginary opponent*, observing *the chair* with one's peripheral vision above the shoulders or under the armpits. One must keep the opponent in sight in order to evaluate his probable movement. This proceeding is fundamental for the unfolding of the request for *arpão de cabeça* movement.

Equally important is the **initial position of the foot that will serve as the axle of the turn.** It should be *a little bit in front of the other*, supported on the ball of the foot, with the *tip lightly turned backwards*, as though it were going to start the turn. The movement will then be loose, light, smooth and agile.

PREPARATORY EXERCISES FOR THE ADVANCED MOVEMENTS

Preparation for the *au*

The exercises for the execution of the *au* aim to develop the musculature used in this movement, the sense of balance while upside down, and the self-confidence during the turn in the air, since it is an unusual position in which the fear of falling is present!

This movement requires strong upper limbs in order to support the whole weight of the body and provide the impulse for the evolution according to the opponent's behavior. The back muscles (especially those along the spine) along with the wide abdominal muscles are also indispensable to the vertical position of the torso during the turn.

The posture of the cervical segment of the vertebral column is fundamental in the beginning of the training, because it is practically impossible to maintain the inverted vertical position with the neck flexed forward. This provokes forward flexing of the spine and the body falls forward, “*cutting*” the *aú*. It is the same in the *bananeira de cabeça* and in the *parada*. Therefore, **we should begin this movement under light flexing of the neck backwards!**

With the development of the practitioner’s nervous reflexes and the evolution of his learning, we can vary the positions of the neck without damaging his balance. This works because the repetition of stimuli generates reverberant circuits of the nervous system responsible for the automation of the movements.

Dominating the fear of losing balance and falling backwards on the ground is important in the training!

The muscles used in the *aú* can be trained with the technique of **support on the ground with jumping**. From the *cocorinha* position, the practitioner puts his hands on the ground and lets his body fall forward, lifting his hips and jumping up as though he were going to do a *bananeira*. In a more advanced phase, he can jump with both feet simultaneously and try to do *bananeira*, then returning to the initial position.

Another training method for the *aú* is **support of the head on the ground and the back on the wall**. This develops the musculature of the back while letting the practitioner get used to being upside down. The respiratory and circulatory organs adapt to functioning in this anomalous position. Little by little the practitioner dominates his fear, which is an enemy always ready to surprise us.

Finally, we can use **support on the ground starting from the ginga**. During the *ginga*, bend the trunk forward and to one side,

plant the hands on the ground, lift one leg as though you were going to do an *aú*, then return to the *ginga* and repeat the movement to the other side. Each time, lift the body more and more, until you can reach the vertical and complete the turn of the *aú* with naturalness.

Preparation for the negativa

From cocorinha, stretch forward the leg on the same side of the hand planted on the ground. Simultaneously, the torso falls to the same side and both hands are planted alongside the outstretched leg. Aim to put the torso and head very close to the ground, and then return to the initial position.

From the ginga, let the body fall loosely on the leg in back, while the other leg stretches forward. Let the torso fall to the side of the outstretched leg, deadening the fall with the support of the hand on the same side. **The trunk should form a ninety-degree angle with the outstretched leg, and the face should be very close to the ground.**

Preparation for backbends

You can begin arching backwards and simultaneously exercise your abdominal musculature by lying on your back on the edge of a bed with your torso hanging off. Your pelvis provides support and the weight of your legs maintains balance. Let your torso and head hang down and try to plant your palms on the ground.

Esquentá banho

All remember the importance that Mestre Bimba attributed to the *esquentá-banho* ritual. This specialized training should be realized through the *African jumping*, the ritual warrior dance of the *Watutsi*, which has the characteristic of being practiced with general relaxation, shaking the whole body like a rag-doll. When jumping, one should aim to float in the air like a bit of cotton.

Upon returning to the ground, the legs should be relaxed and lightly bent, lowering the body and preparing for the impulse of elevation. The spine should be lightly bent forward, accompanied by the shaking of the neck and head.

This was the secret of Hélio Noronha's incredible physical capacity. He was one of the best and most disciplined athletes that I knew in our capoeira rodas!

In the initial period of training, until the practitioner's ability improves, it is prudent to do a reduced number of jumps – between ten and thirty – with intervals for recovery by means of slow ginga and deep breathing. At each fourth jump, the impulse should be greater, thus giving an agreeable rhythm to the exercise executed before the shower. This is very valuable **to reach the desired level of physical fitness.**

PSYCHOSOMATIC INTEGRATION

The solitary practice of capoeira leads to a dynamic, transpersonal state of meditation, capable of leading to a complete integration between the body and mind. It is equivalent to that generated by the practice of yoga and the eastern martial arts, or ritual dance.

By the dynamic introspection that occurs during the individual practice of capoeira, we manage to remove the day-to-day worries from our mind and thus combat stress and fatigue, recovering inner peace and general well-being.

The most noticeable effect is the maintenance of balance in the internal field – *homeostasis* – by the appropriate functioning of the vegetative nervous system and of the system of the flow of *Qi*.

COMPLEMENTARY EXERCISES

The rocking chair is an excellent movement to massage and mobilize the vertebral column. It is performed with the back on the ground, the legs bent in towards the torso, the arms crossed in front of the knees, firmly holding them, and the head bent forward. It consists in rocking movements similar to those of a rocking chair, aiming to successively elevate the head and the lower limbs by rocking on the back.

THE CATECHISM OF CAPOEIRA

**Dedicated to the three stars of “Angola”
Venerable Mestre Pastinha
Mestre João Grande
Mestre João Pequeno**

*... and...
... to all capoeiristas !*

CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF CAPOEIRA

Capoeira in its origin is just one; however, **each Mestre creates his own style**, imprinting it with his personality by means of his music or teaching method. **Each student**, having individuality, manifests his personality in the way in which he feels the music, carries out the movements, and assimilates the theoretical-practical teachings, according to his physical fitness, cultural temperament, and mental development.

The fusion of all the elements of the personality, including the socio-cultural components, of the student with those introduced by the mestre and training companions shapes each person's specific capoeira. It is his Way of Being in the Capoeira Universe!

The main principle of capoeira movements is their natural coupling with the rhythm/music of the berimbau! All the movements that fit naturally can be incorporated into capoeira's practice, which makes the art infinitely rich and fertile, full of surprises!

Movements that are violent by nature should be excluded. These movements, capable of inflicting serious injury or death, can be demonstrated in self-defense to previously selected students in private sessions under precautions against accidents. **They are never revealed or exhibited in public!**

Another important characteristic *is the participants' commitment in a game at a close distance, at most at the reach of an arm or a leg.* The game is extremely clever, with intentions of attack, apparently innocent movements, the simulation of weakness, and choreographic exhibitions, making possible attacks, dodged or not, or unexpected counter-attacks capable of demonstrating the practitioners' technique, agility, physical preparation, self-confidence, and the **superiority** of one of them!

CAPOEIRA, BROAD SENSE AND NARROW SENSE!

While I analyzed that which I observed during my whole life, and the historical documents about capoeira, some unanswered questions sprung to my mind:

- Why do the old descriptions of capoeiras in Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Sergipe not refer to *capoeira rodas*?
- Why don't the old drawings show the berimbau ruling the practice of capoeira in Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Sergipe?
- Why does the capoeira of Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Sergipe involve the concept of *gangs*?
- Why is capoeira frequently associated with fights and disorder in Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Sergipe?
- Why don't we **find** descriptions of the *ginga* in the old descriptions of capoeira in Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Alagoas and Sergipe?
- Why don't we find in the past frequent references to capoeira in Minas Gerais and São Paulo?
- Why don't we find capoeira in the residual *quilombos* found in interior Brazil, especially if we consider capoeira as a form of fight and resistance in the conflict between slaves and the dominant class as some historians and sociologists do?
- Why does the capoeira in Bahia present special characteristics?

- Why is the capoeira in Bahia practiced under the reign of the berimbau?
- Why is the capoeira in Bahia found on the edges of the Paraguaçu river and not found in the interior of the State?
- Why is capoeira intimately linked to candomblé (by the rhythm of Logunedê and the Yoruban accent, as well as its brother in musical root, *batuque*, *maculelê*, and *sambas de chula (santamarense) and corrido (cachoeirano)*)?
- Why does capoeira in Bahia have a characteristic ritual?
- Why is the capoeira in Bahia found associated with *capoeira rodas*, formed on Sundays, holy days, and on popular traditional festivals?
- Why is the capoeira in Bahia of a traditionally playful, rather than fight-like character (besides the *regional* style)?

The responses that occurred to me, inside my personal and cultural limitations, lead clearly to the conclusion that the term capoeira is used in two distinct ways:

- **Broad sense**

Encompassing the fight-like styles of African roots (*ngolo?*)* including the styles of *urban* capoeira practiced in the old times in the *favelas*** of Rio de Janeiro and in Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Sergipe.

- **Narrow sense**

Referring to the *capoeira game – costal or port* capoeira, Bahian, originating in the Bahian Recôncavo, created by the port workers, seafarers, and porters; later unfolded in the *regional* and *angola* styles.

MESTRE BIMBA’S STYLE

The legal prohibition of capoeira obliged Mestre Bimba to disguise its practice under the pompous name of “*Luta Regional Baiana.*”

Because of the temperament of Mestre Bimba and of those who composed the environment in which the new style took shape, *capoeira was conceived as a martial art*. The fight-like aspects were accented in detriment of the purely playful and choreographic aspects. The reserve of movements was enriched with traumatic blows, throws, attack and defense maneuvers, and combat tactics.

It should be recorded that there was a concern with returning to the choreography and the exhibition of abilities by the introduction of the *lúna game*. In this game, the *permission* to use *throws* gives the hallmark of the “*Regional style*” and attests to the technical development of the partners.

In practice, the *Regional* style is recognized by its berimbau toques, by its richness in *floreio* movements of the hands and arms, by the throws, and by the short distance between the *fighters*, which does not permit wrong movements or purposeless flips!

* The N’golo was an African dance/tradition that some say gave origin to (or was the original form of) capoeira.

** Slums/ghettos

It is fitting to emphasize that *the movements of fighting, of self-defense, and others capable of causing accidents or bodily injury, should not be used in games or sporting events.* They should be practiced in reserved, **special** sessions, as was the Mestre's habit – **the secret trainings for the graduated students!**

THE CAPOEIRA COMMANDMENTS

**Respect the Mestre and maintain discipline during the training.
Maintain a permanent vigilance of everyone and of the whole environment.**

**Don't lose your partner's movements from sight.
Stay calm in all situations.**

Care for the safety of your training companions.

Look after the hygiene of the training environment.

Don't use the knowledge you acquire for playing around or for aggression.

Obey the command of the berimbau during the practice of capoeira.

Obey the Mestre's instructions during the trainings.

Practice all the movements daily.

Don't distance yourself from your partner.

Don't wait too long!

GENERAL TEACHING PLAN

The teaching method consists basically **in the domination of each movement of the capoeira game** by individual learning, under the direct supervision of the Mestre, *of the basic teaching sequence* conceived by Mestre Bimba, *without the use of the berimbau. The sequence of throws* should be trained since the first sessions, with the mestre himself, with the help of the contramestre or a skilled graduated student.

Only after acquiring balance in the movements, quickness in the dodging and in the descents, spontaneity in the movements of the sequences, and domination of the fear of being hit and falling, may the participant pass to the second part of the basic course, under the command of the berimbau. During the first class under the berimbau, he receives the special name of *baptized student*. The *padrinho*^{*}, the older student who plays the novice – preferably a *graduated student* – should *play with caution*, avoiding mistreating or knocking down the *godson*, especially with the *rasteira*! On this occasion, the *nome de guerra* of the new *veteran* is chosen, and he will train under the berimbau during the rest of the course.

At around four months of experience, the student should change partners frequently in order to create new defense reflexes and enrich his reserve of movements. Once he reaches efficiency in the *negativa* and in the defense of *throws*, he can be taught the *rasteira* so that he will become accustomed to being thrown off-balance and falling safely.

Around the sixth month of the course, the student should have mastered the movements of the sequences and the art of falling. He should have the experience and development necessary for graduation as a capoeirista in the *graduation* ceremony, which is the responsibility of the Mestre of the *Academy*!

* Godfather

GENERAL PLAN OF THE CLASSES

Each capoeira class includes the following parts:

Sequence of throws
Basic teaching sequence
Games of the newest students
Free games
Iúna games
Esquentar banho
...and finishes with...
A cold shower

It's quick...

GENERATION OF THE CAPOEIRA MOVEMENTS

The original movement is the ginga. *It is the fundamental root from which the many components of capoeira are derived!*

From the ginga we pass to the descent to the *cocorinha* position, the request for *arpão de cabeça*, leg movements, arm and hand movements, turn of the waist or *rolê*, the turn of the *auí*, and the *cabeçada*. **In the cocorinha position, the elbows should rest on the knees, the hands hanging forward.**

From the cocorinha we can pass to the defense in cocorinha, by the crouching to dodge a high attack, with protection of face by one arm and of the flank by the leaning of the body in the direction of the attack movement. The hand on that side plants on the ground next to the feet, while the other hand accompanies the attacking limb and protects the head.

We can pass to the negativa, by the bending of one leg and the extension of the other leg forward, letting the torso fall towards the same side, planting the hands on the ground and bringing the head very close to the ground.

We can pass to the false meia-lua de compasso, with a turn similar to that of *request for arpão de cabeça*, carried out in a *cocorinha* position. This movement is very common in the *low game*.

From the arpão de cabeça arise *the armada-solta and meia-lua de compasso*.

From the leg movements originate *quiexada, benção, escorão, rebote, joelhada, dourada, banda-traçada, and rasteira*.

From the arm movements are born *galopante, asfixiante, quebra-mão, godemi, dedo nos olhos, palma, leque, cutila, costa-de-mão, cotovelada, and jicá*.

From the turn of the waist we develop *rolê, vingativa, banda de costas, and discóbulo*.

From the turn of the auí we carry out *rolê in the auí, leque in the auí, knee strike in the auí, cut in the auí, tesoura, ponteira, sapinho, auí encurugido, closed auí, auí espichado, and bending backwards*.

From the cabeçada we practice *cabeçada de açoite and cabeçada de escurrumelo*.

INITIAL EXAM

The initial exam is composed of tests to evaluate flexibility, muscular strength, and balance. The simple and brief maneuvers aim to discover rare incapacities and limitations, so that the instructor can appropriately select the most appropriate teaching methods for each student.

They are the following: *beijo dos joelhos*, *cocorinha*, *meia-lua de compasso*, *pinto catando milho*, *flexing of the spine forward*, *arpão de cabeça*, *flexing of the spine backwards with support of the waist by the instructor*, *meia-lua-de-frente*, and *aú*.

Beijo dos joelhos*

Description

Legs wide open, feet pointed toward the front, arms separated back and to the sides. Bend one of the knees and try to lay the jaw on the thigh just above the kneecap. Perform to both sides.

Objective

Evaluate the frontal flexibility, the lateral rotation of the spine and the abdomen, the strength and flexibility of the lower limbs, and the balance.

Cocorinha

Description

Crouched, feet separated and pointing forward, torso bent forward, elbows resting on the knees, hands hanging forward, gaze directed straight forward.

Objective

Explore the flexibility of the knees, the abdomen, the pelvis, and the vertebral column, as well as the strength and flexibility of the lower limbs and the diaphragmatic respiration.

Meia-lua de compasso

Description

From the cocorinha position, advance one step forward, bending and turning the trunk towards the same side, at the same time planting the hands on the ground next to that foot. Describe a turn in the air with the other leg, extended, attempting to hit the palm of the Mestre's hand, then return to the initial position. Perform to both sides.

Objective:

Examine muscular coordination, balance, sense of location; flexibility of the hips, spine, and neck; and peripheral vision.

* Kiss of the knees

Pinto catando milho**

Description

From the cocorinha, separate the knees, plant the bent elbows in the internal face of the thigh just above the knees, planting the hands on the ground smoothly in front of the line of support of the feet. Lean the torso forward, remove the feet from the ground, put the soles of the feet together, and remain in this bird-perch for the longest time possible.

Objective

Evaluate the strength of the upper back, the arms, the spine, and the abdomen, as well as the balance and courage.

Flexing of the spine forward

Description

With the feet together and the legs straight, bend the torso forward, attempting to put the hands on the back of the feet.

Objective

Verify the forward flexibility of the vertebral column and the elasticity of the legs.

Flexing of the spine backwards, with support of the waist by the instructor

Description

Standing with the feet together, bend backwards, attempting to plant the hands on the ground; maintain the body arched with the help of the mestre, who will support the waist with his arms during this movement.

Objective

Evaluate the backwards flexibility of the vertebral column, the elasticity and strength of the muscles of the abdomen, the shoulders, the hip flexors, and the back, as well as courage.

Arpão de cabeça

Description

While standing, put one foot forward and complete a turn on the ball of the foot, with the arms separated from the torso and looking under the armpit. Perform to both sides.

Objective

Verify the lightness of the feet on the ground, the balance, and the coordination.

Meia-lua-de-frente

Description

** Chick pecking corn

From the ginga position, lift the extended and turn in a movement of frontal sweeping, attempting to hit the extended hand of the mestre.

Objective

Evaluate the musculature of the thighs and pelvis as well as the dynamic equilibrium.

Aú

Description

Make a turn in the air with the support of the hands on the ground and return to one's feet. Perform to both sides.

Objective

Verify muscular coordination, balance, and fear of doing the movement, strength of the muscles of the back, shoulders, and arms.

FIRST CYCLE

GINGA

The ginga is a swinging, to-and-fro movement of the whole body, a rhythmic movement that accompanies the cadence of the berimbau. It is born from the waist and spreads to the torso, limbs, and head.

*At the level of the shoulders originates the **jiçá**, oscillatory movement of the shoulder blades that spreads in waves through the upper limbs, inside the rhythm of the berimbau toque, generating the **floreio** movements.*

During the practice of the ginga, we should maintain a normal separation between the feet, as in a natural step, **so that our balance is perfect and are movements are more agile.** *The excessive separation between the feet, whether to the sides or front-back, obliges greater dislocation of the body's center of gravity.* This makes it more difficult to stay balanced, diminishing one's agility and requiring greater muscular effort. **The complete extension of the lower limbs** is also disadvantageous. It turns the movements hard and inelegant, provoking hyperextension of the vertebral column. It also reduces the speed of dodges and increases the violence of an eventual impact.

The ideal posture *is the light bending of the joints*, which allows the maximum profit from the muscles and enables maximum velocity in movements, besides deadening impacts.

COCORINHA

In this position, the soles of the feet should be well-supported on the ground, with a comfortable separation between the feet. The center of gravity falls in the line that connects the centers of the feet. *For the balance to be perfect*, the vertebral column should be lightly leaning forward, in order to facilitate a rapid change in position. The Mestre recommended not letting the body hang

backwards, in order not to damage the balance or slow the movements. In the standard position, the arms rest lightly on the knees and the hands hang in front of the body.

The movement of defense in cocorinha is a crouching movement used to dodge high attacks, with protection of the face with the arm *in the direction of the attack movement*. During the defense from a *meia-lua de frente* or *meia-lua de compasso*, the arm on the side of the attack movement should guard the head during the descent *and accompany the trajectory of the attacking foot*. The trunk leans slightly to the same side of the attack movement and the other hand gives support on the ground.

NEGATIVA

Defensive descent assumed from the cocorinha by the extension of one foot forward, letting the torso fall to the same side, planting the hands on the ground and almost putting the head on the ground, while the support foot is bent.

BASIC SEQUENCES

←CONVENTIONS⇒

⇒ Movement of Attack or counter-attack	← Movement of Attack or counter-attack
← Movement of dodge or defense	⇒ Movement of dodge or defense

Meia-lua-de frente and Armada-solta

⇒First meia-lua de frente	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
⇒Second meia-lua de frente	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
⇒Armada-solta	⇒Defense in Negativa
←Escape in Aú	←Cabeçada
←Rolê	Return to Ginga

Queixada and Armada-solta

⇒First queixada	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
⇒Second queixada	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
⇒Armada-solta	⇒Defense in Negativa
←Escape in Aú	←Cabeçada
←Rolê	Return to Ginga

Martelos and Armada-solta

⇒First martelo	⇒Defense with Cupped Hand
⇒Second martelo	⇒ Defense with Cupped Hand
⇒Armada-solta	⇒Defense in Negativa
←Escape in Aú	←Cabeçada
←Rolê	⇒Return to Ginga

Armada solta and Benção

⇒First Armada-solta	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
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⇒Second Armada-solta	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
⇐Negativa	⇐Benção
⇒Cabeçada	⇒Escape in Aú
	⇒Rolê

Benção, Negativa and Aú

⇒Benção	⇒Negativa
⇐Aú	⇐Cabeçada
⇐Rolê	

Meia-luas de compasso

⇒First Meia-lua de compasso	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
⇒Second Meia-lua de compasso	⇒Defense in Cocorinha
	⇐Cabeçada
⇐Rolê	Return to Ginga

Arpão de cabeça

⇒Giro de arpão de cabeça	⇐Cabeçada
⇒Joelhada	⇒Negativa
⇐Escape in aú	⇐Cabeçada
⇐Rolê	Return to Ginga

Godemi and arrastão

⇒First godemi	⇐Defense with palm of the hand
⇒Second godemi	⇒Defense with palm of the hand
⇒Galopante	⇐Arrastão
⇐Negativa	⇐Escape in aú
⇒Cabeçada	⇐Rolê

Note

In this phase, the *Asfixiante* and the *Cutila* are demonstrated, although they are not included in the sequences.

SEQUENCE OF THROWS

*This sequence teaches the student to leap before the threat of a throw and to fall with safety and elegance. It shows **the interdependency of the players, without which capoeira is neither learned nor played!** It should be performed in the **beginning** of each training, while the students' skin and cotton shirts are still dry, so as not to slip.*

In the first sessions, the novice should practice with the mestre, the contra-mestre, or a trustworthy graduated student, in order to avoid accidents. In subsequent sessions, a more skilled veteran student can help in this exercise. It is composed of the following movements: *cintura desprezada, balão cinturado, balão de lado, and balão em pé.**

* Cintura desprezada = despised waist; balão cinturado = throw from the waist; balão de lado = side throw; balão em pé = standing throw.

CINTURA DESPREZADA

The novice gives a very stretched-out *aú* in the direction of the *contramestre*, who advances in a crouched position so that he receives and balances the novice's waist on one of his shoulders. The *contramestre* then rises up, securing the novice's waist with one arm, and throws him – **carefully** – upwards, in a way that the novice comes to land noiselessly on his feet – *like a black cat on an iron roof!* – as Erico Veríssimo would say if he played capoeira.

BALÃO CINTURADO, BALÃO DE LADO, AND BALÃO EM PÉ

1st Part – Balão cinturado

The *contramestre* requests an *arpão de cabeça* and the novice simulates the application of a *boca-de-calça*. When the novice gets close enough, the *contramestre* leans down, embraces the novice by the waist, lifts him off the ground and throws him backwards over his shoulders, in such a way that he lands *smoothly* on his feet.

2nd part – Balão de lado

While the novice completes his aerial trajectory, the *contramestre* goes in front of him, with the knees lightly bent and lightly leaning forward, and applies a *colar de força alto** on the novice. The novice projects the *contramestre* forward in a turn over his hip, by the forward leaning and rotation of the torso while he extends his knees. During the throw, the attacker should **support his partner's neck in order to avoid accidents**, like falling on the back or on the head!

3rd part – Balão em pé

Again, the *contramestre* passes in front of the novice, with his knees lightly bent, and applies a *gravata cinturada alta*** and projects him forward by the inclination of the torso forward and the extension of the legs. **During the throw, the attacker must support the partner's neck to avoid accidents like a fall on the back or on the head!** The novice should touch the ground on the balls of his feet, knees bent, spine relaxed and lightly flexed forward. He should ***never land on his heels***, nor with the back or the knees stiffened!

BAPTISM

Symbolism

The baptism signifies the inclusion of the novice in the category of veteran, by the indication of his *nome de guerra*, which will accompany him for the rest of his career.

Ritual

The mestre chooses the *padrinho* who will *bring up* the novice in his first *round* under the command of the berimbau. After the baptism game, Mestre Bimba used to ask those present, “*What does he look like?*” and cheerfully shouted the nickname, which was applauded by the crowd, in a similar way to the “*djina*”⁴⁶ in *candomblé*!

* A type of headlock

** Another type of headlock

⁴⁶ Name received during initiation

SECOND CYCLE

During the whole second cycle, the student continues practicing the basic sequences and the sequence of throws at the beginning of the classes. He plays under the toque of the berimbau without pandeiro, clapping, or singing. In this more advanced phase, the following movements are introduced: **açoite de braço, banda de costa, banda traçada, boca de calça, bochecho, cruz, cruzilha, dourada, quebra-perna, quebra-pescoço, tesoura de costas, tesoura de frente, tesoura de lado, and vingativa.**

TRAINING UNDER THE TOQUE OF THE BERIMBAU

Once the student has learned the basic sequence and acquired defense reflexes by means of the esquiva, cocorinha, negativa, and aú with rolê, he is initiated in the practice under the berimbau by a *graduated student* indicated by the *instructor*. He plays to a slow toque, without the accompaniment of clapping, pandeiro, or singing. Initially, he is paired with a student of similar height and weight, *in order to develop reciprocal trust*. He is under permanent observation for the correction of defects that could give origin to accidents – above all faults in the guards and postures, which can be corrected by the change of partner to someone who can *naturally and spontaneously* penetrate his guard and take advantage of the “holes,” thus leading to the *subconscious* correction of the fault!

The introduction of the *rasteira* is only done after the batizado, and is the responsibility of the mestre, by his observation of the student’s behavior. *Fear of falling* is the main risk factor for accidents, by the slowness of defense reflexes, and imperfection in the landings in the sequence of throws. It is of great importance that *the capoeirista, upon landing or falling, does not hit* the floor with his elbow, knee, head, back, heel, or butt!

GRADUATION

The *graduation* marks the transition from the learning phase to the full exercise of capoeira under personal responsibility, and the entrance into the community of the *graduated students!*

The *graduation* occurs in a public ceremony, in which the Mestre asks the *graduating student* to demonstrate the movements of the sequences, including throws, in a similar way to a doctoral thesis defense in the universities.

Afterwards, each *graduated student* shows his ability in a *round* with the *patron* or one of the *honored ones of the group*, during which he *must not dirty his white clothes!* After this test of ability, the graduating students are reunited in a line, each one with their *madrinha**. The Mestre delivers the *graduation medal* to the *madrinha* who affixes it to the chest of the *godson* under the applause of those present!

From that point forward, each *graduated student* takes care! With the protection of God! And of *São Salomão!*

* Godmother

THE ESSENTIAL POINTS

Humility.

Discipline.

Sporting Education.

Respect for the hierarchy.

Attention to one's partner.

Perfect ginga.

Obedience to the command of the berimbau.

The esquiva must be the beginning of the counterattack.

Don't offer direct resistance.

Always accompany the direction of the attack during dodges.

Attack against the direction of the opponent's movement.

Repeated and continued practice of the training sequences.

Leap before being knocked down by a throw... silently and smoothly like a clever cat!

Aú is the defense from a rasteira!

Never expose the flank, the head, the neck, or the back.

Keep the adversary in one's peripheral visual field.

Never flee backwards!

Always dodge turning to the correct side, accompanying the attack movement.

Don't let yourself be grabbed!

OUTLINE FOR ESSAYS AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

GENERAL PLAN

To develop...

a) Historical facts

- Origin of capoeira
- Origin of regional
- Stories narrated by Mestre Bimba
- Testimonies about Mestre Bimba and capoeira Regional
- Historical facts of Regional

b) Concept and definition

c) Pedagogy

Basic teaching

- Basic workout
- Basic sequences
- Sequence of throws
- Sequences of floreio
- Sequences of self-defense
- Special sequences
- Maintenance sequences

Specialization courses

- Ambush
- Knife
- Machete
- Razor
- Firearm
- Club
- Street fight
- Fight in an enclosed environment

General precautions and emergency help

d) Physiology (functional effects)

- Cardio-pulmonary
- Muscular
- Ligament-joints
- Neurological
- Psychological

e) Technique

- Basic movements
- Floreio movements
- Dodges
- Aús, jumps, and rolês
- Rasteiras and arrastões
- Traumatic blows
- Throws
- Takedowns
- Cornering and dynamic immobilizations
- Grappling and immobilizations
- Bladed weapons
- Firearms

Clubs

f) Music

Berimbau toques

Pandeiro toques

Rhythms

Songs

Organization of the orchestra

g) Applications

Playful activity

Choreographic activity

Folklore

Workout activity

Competitive activity

Musical activity

Self-defense

Physical fitness

Mental development

h) Sporting organization

Sporting legislation

Regulations

i) Capoeira's potential for evolution

The integration of the styles

Aerobic workout

Workout for maintenance of physical fitness

Therapeutic psycho-somatic workout

Self-defense

CURRICULUM VITAE*

UNIVERSITÁRIO

Interno do Prof. Benjamin da Rocha Salles no Hospital de Pronto de Salvador, Bahia
 Estagiário do Prof. J. Coelho dos Santos no Serviço de Anatomia Patológica do Hospital Sta. Izabel da Casa da Sta. Mizericordia da Bahia
 Estagiário do Serviço de Ortopedia do Prof. Benjamin da Rocha Salles no Hospital Sta. Izabel da Casa da Santa Mizericorida da Bahia
 Estagiário do Prof. Carlos Gama, catedrático de Clínica Neurológica da Faculdade de Medicina da Bahia
 Estagiário de Prof. Edístio Pondé, catedrático de Clínica Neurológica da Faculdade de Medicina da Bahia
 Estagiário do Dr. Cesar Germano de Sá Bittencourt e Camara, Chefe de Clínica Cirúrgica do Hospital Sta. Izabel da Casa da Sta. Mizericordia da Bahia
 Interno Concursado da Clínica Ginecológica do Prof. Alício Peltier Queiroz, da Faculdade de Medicina da Bahia
 Prêmio Prof. Enjorlas Vampré, melhor trabalho em Clínica Neurológica em 1947
 Estagiário do Laboratório de Análise Clínica da Cadeira de Clínica Médica do Prof. José Olímpio da Silva da Faculdade de Medicina da Bahia

PROFISSIONAL

Médico de Guarda do Hospital Sta. Izabel da Casa da Sta. Mizericordia da Bahia
 Assistente da Clínica Cirúrgica do Dr. Joaquim Figueiredo Neto do Hospital Sta. Izabel da Casa da Sta. Mizericordia da Bahia
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 Prof. Assistente Encarregado de Curso Prático de Anatomia Humana da EBMSP
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 Prof. Assistente Encarregado de Curso de Propedêutica Cirúrgica da EBMSP
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 Cirurgião do Hospital Santo Antônio das Obras Sociais de Irmã Dulce
 Sócio Fundador da Regional Baiana do Capítulo Brasileiro da Sociedade Internacional
 Sócio Fundador do Capítulo Brasileiro da Sociedade Internacional de Angiologia
 Sócio Fundador da Sociedade de Angiologia de Salvador
 Consultor Cirúrgico do Hospital Santa Izabel da Casa da Santa Mizericorida da Bahia
 Graduado em Medicina de Trabalho pela Escola Baiana de Medicina e Saúde Pública
 Professor de Ergonomia no Curso de Medicina do Trabalho da EBMSP
 Presidente de Comissão Examinadora de Ginecologia do IAPC
 Ginecologista Concursado do IAPC
 Médico-Perito do IAPI
 Médico-Perito do INSS
 Titulado como Especialista em Perícia Medica por Concurso do INSS
 Coordenador do Plano de Ação Conjunta da S. R. da Bahia do INPS

* Sorry, I got really tired of translating at this point, and decided not to translate Mestre Decânio's curriculum vitae. Suffice it to look at the list of his positions and accomplishments. But scroll on to read the afterword, "Black in the White," by Fred Abreu.

Assessor Médico da Coordenação Regional de Acidentes do Trabalho da Secretaria Regional de Acidentes do Trabalho da S. S. S. da S. R. da Bahia do INPS
 Especializado em Acupuntura pela União Nacional dos Profissionais em Acupuntura do Brasil
 Fundador da Regional Bahia-Sergipe da União Nacional dos Profissionais em Acupuntura do Brasil
 Professor de Acupuntura em Cursos de Acupuntura da Regional Bahia-Sergipe da União Nacional dos Profissionais em Acupuntura do Brasil
 Prof. de Anatomia Aplicada à Acupuntura no I Curso de Acupuntura da Regional Paulista União Nacional dos Profissionais em Acupuntura do Brasil
 Homenageado pela Escola Baiana de Medicina e Saúde Pública pela escolha do seu nome para o Instituto de Cirurgia Experimental

ESPORTIVO

Graduado em Capoeira por Mestre Bimba (1940)
 Contramestre da Academia de Luta Regional Baiana de Mestre Bimba
 Mestre (Lenço Branco) do CCFRB, pelo Mestre Bimba
 Fundador e Primeiro Diretor do Departamento de Capoeira da Federação Baiana de Pugilismo durante a gestão de Fauzi Abdala João.
 Médico da Federação Baiana de Pugilismo
 Médico da Confederação Brasileira de Pugilismo
 Médico do Departamento de Educação Física da Bahia
 Médico da Federação Baiana de Natação
 Curso de Extensão Universitária em Medicina Esportiva
 Faixa preta 1º dan em Judo
 Representante da FBP e de Mestre Bimba no 1º Simpósio Nacional de Capoeira,
 Representante da F.B.P. e de Mestre Bimba no 1º Congresso Brasileiro de Capoeira na Escola de Aeronáutica
 Diretor de Vela do Iate Clube da Bahia.
 Fundador da Flotilha de Snipes do Aratu Iate Clube
 Fundador da Flotilha de Laser de Iate Clube da Bahia
 Fundador da Flotilha de Hobby 16 do Iate Clube da Bahia
 Vice-comodoro do Aratu Iate Clube.
 Autor do Anteprojeto de Regulamentação da Capoeira à C.B.P. durante a Presidência de Pascoal Segretto Sobrinho
 Médico-assistente e Cirurgião de Mestre Bimba

TRABALHOS, PESQUISAS, CONFERÊNCIAS E TEMAS DESENVOLVIDOS

Incisão subcostal para abordagem da loja esplênica e renal
 Tratamento do hiperesplenismo pela ligadura e seção da artéria esplênica
 Portalização da artéria hepática no tratamento da hipertensão portal em cirrose hepática
 Tratamento da síndrome pósflebite pela operação de Mário Degni
 Esquistossomose ovariana e tubária
 Ressecção istmotubária no tratamento da salpingite crônica
 Miofascioplastia urocolpoperinea nos prolapso genitais
 Miofascioplastia colpocistouretral na incontinência urinária de esforço
 Tratamento cirúrgico de divertículo uretral

Reconstituição de uretra por retalho de fundo de bexiga em fistula urogenital tocógena
Ureteroneocistostomia em fistulas ureterogenitais pós-operatórias
Tratamento do câncer uterino avançado pela excocleação pélvica
Esplenização dos linfonódulos mesentéricos na hipertensão portal e hiperesplenismo
Neuroangliectomia lombar no tratamento das arteriopatias obliterativas dos membros inferiores
Ressecção de plexos présacro, hipogástricos e parametriaes em leucoplasia e craurose vulvares
Aortografia no diagnóstico de tumores malignos
Aortografia no diagnóstico de obliterações arteriais de membros inferiores
Tratamento cirúrgico de Cisto de Baker
Tratamento cirúrgico de aneurisma popliteo
Esplenoportografia dinâmica no diagnóstico da hipertensão portal esquistossomótica
Flebografia intra-hepática no diagnóstico das hepatopatias fibrosantes

BLACK IN THE WHITE

FRED ABREU

A taxi driver commented: *“In the past, Bimba’s white students and doctors were proud to say who their mestre was – a half-literate black man!”*

Among those students was the “white” Dr. Decânio.

Seduced by the art and cleverness of capoeira regional, Decânio entered in capoeira in 1938, when capoeira was still socially condemned.

Enchanted by the mysteries of the black world, Decânio went forward: he became close to the mestre; he became an effective member of Bimba’s class; he collaborated in the promotion of the “Centro de Cultura Física Regional”; he entered in the ronco of the terreiro angola “**Tanuri jussara**” of **Mãe Bebê**, in the Engenho Velho da Federação neighborhood, where he was “made a son” of “**Oxalufá**” – “**Chê-ê-ê...Babá!**”

In order to take the course that he took in capoeira, he confesses a psycho-cultural leaning: *“Capoeira excited in the youth of my epoch a fascination resulting from the legendary figures that emerged from the era of slavery as heroes, semi-gods sculpted in ebony by the oral tradition of our Recôncavo... my idols – secretly! – since they were forbidden to be admired by the Christian culture of Portuguese origin in which I was born and raised.”*

The black heroes of that generation were no longer those (white and European) that **Manoel Querino** referred to in his book “**Bahia de outrora**”:^{*} *“the amateur capoeiristas”* (supposedly white) *“previously communicated through written flyers. Two circumstances acted powerfully on the spirit of the young generation to deliver them to the exercise of capoeiragem: reading the history of ‘Carlos Magno’ or of the ‘Doze Pares Da França,’ and also the warrior narratives of Napoleon Bonaparte’s life.”*

It was a trend to be brave, like today it’s a trend to be a singer.

The cultural conflict (**black capoeira ↔ Portuguese Christianity**) revealed in Decânio’s confession was possibly an issue for the majority of the white allies of “regional” and had implications in the history of this style.

Existentially enriched by the African wisdom that Bimba’s capoeira transmitted, they were grateful to the Mestre, to such a degree that they became allies-conductors of his black visionary project of capoeira’s socio-cultural affirmation and expansion.

However, capoeira was not placed in the foreground in the life perspective of these allies.

It was a stage – sometimes shorter, sometimes longer – during which **their innate personality**, although changed, **was not completely extinguished**, not even when they were inside the very environment of capoeira and the robust body of “regional.” That which they valorized most was the fight-like blows and the self-defense, in detriment to the cultural aspects.

* Bahia of the old times

About this subject, Decânio says: *“We entered into the academy in order to learn how to fight.”*

This statement can also serve, in part, for us to begin to understand the project aiming to regulate capoeira as a sport, which (symptomatically) counted on an invaluable and decisive collaboration of Mestre Bimba’s students, a project that tries to bring capoeira closer to the Eastern martial arts that are implicitly violent and bellicose.

Much of the result of this project, which Mestre Bimba capoeiristically “received and ignored,” displeased Decânio.

Thus, a tragic deviation occurred in the course of “regional,” a cultural emptiness that deepened even more as capoeira was removed from its ethno-social roots, mainly after Bimba’s death in 1974.

And Decânio left.

In the 1990s, the **“Filhos de Bimba”*** raised the banner of rebirth of “regional”: to regain the originality of its steps, toques, and songs, its classical form of expression.

It is an undertaking that includes the reaffirmation of Mestre Bimba’s socio-cultural importance as well as a critical reading about the historical destiny of “regional.”

In order to collaborate with this, Decânio integrated himself with the “Filhos de Bimba,” invited by **Nenel**, a son of the Mestre, one of the leaders. He returned mature and with much enthusiasm!

The years of separation gave him a critical new vision about his participation in the destiny of capoeira regional.

“THE HERITAGE OF MESTRE BIMBA,” the first work of the **“SÃO SALOMÃO”** collection, which is now being launched, is one fruit of his reintegration.

It will certainly enrich even more the “reserve” of knowledge about Mestre Bimba and his work, revealing a series of important aspects that had been forgotten, suppressed in favor of other more immediate aspects, having in mind the pragmatism that often fed the expansion of Bimba’s work.

The African wisdom is expressed in **“Parables”** and **“Life lessons”** (experienced knowledge) of the Mestre, poetic aphorisms, sentences, popular sayings, much in the traditional oral Afro-Brazilian way, but being recorded in writing, thus avoiding the risk that **Mãe Estela** warns us about in **“Meu tempo é agora”**:** *“Whatever is not recorded, the wind takes away...”*

It is always necessary to value the wisdom of the **“old mestres”** of capoeira (different from “mestres of capoeira”); especially now, when this wisdom is being excluded from meetings and debates about the subject, academic conferences; when thinking about philosophy, anthropology, sociology, physical education, pedagogy, and other sciences that can be very useful to the study of capoeira, these serve to lend “status” to the art.

* Sons of Bimba

** “My time is now”

In this chapter there is another aspect to consider, that of the facts and stories told within. It is possible to “*un-deify*” the Bimba’s figure and personality, in contrast to some of his students, who put him above good and evil. Bimba also lost, also hesitated, also did silly things like any human being, like any capoeirista.

However, the greatness of a man can be seen behind his blunders.

The letters-responses from Decânio to Nene, who was seeking data for the project of regional’s rebirth, uncover information (“...*and that is why it was that way...*”) about Bimba’s work, avoiding the establishment of transitory things as crystallized truths.

Decânio’s testimonies are important because he lived during a very fertile period of regional, before the corruption of its original values. He lived a time in which the students enjoyed great intimacy with the Mestre and the practice of teaching was more individualized (hand to hand). The Mestre was present, playing or demonstrating, and participated in detail in the elaboration of the symbols and codes that helped “regional” to grow. Beyond this, Decânio is qualified to say “when, who, and why” regional began to lose its original values.

These words of Decânio are not just printed in letters, but in his body, “*in the blood,*” “*in instinct,*” as Bimba would say.

After being separated from capoeira rodas for 20 years, and attacked by viral inflammation of the spine, osteoporosis, and osteoarthritis, he returned to practice it, regenerating his body, training, in order to show “in action” how regional was when he started. Anxious, in this process he came to discover things, within the things that Bimba spoke and practiced (always in consonance with science), that he presents under the form of “**Reflections**” and provides the base for the construction of “**a method of physical preparation for the practice of capoeira in old age**”!

Regaining the originality of the steps, toques, and songs of regional neither aims to be a retrograde movement, nor to dispense with the growths that capoeira naturally accumulated.

“Regional,” by its dynamic, was conceived as an open work; however, with the passage of time, its practice became mechanized, got jammed, and lost its class.

In this case, the “Zen-Africanism” advises: **visit the roots;** they will certainly indicate **the clues for future possibilities!**