

Capoeira Angola from the perspective of Performance and Ritual Studies

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Abstract | The space where the capoeira angola ritual takes place is called roda. Capoeiristas play and sing in a circle, while a pair plays in the center of the roda. For capoeiristas, the roda goes beyond physical and aesthetic aspects. It makes happen and teaches life. Based on this hypotheses, a reflection is presented on the contributions that studies of performance, ritual and oral poetics can offer to the understanding of capoeira as a multidimensional environment.

KEYWORDS: Angola Capoeira. Ritual. Performance. Game. Oral poetics

Capoeira Angola sob a ótica dos estudos da performance e do ritual.

Resumo | O espaço onde acontece a capoeira angola é chamado roda. Os capoeiristas tocam e cantam em círculo, enquanto uma dupla joga ao centro da roda. Para os capoeiristas, a roda ultrapassa os aspectos físicos e estéticos. Faz acontecer e ensina a vida. A partir desse pressuposto, apresenta-se uma reflexão sobre as contribuições que os estudos da performance, do ritual e das poéticas orais podem oferecer ao entendimento da roda de capoeira como ambiente multidimensional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Capoeira Angola. Ritual. Performance. Jogo. Poéticas Oraís.

La Capoeira Angola bajo la óptica de los estudios de la performance y del ritual

Resumen | El espacio donde acontece la capoeira angola es llamado roda. Los capoeiristas tocan y cantan en círculo, mientras un par juega en el centro de la roda. Para los capoeiristas, la roda ultrapasa los aspectos físicos y estéticos. Hace acontecer y enseña la vida. A partir de ese presupuesto, se hace una reflexión sobre las contribuciones que los estudios de la performance, del ritual y de las poéticas orales pueden ofrecer al entendimiento de la roda de capoeira como ambiente multidimensional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Capoeira Angola. Ritual. Performance. Juego. Poéticas Orales.

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Introduction

The roda of Capoeira Angola is a space designed and delimited by the capoeiristas themselves when, with their bodies, they arrange in a circle to shape the performance, the ritual, the capoeira game. This article reflects on the roda as a multidimensional environment. This idea has been built throughout an ethnographic participative research along with the Group of Capoeira Angola Pelourinho, GCAP, in Salvador city, Bahia, Brazil. The ethnography is understood here as an interpretative practice that conceives the work field (capoeira game) as well as its reverberation as a written text as narrative constructions¹. Also an anthropological performance, originated in the relationship bond built among the researchers and the members of the researched group². From the ethnographic perspective, the association of the concepts of performance, ritual, and game³, adopted in this article to discuss the roda, is an act of translation (BHABHA, 1998) or comparison (SAHLINS, 2018). A strategy so that non-capoeiristas can understand the complexity of the place par excellence of Capoeira Angola, the roda. Space, but also an ambiguous organism with multiple faces. The ethnographic experience is a fundamental method that allows highlighting a non-institutional point of view about Capoeira Angola in the confrontation with the capoeiristas, in this case. A point of view that emerges from the encountering of academic studies with the knowledge of the group. A dynamic wealth that adapts on time undertaking doings and meanings, linked to the daily practice of its interpreters.

The Capoeira Angola

At first, it is necessary to explain what is meant by Capoeira Angola, since capoeira is represented by multiple strands and exponents that are not always related. Capoeira Angola is understood in the light of a participative ethnographic experience, between the years 2010 and 2020, with the Capoeira Angola Pelourinho Group, GCAP, which is based at Forte da Capoeira in Salvador. It is worth remembering that the composition of GCAP and its ways of thinking and doing are not static. During the aforementioned ten years of research, there were many changes in the conformation of the group, whether concerning the headquarters in Salvador, in the nuclei of other cities, or in other oriented groups. In addition, many of the current capoeiristas, who are no longer members of the group, trained at GCAP at different times. The only member who followed the entire trajectory of the group is exactly its founder, Mestre Moraes. The

¹In his research, Clifford Geertz deconstructs the myth of the impartial researcher as an objective observer of reality, as a mirror capable of reflecting through ethnographic writing the cultural realities that are presented to him externally. According to Geertz (1974), on the contrary, diversity can be apprehended only as part of the cultural universe of the anthropologist itself. From this point of view, the researcher does not discover a reality external to him but participates in the construction of that reality in his own experience. Geertz's work, which was influenced by the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur who had been his university colleague in Chicago in the early 1970s, considers culture as a text and ethnographic work as a reading of that text, an interpretation. The work of Clifford Geertz, in addition to the famous text *The Interpretation of Cultures* (GEERTZ, 2008), is based on reading other of his articles (GEERTZ, 1974, 1988, 1995, 2000) and on studying Malighetti's work (2007, 2008).
²In the specific case, the meetings with the GCAP between 2010 and 2020.

³From a theoretical point of view, we deal with the concepts of performance and ritual from two points of view: research by Victor Turner and Richard Schechner on theater and anthropology, and research on oral poetics and performance by Paul Zumthor. The concept of game resumes the research of Johan Huizinga and the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer.

coexistence and practice of Capoeira Angola in GCAP is and was a reference for many of the current groups of Capoeira Angola⁴. However, what is clear in living with GCAP and Mestre Moraes is the lack of identification with most of these groups, a distinction that becomes one of the main points of GCAP's work regarding the teaching and dissemination of Capoeira Angola.

These observations are important insofar as the arguments developed in this article are based on ethnographic research restricted to a period of time, to limited living space, to the set of people involved, with their different backgrounds and backgrounds, and to the relationships during these meetings. Here, we do not propose a reflection on the thinking of the various masters and researchers who have dealt with the theme of Capoeira Angola, bringing it closer to performance studies, but we propose to relate our reflections, inspired by the data collected in the field, as well as by our experiences with the work of some authors of performance studies, ritual and oral poetics. This choice is due to the uniqueness of how GCAP has been recreating and reinterpreting the Angolan capoeira tradition, whether in terms of organization or conception⁵.

The GCAP was founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1980 by Pedro Moraes Trindade from Bahia, Mestre Moraes, from Praia Grande on Ilha de Maré. The name Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho is a tribute to the Pelourinho neighborhood, in downtown Salvador, where Mestre Pastinha's Capoeira Angola Sports Center was based. There, Moraes got to know Capoeira Angola.

After a stay that exceeded a decade, the year of 1980 passed, when on the initiative of Mestre Moraes, the Capoeira Angola Pelourinho Group was founded in Rio de Janeiro. When Master Moraes returned to Bahia in 1982, he transferred the headquarters of the aforementioned group, to settle him definitively in the state [...] (MOURA, 2016, p. 21).⁶

In Salvador, GCAP endeavored to involve the masters who no longer taught capoeira, inviting them to speak and show their art during events at Forte Santo Antônio Além do Carmo, where it established its headquarters and in other cultural centers and institutions. Some great allies in this project were the masters João Pequeno, the first capoeirista to occupy a room in Forte Santo Antônio after the passing of Mestre Pastinha, and João Grande who was invited to return to teach capoeira classes at the GCAP space. In an interview about his history, Mestre João Grande recalls that time:

⁴This article does not aim to draw the trajectory of GCAP, rich history of encounters and disagreements, not only in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, but also in other cities in Brazil, such as Belo Horizonte, Brasília, São Paulo, São Luiz de Paratinga, and outside Brazil, in the United States, in Japan, in France. To learn more about this story drawn in two moments and from two different perspectives see Araújo (2004) and Tamplenizza (2017).

⁵When dealing with an Afro-descendant art, tradition must be seen outside traditionalism, but inscribed in ancestry, which according to Muniz Sodré (2017), "represents a moment of group autonomy as a continuous and vigilant memory of a set of rules and historically tuned characters with a peculiar way of ordering the real".

⁶All citations in this article were translated by the authors.

At the time when I worked at the gas station, Capoeira Angola was low, fallen. I did not do Capoeira Angola for five years.

Couldn't I do it? I couldn't. [I was] Working a lot. Capoeira Angola fell. Only Regional was on the top. Capoeira Angola only had João Pequeno in Forte Santo Antônio. Cobrinha Verde had passed away. Mestre Pastinha was sick. Valdemar would only play berimbau. Nobody played capoeira anymore. [...] I was feeling bad. I only played in shows, played maculelê, pulled hammocks at Moenda, but capoeira, which is good, I didn't play. When Moraes made the meeting and called me, I went back to Capoeira Angola and everybody went back. Valdemar returned, late Zacarias, late Bobó. Everyone went back to Capoeira Angola. Moraes and Cobrinha went to the gas station to call me, I was at Moenda. They gave me a salary to come to GCAP. I left Moenda and spent three years working with GCAP. [I had been] Teaching everyone there. After three years I didn't want to stay there anymore. I went to work at Moenda again. (BARROS, 2010, p. 201).

According to Mestre Jair Moura, the work of GCAP and its allies in the 1980s was the driving force behind a renaissance movement in Capoeira Angola, which decisively influenced the implementation of its modern features (MOURA, 2016).

The goal of GCAP is to carry out a process of cultural resistance, led by Mestre Moraes, which was initiated by Masters João Pequeno and João Grande, students of Mestre Pastinha, having passed through other masters he met as a youth.⁷ This issue is linked to the matter of ancestry⁸, which considers capoeira as an art, a system of socio-political education and a way of life. An art practiced by Afro-descendant workers in Brazil, which is why it is called Angola. According to Mestre Pastinha's words: "Angola, capoeira mother. Mandinga of slaves in search of freedom, his principle has no method and its end is inconceivable to the wisest capoeirista " (PIRES, 2002, p. 64).

Given this, GCAP represents a tradition that has a socio-political vision of capoeira, defined by Moraes as "an instrument for the struggle of the proletariat" and an organic means for the analysis and socio-political action of society. In the group's trajectory, attempts are made to innovate to translate for the new generations and carry forward the ideas of the older masters, sparing no effort to think Capoeira Angola not only as a sports practice but with a look focused on its complexity and its educational power.

Nowadays, considering that a lot of descriptive research on capoeira has already been published, the definition of Capoeira Angola can even be taken as a banal way, since what is seen in capoeira - the game, the movements, its rules, the

⁷ According to Moraes, in an interview with Cecilia Tamplenizza (January 6th, 2015, Salvador-Bahia), he learned capoeira regarding both the Masters João Pequeno and João Grande at CECA, Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola, led by Mestre Pastinha, and previously with some "organic" masters from his neighborhood, including Tonho de Hilda.

⁸ By "ancestry", GCAP understands a personal and group link between the past, the present and the future, marked by an Afro-descendant worldview. This subject deserves another space to be treated, we leave here the reflection of Muniz Sodré (2017) as a reference: "Different from historical time, the temporality in which fate is inscribed is inherent to, that is, the ethical validity of, the discourse of foundation of the group, in which origin and end are intertwined ". To learn more about the idea of ancestry for GCAP see Tamplenizza (2017).

strokes, instruments, ringtones, etc ... - incurs the flattening of their multiple identities. Its wealth lies in its ability to adapt at different times, to assume different forms and meanings, linked to the daily practice of its interpreters.

For Mestre, the complexity of Capoeira Angola makes it difficult to define: "She is all that the mouth eats". "She is full of malice, she is tricky, she has the possibility for everything that thinks good in life". In the beautiful interpretation of Mestre Pastinha's words, made by Dr. Decânio, "the multiple aspects of capoeira (Angola) are manifested according to the context, like the water that takes the shape of the vase". Mestre Pastinha said that "capoeira is spiritualized in the self of each one".⁹. (TRINDADE, 2010)

When looking quickly for a definition for Capoeira Angola it is common to hear that capoeira is similar to a dance or a fight. For some capoeiristas, dance is part of the fight, and vice versa. But these definitions leave out many other constitutive aspects of capoeira, such as, for example, spirituality and music, which is performed and created by the same capoeiristas, "dancers" and "fighters". Thus, other words such as spectacle, art, and ritual are inserted in this narrative.

None of these definitions fully satisfies the cultural complexity of the capoeira roda which is why they often intersect, trying to underline the different aspects of capoeira. The definition on the portal of IPHAN - Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage exemplifies this difficulty, citing some of the different faces that constitute the roda:

A The Capoeira Roda is a structuring element of a cultural manifestation, space, and time, where singing, the playing of instruments, dance, strokes, games, play, symbols and rituals of African heritage are simultaneously expressed - notably banto - recreated in Brazil. Deeply ritualized, the capoeira roda gathers songs and movements that express a worldview, a hierarchy, and a code of ethics that are shared by the group. [...] Today, it is one of the greatest symbols of Brazilian identity and is present throughout the national territory, in addition to being practiced in more than 160 countries, on all continents¹⁰ (emphasis added).

To understand how Capoeira Angola is developed in GCAP it is necessary to link the ritual of the roda to the complex African heritage in Brazil, as explained by Mestre Moraes, to a holistic understanding of the ritual and to a ritual dimension of dance, music, and game¹¹. "The ritual is the proper place for the full expression and expansion of the body" (SODRÉ, 2019, p. 83).

⁹ TRINDADE Pedro Moraes. Mestre Pastinha o filósofo da capoeira. April 5th 2010. Available at: <mestremoraes-GCAP.blogspot.com.br/2010_04_01_archive.html>. Consulted on: April 9th. 2020

¹⁰ Available at: <portal.iphan.gov.br/pagina/detalhes/66>. Consulted on: April 9th. 2020.

¹¹ This topic certainly deserves a broader discussion that we propose to write in the future. Some reflections on this topic can be found in Tamplenizza (2017).

In light of these considerations, we now propose to reflect on how the studies of performance, ritual, and oral poetics can offer contributions to the understanding of capoeira as this holistic, multidimensional environment.

The performance concept applied to the roda

The concept of performance adopted in this work refers to the research by anthropologists Victor Turner and Richard Schechner and their interconnections with studies on ritual, play, and dramatization. When dealing with theater from an anthropological perspective, the two researchers used the concept of performance to include non-Western theatrical actions, which were not well defined with the term "theater¹²". From the perspective of performance studies, theatre not only represents, but allows to live. To problematize theatre as a performance aims to bridge the gap between life and art.

In the same way, when speaking of Capoeira Angola from an anthropological point of view, it was necessary to question concepts that could express the complexity of this difficult-to-define art, since at the same time it has elements similar to other arts and rituals, it is absolutely peculiar. A capoeira circle can be understood as art, in the sense of continuous creation, it can be seen as a spectacle, as it occurs in the presence of actors / spectators. However, one of its most interesting features is that it is situated in a between-place, of suspension between the margins of aesthetic production and anthropological instances linked to the urgency of connecting men with other men. It is here that the concept of performance becomes useful for understanding the capoeira circle in Angola.

Performance is understood herein as a corporeal practice necessary for a critical redefinition of reality. As an event outside of everyday life that, in some way, differs from everyday life. Unlike the theatre where different works are produced each season, Capoeira Angola is a show that is repeated the same and different each time.

The activities at GCAP happen weekly. During the period of our experience, there were between two and three weekly training and one roda¹³. The constancy and repetition of training can transform the group's activities into routine. The act of repeating is part of learning capoeira and it is part of its ritual aspects, which we will talk about a little later. In the act of repeating, the body learns to transform novelties into new convictions, to make the unusual into everyday life, into a routine, a process that was called routinization by Max Weber (2000, p. 161).

Special events are created to illuminate and intensify everyday life. Despite this, it is common for people to have ordinary experiences during special events and

¹² The Greek word 'θέατρον' literally means "place to go to see", where who sees / the audience, what sees / the acting, and the imagined / the text are dramatized.

¹³ The amount of training and circles can vary depending on the season.

for extraordinary experiences to arise from the flow of everyday life. Life can thus be understood from reflections and intuitions raised during these special events. The capoeiristas understand and talk about their lives from the special experiences of capoeira. At GCAP, Mestre Moraes says that the circle is a complex micro world, while everyday life can be seen as a macro world. The wheel is designed to excite and stimulate, and therefore it tends to generate more salient experiences and stimulate more memories than everyday events. For a capoeirista from GCAP, these emotions and memories should animate daily life again, collecting from the common routines traces of the extraordinary experiences of the roda.

In an interview, second master David Fonseca commented: "We capoeiristas try to take this question of rhythm into our daily lives. Understand our pace. Try to balance our pace in face of situations, contexts of life. Heal the body through rhythm¹⁴". Associating the rhythm of capoeira with the "healing of the body" is a way of understanding music linked to a learning process that does not only pass through the ear, but involves other senses. There are many cases of capoeiristas who are cured of motor problems through living with capoeira. Based on body knowledge, capoeira can provide analgesic effects and kinetic, as well as psychological benefits.

Concerning etymology, the word performance comes from the English *parfourneny* then *parfourmen*, which derives from the old French *parfournir*, composed of *par* {«completely»} and *foumir* («fornire»). According to Victor Turner (1986, p. 176), the word performance refers to a procedural action to "comply" or "complete". To perform is to carry out a process that can be more or less complex, much more than fulfilling a single action. In this process, performance and knowledge of what is transmitted are linked. Performance changes knowledge in any way. It is not simply a means of communication: as it communicates, it marks (ZUMTHOR, 2007, p. 32). Still following Paul Zumthor (2010, p. 166): "Performance implies competence. In addition to know-how and know-say, performance manifests a know-being in time, in space. Whatever, by linguistic means, the text said or sung evokes, the performance imposes a global referent that is of the order of the body".

The performance of Capoeira Angola brings together several actors: capoeiristas, the public. Capoeiristas acquire different skills over time, becoming more involved with the group, learning to assume different places in the roda. In the beginning, the categories of capoeirista and the public are similar. Even sitting in the roda, the novice capoeirista cannot play, play, or manage the ritual. It sings, watches and participates as a spectator. Thus, outside the circular space of the roda, the audience may sing along with capoeiristas emotionally. Through singing, the audience also participates, adding their own energies to those of the roda. As well as the public, the novice capoeirista, who is not yet familiar with capoeira, with the group's thinking and doing, is inserted in the roda through singing, because through vocation the space of the roda is filled with energy.

¹⁴Interview by David Fonseca, September 13th, 2014, Salvador-Bahia.

When we designate the operation of using the voice of vocality, we are referring to an extremely complex space for the production of signs, and this is because such signs are silent, sonorous, audible and inaudible at the same time, converging all of them to a kind of body sound, which characterizes vocal performance, which is not only sound, but it involves body and voice - body and voice intimately interwoven so that what is not sonorous becomes sonorous, and what is not visual acquires a kind of sonic potential, making vocality a kind of complex theatrical scene, made up of verb-voco-visual signs (MATOS, 2018, p. 85).

In GCAP, it is said that the wheel is a space where everyone actively participates, whether in the work of energy production or in the benefits that are provided by it. Even if a capoeirista does not know how to play, entering the roda just to play and leave soon thereafter is an attitude that is not compatible with the harmony of the group and such behavior is now considered selfish. The least that a capoeirista must do is to respond to the choir, in time, with a will and a loud voice, during the entire unfolding of the roda. In his manuscripts, Mestre Pastinha complained: "Friends, why don't you sing? Capoeira is only beautiful when playing, singing, and only loses its beauty because it is not sung" (DECÂNIO, 1997, p. 34).

Beauty should not be understood as something purely aesthetic, but something directly linked to the production of energy. If capoeiristas do not respond to the chorus, those who are playing in the center of the roda will not be able to "melt". This melt is so difficult to happen that it can be interpreted as the lost beauty which Mestre Pastinha referred to, he continues: "It is the duty of all capoeiristas, it is not a defect not to know how to sing; but it is a defect not to know how to answer, at least the choir. It is forbidden in the battery for people who do not respond to the choir" (DECÂNIO, 1997, p. 35). Through singing, everyone can join the circle willingly, looking for a path of joy.

Over time, capoeiristas learn to play, to play, to coordinate, to organize the activities of the roda. They learn to manage the means that the performance brings into play, the voice, the gesture, the mediation, the "text in presence" (ZUMTHOR, 2010, p. 166-167; FERREIRA, 2007, p. 143). At each round of the GCAP, poetic texts formed by songs, musical texts made of sounds and rhythms, and body texts drawn by movements and relationships are interpreted, reinterpreted and improvised. They are not loose texts, but variations, fundamental elements of the group's identity. To study them, it is essential to link their understanding to the performative, community context, to the imminent, corporal and relational dimension of the circle.

"As the capoeira circle is our supreme asset," says Olujimi¹⁵, "students should avoid taking positions without being able to maintain them, to facilitate energy production. In collaboration with the students, Olujimi continues, the master is "the main responsible person for maintaining the capoeira circle, from the rhythm, the game, all the elements that involve Capoeira Angola". The master, according to Olujimi,

¹⁵ Interview Olujimi Trindade, September 9th 2014, Salvador-Bahia.

The master is the person who should conduct these drums in every situation, but in the case of Capoeira Angola he is not that conductor who will be with a stick in front of him saying what you are going to do, and here comes the matter of feeling. You are the one who is going to decide what you are going to do at that moment, and that decision is a decision that has a lot to do, it is a decision that you cannot make simply because you think you should do that. Everything that you had as a decision has a principle, it has a foundation and in a very short time it must be thought and executed¹⁶

This foundation conveyed in GCAP is difficult to understand for many who are used to living the circle only as a ritual of union, participation, and action. Not infrequently, comments are heard from people complaining about not participating in the drums, or from beginning students, attributing the fact to the group's vanity. In our view, this interpretation does not coincide with the GCAP proposal; it expresses a fundamental issue for capoeira on the contrary. Learning is not achieved only by what is done, but, with the same intensity, by what it could do but did not do. Failing to participate, recognizing the skills acquired so far is another phase of learning.

The *roda* as a ritual

Another dimension of the circle is the one of a ritualistic bias. From this perspective, the circle can be understood as an institution or rather an assembly. The concept of ritual brings us closer to the *roda* as an event that presents and reveals to capoeiristas the development of social relations. Along with other meetings that take place in a circle, the wheel can be a place for decision-making, a way of organizing the "world outside" the society, giving meaning to the real and imagined experiences that happen there. The issues discussed there are discussed in a language other than verbal. A language that expresses itself through the body-voice-community and uses forms of poetic, vocal, musical, corporal, and ritual expression.

From the perspective of repetition, which is a fundamental element of the ritual, the *roda* is a perfect stage that shows the reactions of capoeiristas and their depth of capoeira internalization. Knowing how to control reactions in the most complicated situations requires a deep knowledge of capoeira movement and involvement with all elements of the ritual. But while it is easy to observe others, it is difficult to be able to see yourself, it "hurts" in the sense that it is necessary to accept oneself as what we don't like to face changes and move forward in learning. This difficulty seems to be one of the biggest obstacles in learning capoeira and it can take people to train for years without major changes. The ability to interpret performance as an event capable of providing extraordinary experiences is also linked to that.

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ In an attempt to translate everyday experiences in GCAP, we used, throughout the text, quotations (between "quotes") and metaphors, as well as interviews and notes of informal conversations. These techniques, typical of ethnographic work, were very useful for the construction of writing. However, its use was not easy, since the language of the vocal context appears as more romanticized in the written text, because whoever reads it does not have the person speaking in front of him, presenting, with the marks, the postures, and expressions of its body, its personality, and history.

The learning process at GCAP takes place through oral and face-to-face transmission in a ritual dimension, whether in training or circles. As we live it, the practice of capoeira is intertextual, based on the constant dialogue between the fleetingness of the body, oral, ritual, and the repetition of the media plot recorded in books, audios and videos. A poetic tradition of Capoeira Angola that involves the capoeiristas' body-voice is recognizable. There is corporeality that includes the voice, even if it is impalpable and immanent. After being pronounced, the words, sounds and verses, leave traces, which continue to echo and vibrate in the body + mind, an integral part of the bodily action.

But, the ritual, assembly, circle, far from being just a *mise-en-scène*, a representation, space or game board, teaches that there is a truth given by the events that occur there. It is a timeless reality that leads capoeiristas to reinterpret the learning of training, the memories of what they experience on the streets, at work, in everyday life. According to what is taught in the GCAP, this practice is timeless because in the illusion, or in the hope, of being able to repeat movements, listening and carrying on ancestral rhythms, songs and myths, a continuity is created between the lives of the capoeiristas of the present and the past. Repeating and creating on the wheel, the ancestral past becomes present, existing.

This attitude proposes continuous learning and it is understood by the group as a resistance, through which capoeiristas seek to free themselves from their lives, forgetting tiredness, economic difficulties, traffic congestion, violence in the streets, dependencies, diseases ... The capoeira circle of the GCAP can be understood as a *communitas*¹⁸ in the Turnerian sense.

“Communitas” breaks out in the interstices of the structure, in the liminality; at the edges of the structure, in marginality; and under the structure, in the inferiority. Almost everywhere “communitas” is considered sacred or “sanctified”, possibly because it violates or cancels the rules that govern structured and institutionalized glimpses, being accompanied by experience of unprecedented power (TURNER, 1974, p. 156).

At the same time that the circle can be understood as a theoretical representation of society's action, what drives it is its liminality, a state in which

¹⁸According to Turner (1987, p. 84): “Extreme individualism only comprises part of man. Extreme collectivism only understands man as a part. *Communitas* is the implicit law of wholeness that comes from relationships between wholes”. Criticism of the concept of *communitas* used by Turner: According to De Matteis (1993, p. 25, translated by the author) Turner takes the concept of the community about Martin Buber, not as side by side, or beyond, a crowd of people, but as being with each other. Even if the crowd moves towards a common goal, it “experiences everywhere a movement towards a dynamic being in front of others, a flow from the I to the You. The community is where the community takes place ” (Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd and The Community of Scholars*, p. 207-225). For Turner, thus, *communitas* acquires only positive value and is analyzed alone: “a process, a dynamics identified, and within these, the place of the community, is the result to be verified, compared to the most diverse situations (TURNER, 1993, p. 26, translated by the author)

society's hierarchies and differences can disappear. When a circle happens optimally, the group becomes a continuity, a *communitas*, in which the ways of thinking, acting and feeling are unstructured: "*la liminalità può in parte essere descritta come una fase di riflessione che spezza la crosta del costume e dà via libera alla speculazione*¹⁹" (De Matteis em TURNER, 1993, p. 23). The roda as a preliminary ritual in addition to disrupting the experiences, suggests to capoeiristas another way of being, providing a new structure.

Liminality can be associated, as suggested by Carapanzano (2005, p. 375) referring to the study of Chittick (1989), to the philosophical concept of "barzakha - what is situated between things, between edges, borders, and events ". Metaphorized as the silence between words and dreams, Barzakhi is a concept used by the Andalusian Sufi philosopher Ibn al-'Arabi (1165-1240), according to which imagination (al-khayal) is an intermediate term that, at times, seems to be between the spiritual and the material world, in others, between being and nothingness, as equivalent to existence.

Something that separates [*fâsil*] two other things, without ever tipping to one side [*mutatarrif*], like, for example, the line that separates the shadow from the sunlight ... Barzakhi is something that separates the known from the unknown, the existing from the nonexistent, the denied from the affirmed, the intelligible from the unintelligible (CHITTICK, 1989, p. 117-18).

In practice, philosophical and corporeal of what is invisible, in constant search, GCAP members are driven to look for other truths, for the circle and daily life. Mestre Pastinha (DECÂNIO, 1997, p. 67) states:

Capoeiristas become enlightened, eat *samo*, and really join true knowledge of themselves, studious and eager to know capoeira. They come with staring eyes to show the truth that the black initiators were not denied, in each black the gestures differ, friends, have secrets, and it is very confusing, only with time

As Decânio points out in a comment to Mestre Pastinha's text, the path of capoeira is one of self-knowledge. As well as it is a way of creating truth within the scope of diversity.

If analyzed as a ritual, capoeira has some characteristics specific to inversion and status elevation rituals. At the circle, everyone can participate, "capoeirista is also a doctor", sings Mestre Pastinha, what matters is not the status, the social hierarchy, but the knowledge of capoeira in which "equality and hierarchy are mysteriously the same thing" (TURNER, 1974, p. 219). The adverb mysteriously does not refer to something obscure that cannot be understood, but something that capoeiristas need to pay attention to. Although there is a formal hierarchy composed of the master, second master, students, the principles that govern coexistence in the group are more important than the positions.

¹⁹ "The liminality is part of this description as a stage of reflection and the custom crust and the way it releases all speculation" (translated by the author).

In 1952, Eunice Catunda had already reported this aspect, even though she tried to associate it with her understanding of the discipline. Catunda had seen capoeira in Mestre Waldemar's shed:

The ritual, the tradition that capoeira participants obey, are very strict. The master is the expert of the tradition. Hence he is also the highest authority. (...) This authority of the Master is one of the most admirable and moving things I have seen. The respect is shown to him by the community, the affection with which they surround him, would make many conductors of classical music envious. This proves that the spirit of discipline is more alive in the rough and uneducated people of our land, when it is organized than among the upper layers, already more accustomed to the consequent organization of their own instruction and the exercise of cultural activities and, for this reason, they would have a greater obligation to understand the need and importance of discipline in the community. However, it turns out that the Master never abuses his rights. Dictatorial powers are not attributed. You know that your authority emanates from the collectivity itself and behaves as an integral part of this (CATUNDA, 1952, p.17).

In GCAP, titles, master and second master, are not steady categories. Its attribution depends not only on the knowledge you need to have, but also on the context in which the group finds itself, on the student's attitude, among other factors. Ideally, the hierarchy in GCAP is not related to the maintenance of a privileged caste, it is not absolute, but functional to knowledge and, more specifically, to the project for the preservation of Capoeira Angola. Even the leader of the group knows that he is not forever at the "top of the pyramid", the students go away, follow other paths, contradict the teachings, even breaking up and creating new groups, thus, metaphorically, turning around the pyramid. Because of these considerations, the hierarchy in GCAP should be represented by a circle instead of a pyramid, the circle space, the assembly.

Still thinking of the roda as a preliminary ritual, which encourages self-knowledge, it seems interesting to note that the type of freedom and knowledge experienced are not the same for all capoeiristas. Among the problems raised by Turner about passage rituals is that related to the injunction of freedom (TURNER, 1974, p. 242):

while the structurally well-endowed individuals seek liberation, the inferiors in the structure may seek, in their liminality, deeper involvement in a structure that, even though it is only fantastic and fictitious, allows them nevertheless to experience, for a brief legitimate period, different kind of "release" from a different kind of destiny.

Turner continues (1974, p. 242), whether he seeks liberation in the liminality or a deeper involvement with the structure, all of which ends up reinforcing the current social structure. In the case of structurally well-endowed individuals, the social structure is reinforced because the system of social positions is not contested. In the second case, "humility reinforces a legitimate pride in the

position, poverty affirms wealth and patience maintains virility and health". The freedom that capoeira provides must not be tied only to self-knowledge or affirmation. Sometimes, the path of capoeira can be undertaken out of necessity. When capoeira *communitas*, an instrument of deconstruction, liberation, need, and affirmation, gives something back to society, it is evident that people are linked to their contexts and conditions.

To understand the wheel ritual in its complexity, it is essential, then, that it is not interpreted only as *communitas*. At the same time that the *roda* ideally disrupts social reality, it can also be understood as its full representation, pointing out that the relationships between capoeiristas and their actions are not free from social determinations. The wheel ritual is thus characterized by great ambiguity. On the opposite side of injunction, of freedom injunction, hierarchies, and machismos, racisms, authoritarianisms can also be manifested. Such situations must be perceived, analyzed, and worked on by the circle as an assembly. In this sense, this movement or, as Crapanzano (2005) suggests, this "fluctuation between ideal and real" characterizes the ritual learning of the *roda* and, at the same time, makes it an event of difficult apprehension. Looking only at the ideal characteristics of *communitas* transforms the capoeirista into a subject disconnected from reality. Looking only at social characteristics deceives the capoeirista with a limited perspective, since the *roda* is only a partial representation of society, and may lead him to reinforce the structure he intended to transform.

The roda, a group's game

Another way we have to reflect on the wheel is from the perspective of the game concept linked to the dimension of performance and ritual. On the one hand, if what Muniz Sodré (1988, p. 15) says is true: "The game restores the child's mental and physical availability to the individual. Playing - or frisking - is somehow circumventing the seriousness of the concept of art, established by a neurotic system called culture ". On the other hand, in GCAP, it is very important to learn to distinguish games from play as fun or entertainment. As Johan Huizinga points out, the game can be deeply serious and that is how GCAP takes the playful dimension of capoeira uprightly.

It goes without saying that the spiritual attitude of a social group when carrying out and experiencing its sacred rites, is of the most extreme and most holy gravity. But we insist once again: authentic and spontaneous play can also be profoundly serious. The player can surrender body and soul to the game, and the awareness that it is "just" a game can pass into the background. The joy that is inextricably linked to the game can be transformed, not only into tension, but also into rapture. Frivolity and ecstasy are the two poles that limit the scope of the game (HUIZINGA, 2000, p. 26).

According to Huizinga (2000, p. 6), the very existence of the game still confirms the existence of a supra logical component in human nature: "If we frisk and play, and we are aware of it, it is because we are more than just rational beings, because the game is irrational." In capoeira, the game is neither exactly playful nor

serious, but it is an intermediate "reality", which includes rationality and irrationality. In this condition, the capoeirista learns to live with the ambiguity of the human condition. In this sense, still quoting Huizinga (2000, p. 4), what is at stake in the capoeira game "transcends the immediate needs of life and gives meaning." Considering this perspective, the game has the quality of putting bodies, thoughts, senses and perceptions in dialogue, looking for another experience that is sometimes associated with the idea of freedom. According to Huizinga, freedom is associated with the dimension of pleasure, as children and animals that play because they like it, for example. In adulthood, even if it is never imposed or constitutes a task, playing becomes an urgent need to reconnect with pleasure and freedom. In the capoeira game, it is possible to think of the beginning capoeirista as a child, so whoever starts it does it because he likes it; with time and learning, playing becomes a pleasurable necessity for most. For Huizinga, the game still can be considered an escape from real life, from work, without losing, therefore, the ability to fully absorb the player, seriously.

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1997) warns that, in order to understand the concept of the game, it is necessary to free it from its subjective meaning. Gadamer is interested in its correlation with the aesthetic experience of art. So the game does not mean behavior, state of mind or freedom from a subjectivity, which acts in the game, but it is necessary to differentiate the game and the player's behavior:

playing fulfills its purpose when the player comes into play. It is not the relationship that, from the game, from the inside out, points to seriousness, but it is only the seriousness that exists in the game that allows the game to be entirely a game. Anyone who doesn't take the game seriously is a killjoy. The game's way of being does not allow the player to behave with the game as with an object. The one who plays knows very well what the game is and that what he is doing is "just a game", but it knows what it "knows" about it. [...] The work of art has, rather, its true being in becoming an experience that will transform the one who experiences it. The "subject" of the experience of art, what remains and perseveres, is not the subjectivity of those who experience it, but the work of art itself (GADAMER, 1997, p. 175).

From this perspective, the game, endowed with its nature, independent of the conscience of those who play, has significant power. Through the players, the game gains representation. Thus, Gadamer continues (1997, p. 181), "all playing is a being-played. [...] The real subject of the game [...] is not the player, but the game itself. It is the game that keeps the player going, that gets him in the game, and that keeps him in play". The rules and regulations are different in each game, imposing one or more tasks on the men who play. But, the philosopher continues, "the real end of the game is by no means the solution to these tasks, but the regulation and configuration of the movement of the game itself" (GADAMER, 1997, p. 183). According to Gadamer (2002, p.180), "the game is, in fact, a dynamic (kinetic) process that embraces the players or the player".

As for the ritualistic dimension, when playing, capoeiristas stage a representation of capoeira, but this is only a point of view. Capoeira exists

independently of its representation in the roda, or, as Mestre Moraes says, capoeira goes beyond its tangible aspects, beyond the movement of the body, "throwing legs up", what matters are the impalpable elements. To facilitate this understanding, in GCAP, you learn that it is possible to play capoeira through words or daily behaviors external to the roda. According to Olujimi Trindade, today the group's second master:

Mestre Moraes teaches us that being a capoeirista goes far beyond playing leg up and playing the berimbau singing songs, he goes much further than that. Being a capoeirista involves a very subjective issue, that only another capoeirista will be able to verify, will be able to feel. The capoeirista has a very unique artifact, which is precisely the question of feeling. Only those people who want to become experts in what they do, or who are predisposed to do, will be able to acquire this feeling. This is not for anyone²⁰.

Mestre Moraes usually proposes to his students the use of a metaphor to exemplify how energy flows in the roda. He sees the players of all musical instruments as "matches" and playing instruments and the beginning of singing as the risk of these matches, thus lighting the "candles", which are capoeiristas when composing the circle of the roda. The energy produced thus takes the center of the wheel and fills its space and allows the two candles, which are playing there, to melt together. Moraes continues:

Logically, the two "candles" that are closest to the "matches" will receive more energy than the others, which will result in melting and consequent extension that can make it difficult for the misunderstandings, what is happening in the center of the roda with those two candles in the process of "melting". The symbolic elements of the capoeira circle are available to anyone. The challenge is to transform these elements into energy, to stimulate trance²¹.

This melt is also called by Moraes a feeling. To move with feeling it is necessary to stimulate the music and relate the sound to the interior of each one. The music provokes capoeiristas who, emotionally, transfer energy to each other. The center of the roda, where the game takes place, is the privileged place that receives this energy from all directions, capable of bringing the attentive capoeiristas into a trance. Moraes²² states that in the trance, the capoeirista knows what he is doing, he reaches a state of high spirit, which is not the physical, of the body as matter: "light body is what goes up, the heavy goes down. So, he is in a light state of mind, but he is not possessed".

²⁰Interview Olujimi Trindade September 9th 2014, Salvador-Bahia.

²¹Trindade, May 18th, 2009, available at <mestremoraes-GCAP.blogspot.com.br/2009/05/roda-de-capoeira-um-espaco-sagrado.html>, consulted on April 8th, 2020.

²² Lecture on Musicality in capoeira, by Mestre Moraes, July 31st, 2015, Cremona, Italy.

Music, Blacking writes (1986, p. 70), allows access to a universe of virtual time, called by Gustav Mahler from another world, or another mind by the Balinese. It is in this state of lightness that the capoeirista understands himself and the world around him as if advised by his ancestors. The game of capoeira becomes a true source of learning and music begins to mean in terms of human experience and communication. Yet Moraes states:

If excited [capoeiristas] are going to talk, a dialogue of bodies will happen. Unlike the fight, the struggle will happen. That's the point, this difference between fighting capoeira and dialoguing capoeira. Most today are fighting capoeira. Now, to fight it doesn't have to be with capoeira. Symbolic space is not a place for struggle, African speaking, the symbolic space of the wheel is a place for group dialogue and decision making.

The capoeira master knows how to play and generate this energy. He teaches his students the dialogue with music in order to feel this state of lightness, this other body-time-space. Music alone is not enough to create this state, it is necessary to train a lot, because, as stated by Blacking (1986, p. 41): "potrebbero esserci molte interpretazioni strutturali possibili per ogni modello sonoro ed un numero pressoché infinito di reazioni individuali alla sua struttura, in funzione del bagaglio culturale e del momentaneo stato emotivo degli ascoltatori"²³. The energy that Mestre Moraes talks about does not happen automatically at each wheel, it is something different from the ordinary, difficult to manage, like Turner's *communitas* (1974, p. 170), it is understood as a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition. At GCAP, students aim to learn how to generate and maintain this peculiar energy, collaborating in the wheel game.

Final considerations

Reflecting on the roda based on the concepts of performance, ritual, and game allows us to highlight complex aspects of Capoeira Angola, not only as a practice but as a multi-dimensional environment that provides capoeiristas with various stimuli. GCAP proposes to teach how to deal politically with these different dimensions from a corporal and relational learning knowing "that capoeira can take you up or down"²⁴. On the one hand, undertaking a path of learning, of discovery, of fluctuation between ideal and real, knowing that this will not lead to any end or certainty. And, on the other hand, to feel the target of the traps of the ritual and its too much humanity, being trapped in the void of vanity and illusion.

²³ "There may be many possible structural interpretations for each sound model and an almost infinite number of individual reactions to its structure, depending on the cultural background and the momentary emotional state of listeners." (translated by the author).

²⁴ This phrase is often quoted by Mestre Moraes who affiliates it to Mestre João Grande.

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