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RESUMEN

En este artículo se asume que los contenidos de los cantos de Capoeira son una fuente confiable de información sobre los aspectos más importantes de este arte: música, ritual, juego, historia, filosofía y la idiosincrasia de sus practicantes. Este artículo explora el universo musical de Capoeira a través de un análisis sistemático de las letras de un grupo seleccionado de cantos de Capoeira, para los cuales se proponen dos clasificaciones cuyos criterios son analizados. Además, serán estudiados ciertos elementos estéticos de su música para complementar dicho análisis.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Juan Diego Díaz Meneses, Cantos de Capoeira, Etnomusicología, Música Afrobrasileña.

TÍTULO

Análisis y propuesta para la organización del repertorio de canciones de Capoeira

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the lyrics of Capoeira songs are used as a reliable source of information about the most important aspects of this art-form: music, ritual, play, history, philosophy and the idiosyncrasy of its practitioners. This paper elucidates the musical universe of Capoeira through a systematic analysis of the lyrics of a selected group of songs. The songs are classified using two criteria and both criteria are analyzed. Furthermore, certain aesthetic elements of the music are studied to complement the discussion of the lyrics.

KEY WORDS

Juan Diego Díaz Meneses, Capoeira songs, Ethnomusicology, Afro-Brazilian Music.

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Ingeniero Civil de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia (1998). Ha practicado Capoeira continuamente desde 1998 en varios países, incluyendo el Brasil. Allí tomo clases con Mestres Cobra Mansa, Valmir y Moraes. Estudió canto lírico con el profesor cubano Alberto San José y además participó como tenor coral en el Coro Sinfónico Nacional de Costa Rica en 2001. Desde 2001 se ha dedicado a investigar y escribir sobre temas relacionados con la etnomusicología. En 2005 trabajó como voluntario en el Grupo de Investigación Valores Musicales Regionales de la Universidad de Antioquia (Medellín), bajo la orientación de María Eugenia Londoño Fernández. Actualmente adelanta estudios de maestría en etnomusicología en Goldsmiths College en Londres.

Analysis and Proposed Organization of the Capoeira Song Repertoire

Juan Diego Díaz Meneses

Etnomusicólogo

Introduction*

Capoeira was born within the constructs of Afro-Brazilian culture and has been an expression of resistance of the Afro-Brazilian people in Brazil since at least the beginning of the Nineteen Century¹. Today, swept up by globalization, it is no wonder that Capoeira has become a new symbol of resistance, not only in Brazil but also in the countries where it has arrived after its first official exit from Brazil in the early 1950s². Its spread through the rest of the world has been more noticeable in urban settings where it arrived, primarily, with Brazilian practitioners who went abroad. The media has subsequently played a role

* This article is based in a larger work in Spanish by the author named “Una Propuesta de Clasificación del Cancionero de Capoeira”, unpublished.

¹ CARLOS EUGENIO LIBANO SOARES. *A Capoeira Escrava e Outras Tradições Rebeldes no Rio de Janeiro (1808-1850)*. Campinas, São Paulo, Editora da Unicamp, 2001, p. 25. Libano Soares coined the term *Capoeira escrava* (enslaved Capoeira) for the practice of Capoeira at the beginning of the 19th century in the streets of Rio de Janeiro not only by enslaved Afro-descendants, but also by free black men, poor white men, immigrants from other regions of the country and from places all around the world (specially sailors).

² BIRA ALMEIDA (Mestre Acordeón). *Capoeira, A Brazilian Art Form. History, Philosophy and Practice*. Berkley, California (USA), North Atlantic Books, 1986, p. 56. Mestre Acordeon asserts that Capoeira left Brazil via cultural shows in the 1950's. One of these first shows was called Skindo, which featured capoeirists Arthur Emidio and Djalma Bandeira. Later, in 1975 Jelon Vieira (a student of Bimba's) pioneered the teaching of Capoeira overseas in USA.

in introducing Capoeira into new settings. Interestingly, around the world Capoeira practitioners have found in Capoeira a new path of resistance in the face of the rapid changes imposed by globalization and capitalism.

With Capoeira being practiced around the world many non-Brazilian nowadays sing Capoeira songs (a short search in the web allows one to see that Capoeira is now practiced in countries on all continents). In most of the *rodas*³ I have observed, the practitioners sing the *ladainhas* and *corridos*⁴ in any situation, regardless of what is happening at that particular moment. A deeper understanding of Capoeira songs would allow practitioners to use the songs in specific settings according to the lyrics. The fact that non-Brazilian Capoeira practitioners do not heed the lyrics of the songs they sing, combined with their general lack of knowledge of Afro-Brazilian culture, demonstrate that these practitioners underestimate the power of Capoeira songs. These songs, when used properly, have great influence on the Capoeira *roda* and furthermore are a vehicle for understanding the history of Capoeira and important elements of Afro-Brazilian culture.

It is remarkable the importance that *Mestre Moraes* (a well-known traditional Capoeira *mestre*) gives to Capoeira music⁵:

“The importance of music in the *jogo*⁶ of Capoeira is immeasurable. It creates an atmosphere in which its physical expression reaches the highest level of beauty. The music inspires the players to reach more intensive levels of interaction and calm down the energy of the *jogo* if it is very exalted. Through music the leader of the *bateria*⁷ can not only intervene in order to mediate the behavior of the players but can also prevent a haphazard moment. Moreover, he [or she] can provide more energy to enhance the players’ performance. Sometimes the mediation of the music is explicit: the singers can criticize, joke, praise or challenge the players. The permanent link between music and the movement of the players creates and maintains the Capoeira *roda*.” (Translation from Portuguese by the author).

A scrutiny of the lyrics of Capoeira songs permits us to see a universe in which the *mestres* (Capoeira masters, or the individuals recognized by the Capoeira community as the most distinguished teachers) are kings of unquestionable power and an infinite source of

³ *Roda* is the Portuguese word for the formal Capoeira ritual. A further explanation is given farther on in the text.

⁴ *Ladainhas* and *corridos* are types of songs within the Capoeira repertoire. A further explanation is given farther on in the text.

⁵ *Mestre Moraes* and Grupo De Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP). *Capoeira Angola From Salvador, Brazil* [CD liner notes]. Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, 1996.

⁶ *Jogo* is a Portuguese word for the physical aspect of the Capoeira ritual. It means “game” or “play” and it is a more inclusive word than “fight” or “dance” because both may occur within the *jogo*.

⁷ *Bateria* is the Portuguese term for a percussion section or ensemble. In this context it refers to the group of percussion instruments used in the Capoeira ritual (there are no melodic instruments).

wisdom. Inasmuch, Capoeira music is a perfect place to start a profound exploration of this complex art form.

This paper is based on a thematic songbook written by me, in Spanish, containing a compilation of some six hundred Capoeira songs and further, a proposed division of the songs, based on an analysis of the lyrics and some aesthetic elements⁸. The songs were taken from the repertoire used by Capoeira groups in Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico and the USA as well as from videos, CD and tape recordings, songbooks and websites, all collected between 2000 and 2005.

In this paper I will discuss my proposed division of the Capoeira song repertoire and analyze certain aesthetic elements in order to contribute to a better understanding of the Capoeira universe through its music.⁹ First of all, I will refer to some historical and musical elements which will enhance the reader's understanding of the phenomenon of Capoeira and the ideas proposed here. Second, I will present my proposed division of the Capoeira song repertoire and explain the criteria for that division with some examples. Third, an analysis of some aesthetic elements of several typical Capoeira songs (*corridos*) will be undertaken to support or refute the lyrics-based division. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

Background Information

Historical Overview of Capoeira

A little history of Capoeira, with a specific focus on events in the 20th century, will be given in order to allow for a better understanding of the processes that led to the development of the two main traditions in Capoeira (*Capoeira Angola* and *Capoeira Regional*).

Although Capoeira is an old art-form no doubt related to the Afro-Brazilian people, it is not clear when Capoeira began to be practiced. Most practitioners claim that Capoeira has been practiced in Brazil since the arrival of enslaved people from Africa¹⁰. However, Cavalcanti claims to have found the earliest document that proves the existence of Capoeira

⁸ The name of the original work is *Una Propuesta de División del Cancionero de Capoeira* (unpublished).

⁹ As the musical universe of Capoeira is extensive and I am a *Capoeira Angola* practitioner, in this paper the analysis of the aesthetic elements is focused on what I call "traditional songs". However, some examples of "contemporary songs" will be used to contrast or reinforce the analysis of aesthetic elements of traditional songs in order to draw general conclusions.

¹⁰ Most Capoeira *mestres* and authors claim that this art-form has been practiced since the beginning of the slavery in Brazil (1538). Bira Almeida (1986:15) cites Augusto Ferreira, who romantically relates Capoeira with the *quilombos* in the Seventeenth century. However, other important researchers like Frederico Abreu (personal interview, Salvador, April 2006) and Almeida himself (1986:20), assert that, despite the fact that throughout history Capoeira has been undoubtedly related to Afro-descendant culture, fights and disorder, there is no documentary evidence of the presence of Capoeira in Brazil before the Eighteenth Century.

(dated in 1789)¹¹. Since then, evidence of Capoeira practice has been found in police records always relating to urban disorders, gangs, and even street-based political parties in Rio de Janeiro¹². Nevertheless, the fact that Capoeira is an oral tradition allows us to suppose that before the end of the 18th century, it was practiced mostly as a martial art in rural contexts, probably as a form of resistance against slavery as imposed by the Portuguese colonizers¹³. At the beginning of the 19th century, it appeared in urban contexts and thus began to radically change its aesthetic.

The practice of Capoeira was banned in Brazil for many years until Mestre Bimba (a well-known figure) opened the first Capoeira academy in 1932, called *Centro De Luta Regional Baiana*¹⁴. Bimba was careful to change certain aspects of Capoeira, such as attire, movements and methods of instruction. He included students from the upper-middle class and called this type of Capoeira, *Capoeira Regional*. Various other *mestres* found these changes unacceptable and opened their own academy, in order to preserve what they considered to be “traditional” Capoeira. The *mestre* of this academy, which opened in 1941, was Mestre Pastinha. Pastinha’s group decided to call their style *Capoeira Angola* in recognition of the African roots of Capoeira and of the region in Africa that gave the most slaves to Brazil¹⁵. Both Bimba and Pastinha became, respectively, the fathers of *Capoeira Regional* and *Capoeira Angola*. From this point onwards, Capoeira was split into these two main streams.

The *Capoeira Regional*¹⁶ style became more popular in Brazil (and in the other countries into which it has been introduced by Brazilians or local practitioners), whereas the *Capoeira*

¹¹ NIREU CALVALCANTI. *Cronicas do Rio Colonial. O Capoeira*. Journal do Brasil. Caderno B-1ª Edição, Rio de Janeiro, 1999, p. 22. He describes a story of a slave who fled from his master’s house to fight using Capoeira and who was subsequently punished by the police because the practice of Capoeira was outlawed. It is not possible to establish from the account if Capoeira was played in an urban or rural context.

¹² CARLOS EUGENIO LIBANO SOARES. *A Capoeira Escrava e Outras Tradições Rebeldes no Rio de Janeiro (1808-1850)*. Campinas, São Paulo, Editora da Unicamp, 2001, p. 23, 229, 412.

¹³ JOHN FREDY ZAPATA. *Desarrollo Histórico de la Trova Antioqueña*. Medellín, unpublished thesis, Universidad de Antioquia, 2005, p. 75. According to Zapata, oral poetry is the only means of communication available for farmers, fishermen, miners and illiterate people from the countryside. Thus, oral traditions (like Capoeira itself) are almost always related to rural contexts.

¹⁴ BIRA ALMEIDA (Mestre Acordeón). *Capoeira, a Brazilian Art Form. History, Philosophy and Practice*. Berkley, California (USA), North Atlantic Books, 1986, p. 32. In 1937 Bimba’s academy would receive official recognition by the Brazilian Government.

¹⁵ EDUARDO FONSECA JR. *Dicionário Antológico Da Cultura Afro-Brasileira (Português, Yorubá, Nagô, Gege, Angola)*, *Incluindo As Ervas Dos Orixás, Doenças, Usos E Fitologia Das Ervas*. São Paulo, Yorubana do Brasil, Sociedade Editora Didática Cultural Ltda, 1995, p. 35.

¹⁶ In this case, the term *Regional* refers to both Bimba’s *Capoeira Regional* and other hybrid styles of Capoeira different than the two main styles. Farther along in the text an exact distinction will be made.

Angola style maintained a low profile¹⁷. I have witnessed tensions between the practitioners of these two styles in most of the countries to which I have traveled (Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico and United States). Such disputes are grounded in a struggle for power and a desire for one style to dominate the other. These practitioners hold the idea that their respective style represents the “authentic tradition”. Clearly, behind this is what Ochoa calls a permanent fight for the redefinition of social processes and the ideologies associated with them¹⁸.

The Capoeira Roda and the Role of Music

The principal expression of the Capoeira game is a ritual called the *roda*, which means “ring” or “circle” in Portuguese. In the *roda* the practitioners form a closed circle. Some sing, some play music and some play the game. In the *rodas* that follow Pastinha’s tradition (*Capoeira Angola rodas*) there are eight instruments that accompany the songs and the event from beginning to end. The eight instruments belong to the percussion family and are frequently found in several Afro-Brazilian dance-music expressions, especially in those from the Northeast region of the country¹⁹. This musical ensemble is comprised of three *berimbaus* (musical bows) of different sizes known as *gunga*, *meio* and *viola*, two *pandeiros* (samba-like tambourines), one *agogô* (two belled instrument, not unlike a cow-bell, used in both *Candomblé* and samba), one *reco-reco* (friction instrument) and one *atabaque* (drum used in *Candomblé*)²⁰. In the *rodas* where Bimba’s tradition is followed, there are only three instruments: one *berimbau* (normally a *meio*) and two *pandeiros*. In other *rodas*, these two formats may be varied with certain inclusions or exclusions²¹. However, at the very least, one

¹⁷ According to Frederico Abreu and Mestre Cobra Mansa (personal interview, Salvador, Bahia, April, 2006), *Capoeira Angola* has increased in popularity over the last few years. However, the number of *Capoeira Angola* practitioners is still very small when compared with the popularity of other styles.

¹⁸ ANA MARÍA OCHOA. *Tradición, Género y Nación en el Bambuco*. A Contratiempo, #9, Bogota, 1997, p. 43.

¹⁹ The northeastern region of Brazil includes the following states: Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Sergipe. It is within this region of Brazil that the Afro-descendant culture has the greatest influence. Some of the local dance-music expressions related to Capoeira are: *Samba de roda*, *Maculele*, *Maracatu*, *Candombles da Bahia*, *Tambor de Mina*, *Tambor de Crioula* and *Bumba meu boi*, among others.

²⁰ In *candomblé* rituals in Bahia three *atabaques* of three different sizes are used: *Rum*, *Rumpi* and *Le*, being the first one the biggest drum, the second, the medium and the latter one, the smallest. Normally one *Rumpi* or one *Le* is used in Capoeira *rodas*. However, any of these drums are always indistinctly addressed in Capoeira as *atabaque*.

²¹ Mestre Lua Rasta is a well known Mestre who teaches a style called *Capoeira Angola da Rua* (Street *Capoeira Angola*). He holds a very famous *roda* at the *Terreiro de Jesús* in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil every Friday evening. At one of his *rodas* I observed the use of a *como* (the horn of a cow used as a simple trumpet), a two-skinned drum and a friction instrument in the form of a frog (and thus called a *sapo*).

berimbau and one *pandeiro* remain in such ensembles and thus, could be considered essential instruments in a *roda* regardless the nature of the tradition of the group.

A *Capoeira Angola* *roda* normally begins with the *bateria*, led by the *gunga* (the *berimbau* with the lowest tonality). The *mestre* initiates the *roda* with a typical cry, “E-YEA!”, and then sings a *ladainha* (an introductory song, sung as a solo). The *mestre* then continues with a responsorial song (the *chulas*) in which a one-line verse alternates with a one-line chorus (sung by the rest of the participants). Once the *chulas* have finished, the *corridos* (songs used during play) begin and these are led by the *mestre* or by one of the members of the *bateria*. At this point the game starts. Couples pass to the center of the circle to play *Capoeira*. Throughout the *roda* each participant assumes different roles: musician, leader of the songs, chorus or dancer. These roles change over the course of the *roda* and these changes follow certain rules adopted by the group. After one or two hours of *jogos*, the *roda* finishes with a final cry from the *mestre*: “YE!”.

The standardized ritual described above varies from group to group depending on the school, the *mestre* and local influences. Many *Capoeira Angola* groups celebrate their *rodas* with a format similar to this one. The types of games, lyrics and general musical aesthetic can vary very little or greatly between groups and the trend is towards the latter case when comparing groups whose *mestres* originate from different regions of Brazil. There is a significant difference between the music in *Capoeira Regional* (and *Capoeira Contemporánea*²²) *rodas*, as compared to the music in *Capoeira Angola* *rodas*. An exhaustive analysis of these differences exceeds the scope of this paper.

Division of the Capoeira Song Repertoire

The use of categories is one of the most popular practices when studying complex issues (in our case a specific musical system). Meyer asserts that this is “a consequence of the limited capacity of human mind”²³. Therefore, in many cases, the use of categories is a helpful tool for the study of musical systems. Conversely, Merriam has greatly contributed to the understanding of oral musical systems by proposing a ten-category classification of songs based on the social function of the songs²⁴. Therefore, it is no wonder that many

²² *Capoeira Contemporánea* is the most common term used within the *Capoeira* realm to address hybrid styles of *Capoeira* which combines features of Pastinha’s *Capoeira Angola* and *Bimba’s Capoeira Regional*.

²³ LEONARD B. MEYER. “Un universo de universales”, in FRANCISCO CRUCES et al. *Las Culturas Musicales. Lecturas de Etnomusicología*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2001. pp. 241-242. Meyer states that it is not possible to understand the variability within human cultures without understanding the constants implied by its formation. One of those constants is precisely our limited mind.

²⁴ ALAN MERRIAM. “Usos y funciones”, in Francisco Cruces et al. *Las Culturas Musicales. Lecturas de Etnomusicología*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2001. pp. 285-294. Merriam proposes ten main functions of music applicable to any society: emotional expression, aesthetic joy, entertainment,

authors studying Capoeira have attempted to classify Capoeira songs. Among them Rego is remarkable²⁵ as his book includes the first significant Capoeira songbook and uses a thematic classification of Capoeira songs based on diverse criteria.

This paper uses several levels of division in order to organize and make sense of the Capoeira song repertoire. First, the songs are discussed along their lines of function. The Capoeira universe generally recognizes three different types of songs used at different moments in the *roda*. These are *ladainhas* (a non-responsorial song sung by a soloist; it initiates the ritual), *chulas* (one-line responsorial songs that follow the *ladainha*) and *corridos* (the songs used during play). Being able to recognize and differentiate between these three types of songs is necessary for a basic understanding of the Capoeira song repertoire. Note that this paper, for the sake of brevity, tends to focus on *corridos* in all discussions.

Second, I introduce two overarching categories for Capoeira songs: “traditional” and “contemporary”. These two categories can be used to analyze both *ladainhas* and *corridos*; however, in this paper only *corridos* are discussed in this manner.

Third, a thematic division of the *corridos* is introduced. This portion is somewhat related to Rego’s classification²⁶; however, some of his categories are rejected due to inconsistencies in his criteria. I propose thirteen categories for the “traditional” *corridos* and fifteen for the “contemporary” *corridos*. The division by function proposed by Merriam will be used solely as a theoretical base.

Creating the initial compilation of songs was very complex given that information is dispersed, that sources are not always trustworthy and that songs exist in many versions. Given that Capoeira is an oral tradition that has been significantly impacted by the media, it is important to choose a hierarchy of musical sources. The three levels of orality that Zapata distinguishes were taken into account in this paper: pure orality (such as live performances), mediated orality (such as recordings of live performances) and compound orality (when oral material is influenced by written material)²⁷. Thus, with regards to Capoeira music as

communication, symbolic representation, physical response, reinforcing social rules, reinforcing social institutions and religious rites, contributing to the continuing stability of a culture and contributing to the integration of society.

²⁵ WALDELOIR REGO. *Ensaio Socio-etnografico de Capoeira*. Salvador, Bahia, Editora Itapoa, 1968: 235-255. In his book Rego includes 139 Capoeira songs and proposes a division of them into twelve categories: Diverse themes, songs of superstition, songs to insult, songs of women, cradle songs, devotion songs, religious songs, geographic songs, songs of praise, songs of challenge, children’s songs and beggars’ songs. Some of these categories were used in this work, but the in general the division criteria used by Rego is not very clear. At times it is very refined as in the religious topics but vague and very general about issues relating to the *roda* itself. It is also noticeable that Rego does not distinguish between *ladainhas*, *chulas* or *corridos*.

²⁶ *Ibíd*, pp. 235-255.

²⁷ For a complete analysis of the subject of orality see John Fredy Zapata. *Desarrollo Histórico de la Trova Antioqueña*. Medellín, unpublished thesis, Universidad de Antioquia, 2005: 37-57.

THEME 1

THE LADAINHA

Yê!

Tava em minha casa
Sem pensar nem imaginar
Quando ouvi bater na porta
Mandeí minha mulher olhar
Ela então me respondeu
Salomão veio te buscar
Para ajudar a vencer
A guerra do Paraná
Minha mãe então falou
Meu filho você não vá
A batalha é perigosa
Eles podem te matar
A marinha é de guerra
O exército de campanha
Todo mundo vai a guerra
Todo mundo é quem apanha
Camará...!

(SOURCE: BOLA SETE, 1997)

YE-AAAA!

I was in my house
Not thinking about anything
When I heard knocking at the door
I sent my woman to see
Then she answered me
Salomon came looking for you
To help defend
In the Paraná War
My mom then spoke
My son you are not going
The battle is dangerous
They might kill you
The navy is for war
The army leads a campaign
Everyone goes to war
Everyone gets hurt
Camará...!

(TRANSLATION BY THE AUTHOR)

a source of knowledge, the following order of importance was determined and adhered to: the *rodas* themselves, video recordings of *rodas*, audio recordings of songs, written documents and group websites.

The differences between the versions of Capoeira songs represented a significant obstacle, as it is hard to decide which version is more “authoritative”. Initially, I attempted to unify the diverging versions, but as the research continued, it became clear that this was not possible or even useful. A recognition of each version, with its differing lyrics (sometimes subject to minor spelling differences with significant influence on possible meanings), structure, melody and rhythm, was the first big achievement of this research: an exposition of the microcosm in each version of the songs that could be studied not only on its own, but also as part of a family of songs.

Division of the Songs into Ladainhas, Chulas and Corridos

It is widely accepted in all Capoeira groups, regardless the tendency or tradition, that there are three types of songs: *ladainhas*, *chulas* and *corridos*. With few exceptions, all the groups use the songs in the same moment in the *roda*²⁸. Therefore, there were no conflicts when dividing these songs along these lines. We will first explore the most common form of these three types of songs.

The *ladainha* is the song that initiates the *roda* (except in cases where groups have not properly been initiated into the Capoeira ritual by a formal *mestre*). It is generally a long solo song in which the *mestre* tells stories and gives advice. In the groups that follow Pastinha’s tradition, the *ladainha* normally starts with a call “E-YEAAAA!” and finishes up with the word “Camará!” (see theme 1).

²⁸ Although the *ladainhas*, *corridos* and *chulas* appear in the *roda* in specific moments and have certain forms, some of the groups (especially *Capoeira Regional* groups) have incorporated new forms of singing by changing the responsorial nature of the songs.

In most *rodas*, only one *ladainha* is sung, however, sometimes, when the *mestre* is going to play (partway through the *roda*), he (or she) kneels at the foot of the *gunga* and sings a *ladainha*, as if he/she were reinitiating the *roda*. The *roda* may be reinitiated in this way for other reasons, such as when an important visitor has arrived.

The *chulas* are short responsorial songs that follow the *ladainha* and prepare for the first *jogo*. They have a standardized size of four bars and the melodies generally go as follows:

Voice

E vi - va meu Deus_ I - E! VI - VA MEU DEUSCA - MA - RA

Atabaque
agogo
Pandeiro
reco-reco

Chulas are barely considered as songs themselves. Rather, they are often seen as the natural end of the *ladainha* or the mere transition between the “mystical *ladainha*” and the “bright *corridos*”²⁹. Nonetheless, the *chulas* have a standardized form and they hold the most uniform musical and poetic form among the three types of Capoeira songs. The chorus echoes the *chula* sung by the soloist adding the word “*camará!*” at the end. In a standard *roda* the number of *chulas* may vary, but normally *mestres* do not spend more than one or two minutes singing them. The themes of the *chula* are often related to the *ladainha* sung previously.

The *corridos* have many different sizes and forms but they are characterized –as are *chulas*– by their responsorial nature. They are the songs used when the physical game is played. Their primary function is to describe and mediate the *jogo*, though some lyrics are related to other themes. Further along I will give examples of *corridos*, as all further organization of Capoeira songs deals specifically with *corridos*.

Since Capoeira practitioners from both Brazil and other countries are influenced by local and popular musical genres, their interpretation of the *ladainhas* and *corridos* has changed. For example *Mestre Acordeon* has recorded a responsorial *ladainha* called “*Vamos pedir o axé*”³⁰ (see theme 2).

²⁹ In many occasions *mestres* sing their *ladainhas* as if they were praying, in several cases closing their eyes. Moreover, during the *ladainha* many *mestres* kneel on the foot of the *berimbau* and perform various religious gestures. In contrast, while singing *corridos*, *mestres* often laugh and joke.

³⁰ *Axé* is an African concept in the *nagô* which designates the magical-sacred force inherent in every divinity and being of nature. In Capoeira, *axé* is the energy that all the participants share in the *roda* and is seen as being sustained by the music.

THEME 2

VAMOS PEDIR O AXÉ

Pra essa roda começar
Vamos a pedir o axé
Pra essa roda começar
Que conforme aos fundamentos
Capoeira e Candomblé
Axé Babá
Axé Babá
Vamos pedir o axé, meu pai
Meu pai Xangô
Vamos pedir o axé, minha mãe
Iemanjá
Vamos pedir o axé, meu rei
Rei Oxalá
Oh ié! viva meu Deus
Axé Babá
Oh ié! viva seu Bimba
Meu camará
Oh ié! mestre meu
Sempre será
Oh ié! a capoeira
Vamos a jogar
Oh ié! volta do mundo
Que o mundo dá

(HEARD IN THE RECORDING "PEDIR O AXÉ" BY MESTRE ACORDEON)

LET'S ASK FOR AXÉ

To begin this roda
Let's ask for axé
To begin this roda
According to the foundations of
Capoeira and Candomblé
Axé Babá
Axé Babá
Let's ask for axé, my father
My father Xangô
Let's ask for axé, my mother
Iemanjá
Let's ask for axé, my king
King Oxalá
Oh Ye-A! Long live my god
Axé Babá
Oh Ye-A! Long live Bimba
My comrade
Oh Ye-A! My master
He will be forever
Oh Ye-A! Capoeira
Let's play
Oh Ye-A! The spinning of the world
The world goes round

(TRANSLATION BY THE AUTHOR)

Other *Regional/Contemporânea*³¹ groups have created new *corridos* with long parts for a soloist (sometimes four or six verses) and short responsorial parts at the end. These *corridos* seem more like *ladainhas* in the brevity of the chorus response. An example heard in the group *Abolição* in San José, Costa Rica (p. 194).

Division of Capoeira songs between "traditional" and "contemporary"

In an initial attempt to divide Capoeira songs into traditional and contemporary, I looked for historical hints in order to locate the first songs used in Capoeira, but this task has been shown to be futile by researchers like Mestre Cobra Mansa³². In fact, it seems that the first Capoeira songs actually came from the melodies and lyrics of other dance and music genres from Brazil's Northeast region, especially from *Samba de roda*³³. Although a certain group of songs is considered today as authentic Capoeira songs, the incorporation of new songs into the Capoeira repertoire has not stopped³⁴. Thus, creating a musical chronology was not the way to go about this task.

³¹ I have lumped *Capoeira Regional* and *Capoeira Contemporânea* groups just to differentiate them from *Capoeira Angola* groups.

³² In personal interview with Mestre Cobra Mansa (Salvador, Bahia, April, 2006), he stated that there is no proof of the existence of a repertoire of Capoeira music/songs before the Twentieth Century. Instead, the first songs used to play Capoeira as we know it today, were probably taken from the repertoire of *Samba de roda* (a very popular dance-music from the northeastern region of Brazil).

³³ Among the 174 *Capoeira Angola corridos* compiled by the author in the original songbook, Mestre Cobra Mansa identified sixteen, as old *Samba de roda* songs. They are: *Boa viagem, A onca morreu, Marimbondo, O moinho da Bahia quemou, Ave Maria meu Deus, Chue chua, E de couro de boi, E por cima da linha, Pé dentro pé fora, Chora viola, Minha comadre, Sou eu maita, Quando eu vim na Bahia eu vim so, Quem vem lá sou eu* and *Ae goma*.

³⁴ Relatively recent incorporation of *Sambas* and *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB) songs into the Capoeira repertoire

In order to organize Capoeira songs as “traditional” or “contemporary”, one must define these two terms. The transformation of traditions has always caused controversy, as Ochoa mentions³⁵. Moreover, the continuation of a tradition implies its capacity to manage a transformation process that allows it to adapt to new contexts and thus, logically, not remain exactly the same through time³⁶. This sort of understanding of tradition is greatly important in our times of accelerated changes in society.

Capoeira is not immune to the controversy over tradition. There is one group of practitioners, the *angoleiros* (those who play *Capoeira Angola*), who believe they are the keepers of tradition, while there is another group, the *regionales/contemporâneos* (those who play *Capoeira Regional* and/or *Capoeira contemporânea*), who, in general, believe that Capoeira must evolve. Of course, both have their own “tradition”, but the *angoleiros* claim that theirs is older and thus, more authentic.

Before analyzing this controversial issue, it is necessary to state that most of the actual Capoeira *mestres* follow a tradition that can be traced back through time to *Mestre Pastinha* (in the case of the *Capoeira Angola mestres*) or to *Mestre Bimba* (in the case of the *Capoeira Regional mestres*). Were one to use this criterion, two main genealogies would be found: the followers of *Mestre Pastinha* and the followers of *Mestre Bimba*³⁷. This two-pronged genealogical division is part of an overarching discourse within Capoeira today.

Although every group that I have visited followed one of the two main traditions mentioned above, the division remains problematic. There are certain groups which do not follow a unique tradition like the “purist” *angoleiros* or the *regionales*. They have a more open range of influences and tend to practice both styles and hence will be addressed in this paper as Capoeira *Contemporânea* groups³⁸. Moreover, most of the Capoeira *Contemporânea* groups recognize *Capoeira Angola* as the older tradition and begin their *rodas* with songs

include: *Navio negreiro* (famous MPB song recorded by Caetano Veloso), *Magalenha* (famous samba recorded by Chico Mendes), *Chico Parauera* (famous *samba* from Bahia) *Xo-xua* (famous MPB song recorded by Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso) and *Na praia da Amaralina* (popular *Samba de roda* from Bahia recorded by Carolina Soares).

³⁵ ANA MARÍA OCHOA. *Tradición, Género y Nación en el Bambuco*. A Contratiempo, #9, Bogotá, 1997, p. 35.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 35-36.

³⁷ Although most of the groups fit well in these categories, there are other groups that follow a different tradition, such as the groups affiliated with the *Associação Brasileira Cultural de Capoeira Palmares* whose master is *Mestre Nô*. Although he is an *angoleiro*, he was taught by *Mestre Pirró*, who was not a follower of any of Pastinha’s groups. There are also many well known *Capoeira Angola mestres* who actually were taught by *mestres* who did not learn with *Mestre Pastinha*, but were nonetheless greatly influenced by him. This is the case of *mestres* like *Lua de Bobó*, *Noronha*, *Espinho Remoso*, *Cobrinha Verde*, *Bom Cabrito* and *Boa Gente*.

³⁸ This is the case of the *Grupo de Capoeira Longe do Mar* in Mexico City, visited by the author in 2002.

THEME 3

Foi, com grande tristeza
Que meu berimbau
Anunciou sua partida
Há que coisa mais sofrida
Há mais quanta dor
Encerra uma despedida
Me deixou tanta saudade
Me deixou tanta lembrança
Quando foi me fez chorar
Como nos tempos de criança
Quanta tristeza me-dá
Me-lembrar que todo tinha
Que acabar assim
Quando você me pideu
Para eu largar a capoeira
Mas você não entendeu
Que ela fais parte de mim
Eu que sempre lhe-pedí
Não me faça escolher
Entre você e a capoeira
Poque você é quem vai perder
Hoje eu choro de saudade
Mas prefiro a despedida
Pois largar a capoeira
É o mesmo que largar a vida
O sereia
O minha sereia
Eu vou jogando a capoeira
Pra tristeza eu espantar
O sereia
O minha sereia

(HEARD IN RODA OF THE GROUP LONGE
DO MAR, MÉXICO, D.F., JUNE 2002)

IT WAS WITH A LOT OF PAIN

That my berimbau
Announced her leaving
Ay! what a thing to suffer
Ay! How much pain
Is in a farewell
It left me so nostalgic
It left me such remembrances
When she left I cried
Like when I was a child
How big is the sadness
Remembering that everything
Has to end like that
When you asked me
To leave Capoeira
You did not understand
That it is part of me
I always beg you
Do not make me choose

frequently used in the most purist *Capoeira Angola* groups and ostensibly change their style of play for that portion of their ritual. However, significant changes not only in the lyrics, but also in the musical aesthetic remain. Searching for authoritative origins in this mix is difficult.

Given these considerations, it appears difficult to find well-based criteria for the division between “traditional” and “contemporary” songs. Nonetheless, I propose a division of Capoeira songs into two groups: a) the songs used by the groups that exclusively follow Pastinha’s tradition, which I will call “traditional”, and b) the songs used by the other groups (*Capoeira Regional* and *Contemporânea*), which, of course, have their own tradition but will be referred to as “contemporary” for the purposes of differentiation.

Although this criterion seems arbitrary, it emerged as the least refutable option. It was observed that the groups that follow Pastinha’s tradition maintain a close relationship among themselves. In fact, it seems as if they function like a big family whose center spins towards Salvador³⁹. This might be explained by many reasons: first, *Capoeira Angola* groups and *mestres* are relatively few when compared to *Capoeira Regional/Contemporânea* groups, which enhances their relationship. Second, *Capoeira Angola* *mestres* and practitioners are very marked by Pastinha’s philosophy which is very focused on preserving their tradition. This aspect does not seem very strong in *Capoeira Regional/Contemporânea* *mestres* and groups.

By using this criterion it was possible to find important differences in rhythm, melody, and musical form between the “traditional” and “contemporary” songs, although a further analysis will show that they maintain several common

³⁹ According to Mestre Cobra Mansa (personal interview, Costa Rica, 2005), all *Capoeira Angola* groups, whether located in Brazil or overseas, have received direct or indirect influence of the *Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho* and *Academia de João Pequeno de Pastinha*. These two important groups headed by Mestre Moraes and Mestre João Pequeno are responsible to a great extent for the popularity that *Capoeira Angola* enjoys today.

elements, such as the purpose of the songs in the *roda*, many lyrics and certain musical and poetic forms.

Let me describe some of the significant differences that can be observed in the use of Capoeira songs between *Capoeira Angola* and *Capoeira Regional/Contemporânea* groups.

The *corrido* “*Aidê*” distinctly shows some of the differences (and consistencies) in lyrics, melody and rhythm.

VOICE

AI AI AI - DE TO - GA SO - NI - TO QUE.EU QUE - RO.A - PREN

5

DER AI AI AI - DE TO - GA SO - NI - TO QUE.EU QUE - RO.A - PREN - DER AI

ATABAQUE, AGOGO
PANDEIRO, RECO-RECO

Transcription by the author based on a song heard in a roda at the Capoeira Angola Center of Mestre João Grande, N.Y, USA, Sept. 2003.

VOICE

AI AI AI - DE AI AI AI - DE

7

13

AI AI AI - DE AI

ATABAQUE, AGOGO
PANDEIRO, RECO-RECO

Transcription by the author based on a song heard in a roda by Grupo de Capoeira Longe do Mar, Mexico City, May, 2002.

Between you and Capoeira
Because you will lose
Today I cry with nostalgia
But I prefer your farewell
Because leaving Capoeira
Is like leaving my own life
Oh mermaid
Oh my mermaid
I am playing Capoeira
To scare away my sadness
Oh mermaid
Oh my mermaid

(TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR)

THEME 4

EU SOU ANGOLEIRO

Angoleiro sim Sinhô
Eu sou angoleiro
Angoleiro de valor
Eu sou angoleiro
Angoleiro é que eu sou
Eu sou angoleiro
Angoleiro jogador

I AM AN ANGOLEIRO

Angoleiro, yes Sir
I am an angoleiro
A brave angoleiro
I am an angoleiro
Angoleiro is what I am
I am an angoleiro
An Angola player

(TRANSLATION BY THE AUTHOR)

THEME 5

CAPOEIRA PRA ESTRANGEIRO

Meu irmão
É mato!
Capoeira brasileira
Meu compadre
É de matar!
Berimbau tá chamando
Olha a roda formando
Vai se benzendo
Pra entrar
O toque é de Angola
São Bento Pequeno
Cavalaria e lúna

The version shown above is probably the most commonly heard in both the *Capoeira Angola* and *Regional/Contemporânea* groups. One can see that the soloist's part superimposes triplets over the binary time played by the percussion. The chorus alternates with the verses every two bars with "Ai, Ai Aideee!".

Now let us look at a second version of this same *corrido*.

This latter version of the *corrido* "Aidê", which was heard in one of the groups that practices *Capoeira Contemporânea*, is quite different than the first one. Although they are versions of the same song, a question emerges: which of them should be considered "traditional"? The first one is sung in the group of *Mestre João Grande*, one of the oldest *Capoeira Angola mestres* and a former student of *Mestre Pastinha*. The second one is sung by a group in México, where *Capoeira* arrived some fourteen years ago and which lacks the permanent presence of a Brazilian *mestre* (at least in mid-2002)⁴⁰. Clearly the first version might be traced back to an older and presumably more formal tradition and the second one could be seen as a further alteration (but this is not reason enough to say that it does not imply a tradition in itself).

A further difference is that, in some cases, *angoleiros* choose to sing particular songs and *regionales/contemporâneos*, others. There are a great number of songs specifically identified with the *Pastinha's angoleiros* or with *regionales/contemporâneos*. An example of the former is the *corrido* "Eu sou angoleiro", considered an anthem by the *angoleiros* (theme 4).

An example for the latter is "Capoeira pra estrangeiro", which was recorded by the *Grupo de Capoeira Cordão de Ouro* and is very frequently used in *Capoeira Regional/Contemporânea rodas* (e.g. *Grupo de Capoeira Abolição*, Medellín, Colombia, see theme 5).

⁴⁰ In personal interview with Ian Night (one of the most experienced Mexican *Capoeira Angola* practitioners) in México City, May, 2002, he asserted that *Capoeira* was brought to Mexico by the Argentine Mariano Andrade in 1992. This *Capoeira* pioneer in Mexico is now a student of *Mestre Curió* (a well-known *Capoeira mestre* from Salvador who was student of *Pastinha*) and ostensibly holds the title of *contramestre* (one step below *mestre*).

On the other hand, *Capoeira Angola* groups have presumably taken songs from the Regional repertoire, as in the case of the *corrido* “*Nhem, nhem, nhem*”, which *Capoeira Regional* practitioners claim to be a personal composition of *Mestre Bimba*. The following version was heard in a *roda* with the professor *Minhoca*⁴¹ in Mexico City (see theme 6).

Versions of this *corrido* heard in *Capoeira Regional/Contemporânea* groups are very similar to versions heard in *Capoeira Angola* groups.

Division of the Corridos by Theme

In *Capoeira*, the *corridos* have two primary functions: to describe and to mediate the *roda*. Beyond this, there are historical, romantic, and religious songs as well as songs that challenge and songs that exalt one's condition. The analysis gets complicated as some songs fit into more than one category. This is the case of the *corrido* “*Marimbondo*”. The chorus mentions the way in which Catholics cross themselves, “*Pelo sinal*”, and implies superstitions around this; however, the line “*marimbondo me mordeu*” will describe the way in which a player took a hit in the *roda* (see theme 7).

It is clear that “traditional” *corridos* use popular poetry in the lyrics. Thus, words relating to nature (rivers, seas, animals, forests, trees, rain, etc.) were an obvious basis for the construction of *Capoeira* songs in the past. Many songs mention animals of the Brazilian forests and draw parallels with players. The animals most mentioned by the *angoleiro* poets are snakes and birds, although monkeys, dogs, crocodiles, oxen, felines and fish are also mentioned. Another element of nature often used by *angoleiros* is the plants of the Northeast region of Brazil. For example, they mention trees such as *baraiúna*, *gameleira*, *pau-brasil*, *maçaranduba*, *jacarandá* and *beriba* (this last tree provides the wood used to make *berimbaus*). They also mention typical fruits, vegetables and dishes from the Northeast region of Brazil, such as *dendê*⁴², *quiabo* (okra), *limão* (lime), *abobora* (squash), *mamão* (papaya), *farinha de mandioca* (yucca flour), *caruru* and *acarajé*⁴³.

The musical content of the *Capoeira Angola* songs was divided by theme in thirteen categories during my original investigation (presented below with an example).

⁴¹ *Minhoca* is a Brazilian student of the *Academia de João Pequeno de Pastinha* who spent one year in México teaching *Capoeira Angola* in 2002. He has already received the title of *contramestre* by his *mestre* and brother *Mestre Pé de Chumbo*, who is also a student of *Mestre João Pequeno*.

⁴² *Dendê* is the fruit from a palm tree that secretes a red oil used in cooking in the Northeast of Brazil. *Dendê* also signifies, in *Capoeira*, the special way in which experienced *capoeiristas* perform in the *roda*, whether playing instruments, singing or playing the game.

⁴³ *Caruru* and *acarajé* are two typical foods from Bahia and easily found in Salvador. The former is a food made from okra, onion, shrimp, palm oil and toasted nuts and the latter is a food made with shrimp, chili peppers and bean flour.

CATEGORIES FOR "TRADITIONAL" CORRIDOS

A mandinga do jogo
 O cuidado com a ginga
 É pra não vacilar
 Capoeira é ligeira
 Ela é brasileira
 Ela é de matar
 Capoeira é ligeira
 Ela é Brasileira
 Ela é de matar

GRUPO DE CAPOEIRA ABOLIÇÃO

CAPOEIRA IS FOR FOREIGNERS

My brother
 It's a forest!
 Brazilian Capoeira
 My comrade
 It kills!
 The berimbau is calling
 The roda is forming
 Start blessing yourself
 So you may enter
 The rhythm is Angola
 São Bento Pequeno
 Cavalaria and lúna
 The mandinga of the game
 Watch your ginga
 Do not hesitate
 Capoeira is fast
 It is Brazilian
 It kills
 Capoeira is fast
 It is Brazilian
 It kills

(TRANSLATION BY THE AUTHOR)

THEME 6

NHEM, NHEM, NHEM

Olha chora o menino
 Nhem, nhem, nhem
 O menino chorou
 Nhem, nhem, nhem
 É porque não mamou
 Nhem, nhem, nhem
 Cale a boca menino

CAPOEIRA ANGOLA GROUPS

WHAA, WHAA, WHAA

Look the child cries
 Whaa, whaaa, whaa

THEME	EXAMPLE
Descriptive songs used as salutation, used for starting the <i>roda</i> or for when an <i>angoleiro</i> arrives.	Camungerê Como vai como está? Camungerê Como vai vos-mecê? Camungerê Eu vou bem de saúde Camungerê
Descriptive songs used as farewell, for finishing up the <i>roda</i> , or when an <i>angoleiro</i> leaves.	Adeus corina, dão, dão Vou-me embora, vou me embora Adeus corina, dão, dão Como já disse que vou Adeus corina, dão, dão Mas prossegue o berimbau
Descriptive songs for a player who takes a hit or is deceived in the game.	Mas meu facão bateu embaixo A bananeira caiu Mas meu facão bateu embaixo A bananeira caiu Cai, cai bananeira
Descriptive songs for intrinsic elements such as the instruments and philosophy.	Beriba é pau Pra fazer berimbau Mas beriba é pau Pra fazer berimbau Beriba é pau Pra fazer berimbau
Mediating songs that incite a stronger game.	Quebra, quebra gereba Vou quebrar tudo hoje Amanhá nada quebra Quebra, quebra gereba Vou quebrar tudo hoje Amanhá quem é que quebra Quebra, quebra gereba
Mediating songs that incite a slower game.	Ai ai, Aidê Joga bonito que eu quero ver Ai, Ai, Aidê Olha, jogo uma coisa que eu quero aprender Ai, Ai, Aidê Aidê, Aidê, Aidê, Aidê
Mediating songs that inciting the music to play in a specific way.	Chora viola Chora Oi chora viola Chorá Oi viola mentira Chorá

CATEGORIES FOR “TRADITIONAL” CORRIDOS

THEME	EXAMPLE
Mediating songs that incite a challenge among players.	Jogue comigo Com muito cuidado Com muito cuidado Com muito cuidado Jogue comigo Com muito cuidado Com muito cuidado Que eu sou delicado
Historical songs	Quando o nêgo fugia no mato O Sinhô mandou lhe buscar O nêgo então sacaricava Batendo o homem que vinha pegar Quem é esse homem Capitão do mato Quem era esse homem Capitão do mato
Songs that mention women.	A mulher mata o homem É debaixo da saia A mulher mata o homem É debaixo da saia A mulher mata o homem
Superstitious songs that ask for protection from gods and saints, both African and Catholic.	Ô Santa Barbara que relampuê Ô Santa Barbara que relampuá Ô Santa Barbara que relampuê Que relampuê, que relampuá Ô Santa Barbara que relampuê
Songs that exalt Capoeira as a practice and as culture	É legal, é legal Jogar capoeira é um negocio legal É legal, é legal Jogar capoeira e não levar pau É legal, é legal Oi! tocar berimbau é um negócio legal
Songs of free theme	Quem não pode com mandinga, Paraná Não carrega patuá, Paraná Paranaue, Paranaue, Paraná Quem não pode com Besouro, Paraná Não assanha Mangangá, Paraná Paranaue, Paranaue, Paraná

The child cried
Whaa, whaaa, whaa
It is because he did not suckle
Whaa, whaaa, whaa
Shut up boy

(TRANSLATION BY THE AUTHOR)

THEME 7

MARIMBONDO

Marimbondo, marimbondo

Pelo sinal

Marimbondo me mordeu

Pelo sinal

Oi me mordeu foi no umbigo

Pelo sinal

Mas se fosse mais pra baixo

Pelo sinal

O meu caso estava perdido

(HEARD IN THE RECORDING “CAPOEIRA”
BY MESTRES WALDEMAR Y CANJIQUINHA)

MARIMBONDO

Marimbondo, marimbondo

By the sign of the Holy Cross

Marimbondo bit me

By the sign of the Holy Cross

It bit my bellybutton

By the sign of the Holy Cross

Had it bit me any lower

By the sign of the Holy Cross

My case was over

(TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR)

A simple count the number of collected songs in each category led to the conclusion that the favorite themes in “traditional” *corridos* are: a) the descriptive songs for intrinsic aspects, b) the superstition mediating, and c) the songs that incite challenges. On the other hand, the repertoire contains few descriptive salutation songs and few free theme songs⁴⁴.

It is also interesting that in “traditional” *corridos* the preferred animals are snakes, birds and dogs, the fruit most mentioned is coconut and the preferred plant is *dendê*. The most popular characters are Pastinha and Besouro⁴⁵. Bahia and Angola are the most commonly mentioned places. The musical instrument most mentioned is the *berimbau*, but there is almost no mention of the rhythms played by the *berimbau*. Finally, the most frequently referred to movements are *ginga* and *rasteira*.

It is remarkable that, although the groups of each stream often make a special effort to mark the differences with respect to the groups of the other stream, they share almost all of the same themes in their songs. The contemporary Capoeira groups have introduced a couple of new themes in their songs: romantic songs whose exaggerated lyricism can be related to other Brazilian genres like *bossanova* or certain types of *samba*, and anthem songs that function as identifiers for certain groups or schools⁴⁶. The last category demonstrates the tendency to mark the differences between groups by creating their own repertoire of songs, including a song that exalts the group and its members (see *Additional Categories for contemporary Songs*).

In accordance to my simple counting system, the favorite themes in contemporary *corridos* are: a) the descriptive songs for intrinsic aspects, b) the historic songs and c) the challenge songs. On the other hand, the repertoire contains few descriptive songs for a player who takes a hit and few descriptive farewell songs.

⁴⁴ In the original work by the author, among a total of 174 traditional *corridos*, 34 were classified as descriptive songs for intrinsic aspects, 18 as superstition songs, 17 as songs that encourage challenges, 16 as descriptive songs for a player who takes a hit, 16 as songs that mention women, 15 as mediating songs that incite slower game, 11 as historical songs, 11 as farewell songs, 9 as songs that condition the way to play music, 8 as songs that encourage strong play, 7 as songs that exalt Capoeira as a practice and as a culture, 6 as songs for salutation and 6 as free theme songs.

⁴⁵ Besouro Mangangá is one of the most celebrated characters in the songs of Capoeira and by far, the greatest legend. The myth is easily pieced together using the information supplied by the Capoeira song repertoire. It is said that he was a black slave and a brave man who defended his people and fought against the Portuguese and the police. It is also said that he had *corpo fechado*, meaning that he could not be killed with a weapon. It is also said that he was killed at the *Engenho de Maracangalha* (sugar cane production and processing farm) with a *faca de tucum* (a knife made from a specific type of wood), the only thing able to break the enchantment that protected him.

⁴⁶ Some *Capoeira Angola* groups have anthems too, but they are barely heard in public *rodas*. That is why this category was not included in traditional songs. One example of this type of songs is the *corrido* “O *quilombo da FICA*”, that mentions the name of the International Foundation of Capoeira Angola (“FICA” is the abbreviation in Portuguese). This is one of the biggest *Capoeira Angola* groups worldwide with its main academy in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. The FICA (or ICAF in English) is headed by *Mestres* Valmir, Cobra Mansa and Jurandir.

ADDITIONAL CATEGORIES FOR “CONTEMPORARY” SONGS

THEME	EXAMPLE
Romantic songs	<p>Romantic songs Meu berimbau Meu amante verdadeiro Na tristeza e na alegria Sempre foi meu companheiro Na volta do mundo que eu dou Na volta do mundo que dá Na volta do mundo que eu dou Na volta do mundo que dá Já tocou pra seu Pastinha Pra seu Bimba e Paraná Já rodou por esse mundo Não sei onde vai parar</p>
Anthems	<p>Hoje tem roda no morro Ouvi berimbau tocar É o Grupo Axé Capoeira Que acaba de chegar Hoje tem roda no morro Ouvi berimbau tocar É o Grupo Axé Capoeira Que acaba de chegar Olha o Grupo Axé Capoeira Tem raiz e também tradição Todos jogam capoeira Com amor no coração Hoje tem roda no morro Ouvi berimbau tocar É o Grupo Axé Capoeira Que acaba de chegar Olha o Grupo Axé Capoeira Nasceu no Brasil foi para muito lugar Já foi na Itália, Suíça Estados Unidos e também Canadá</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(MESTRE BARRÃO, MESTRE OF THE GRUPO AXE CAPOEIRA)</small></p>

It is also interesting that in “contemporary” songs the preferred animals are oxen and monkeys, the plants most mentioned are the sugar cane and the *beriba* and the most popular characters are Bimba, Pastinha and Besouro. The places most mentioned are Bahia and Luanda. The musical instrument most mentioned is, as before, the *berimbau*. Contemporary *corridos* frequently mention the rhythms of the *berimbau*, most commonly mentioning the *São Bento*, *Angola*, *Benguela* and *Iúna* rhythms. Finally, the movements in Capoeira that are most mentioned are also *ginga* and *rasteira*, as well as *meia-lua* and *armada*.

It is noticeable that in the repertoires of both styles, Pastinha and Besouro appear as the most popular characters, only superseded in contemporary *corridos* by the mention of Bimba. The mention by contemporary groups of Pastinha can be perhaps interpreted as recognition to an “older tradition”. A reciprocal recognition of Bimba and his contribution to Capoeira is inexistent in the songs of the traditional groups.

Analysis of Differences in Lyrics and Poetic Structure of the Corridos

The next paragraphs discuss some of the typical differences among *corridos*. There are illustrative examples from both the traditional and contemporary songs.

Minor Spelling Differences

Sometimes the differences between two versions of one song may look very small, but are significant, nonetheless. For example, while the *corrido* “O Dendê, o Dendê” is sung

THEME 8

Vou dizer a dendê
Sou homen, não sou mulher
Manda dizer a dendê
Sou homen, não sou mulher

(FROM THE CD "CAPOEIRA ANGOLA",
MESTRE JOGO DE DENTRO, 1999)

I am going to tell Dendê
I am a man not a woman
Go tell Dendê
I am a man not a woman

(TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR)

THEME 9

Vou dizer a dendê
Sou homen, não sou moleque
Manda dizer a dendê
Sou homen, não sou moleque

(VERSION SUNG BY MESTRE COBRA
MANSA IN A CAPOEIRA WORKSHOP IN
MANAGUA, NICARAGUA, 2005)

I am going to tell Dendê
I am a man not a boy
Go tell Dendê
I am a man not a boy

(TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR)

THEME 10: QUADRA

Caminando pela rua
Uma cobra me mordeu
Meu veneno era mais forte
E foi a cobra quem morreu
Ai ai ai ai
São Bento me chama
Ai ai ai ai
São Bento chamou
Ai ai ai ai

(VERSION HEARD IN RODA OF "CA-
POEIRA ANGOLA CENTER OF MESTRE
JOÃO GRANDE", NEW YORK, 2003)

Walking down the street
A snake bit me
My venom was stronger
And it was the snake who died
Ay ay ay ay
Saint Benedict is calling me
Ay ay ay ay
Saint Benedict called me
Ay ay ay ay

(TRANSLATION BY THE AUTHOR)

by Mestre Jogo de Dentro (a young *Capoeira Angola* master) as shown in theme 8. Nonetheless Mestre Cobra Mansa says that this *corrido* was previously sung as shown in theme 9.

Although the one-word difference here is minor at first glance, the implication is remarkable. Whereas the first version of this *corrido* shows a sexist stance, the second one presents age-based discrimination.

Differences in Poetic Structure of the Verses

Another important difference in the various versions of the *corridos* is the poetic structure of the verses. The basic structure for the verses of a *Capoeira Angola corrido* is one, two or four lines, sung by the soloist, and echoed by the chorus (whose response is of equal length). This structure is altered at times by including one (or sometimes more) *quadra*⁴⁷ at the beginning of the *corrido*. The *quadra* is a four-line verse, which could precede virtually any *corrido*. *Quadras* used in these circumstances are never echoed by the chorus. While these *quadras* are most often improvised or taken from *ladainhas* and used to describe what is happening in one particular moment in the *roda*, some of these *quadras* have been associated with specific *corridos* and adopted by many groups, both *Angola* and *Regional/Contemporânea*.

The *quadra* that appears in the four first verses of theme 10 is a specific combination of lyrics commonly heard.

Note however, that some groups (e.g. Mestre Bimba's group, as heard on the album *Curso de Capoeira Regional*) sing this *corrido* but do not include the *quadra*.

⁴⁷ *Quadra* is a four-line verse with rhyming pairs. It is widely used both in literature and songs in Portuguese. Perhaps the correct English word is quatrain. The general use of the term in this paper must be distinguished from the *quadras de Mestre Bimba*, which are also four-line verses, but used specifically as introductory songs in *Capoeira Regional* groups that follow Bimba's tradition strictly. These particular *quadras* are not discussed in this paper.

Analysis of Differences in Musical Aesthetic of the Corridos

It can be said that Capoeira *corridos* are responsorial and monophonic, as the chorus responds in unison; however, one may hear thirds or even false intonations in the chorus response due to individuals' vocal capacities. There are no rules for intonation in the group, as there are no harmonic or melodic instruments in the *bateria* to support harmony. A song in which parallel thirds are often sung is the *corrido* *Paranaué*.

Transcription by the author based on *roda* of the group Banda do Saci, in Mexico City, in March 2002

The melody of traditional *corridos* is very simple. The melodic periods of the “traditional” *corridos* almost always bear two phrases: the antecedent phrase which concludes with a dominant cadence and the consequent phrase which concludes with a tonic cadence. The most common use of this structure is as follows: the soloist introduces the unique melodic period, then he/she leaves the antecedent phrase of the melodic period to the chorus and he/she sings the consequent phrase completing the melodic period. The soloist and the chorus alternate these two phrases during the whole *corrido*. In general, the soloist improvises verses in his/her part, while the chorus sings a fixed verse.

Transcription by the author based on a *roda* by the Grupo de Estudio de Capoeira Angola Raiz in San Jose, Costa Rica, January 2003.

Although the structure depicted above is one of the most frequently seen in “traditional” *corridos*, there are other uses of this structure in which the soloist’s and the chorus’ parts are shorter, splitting the melodic period into four. A good example is the *corrido* “Camungere”.

The musical score for "Camungere" is in 2/4 time. It features two phrases: an "Antecedent phrase" and a "Consequent phrase". Both phrases consist of a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The melodic line includes triplets of eighth notes. The lyrics are: "CA - MUN - GE - RE Co - mo vai co mo ta CA - MUNGE - RE co - mo vai vos me - ce - e CA - MUNGE".

Transcription by the author based on a *roda* by the Grupo de Estudio de Capoeira Angola de Nicaragua in Managua, April 2005.

On the other hand there are *corridos* whose melodic period is not divided and thus, the soloist’s and chorus’ parts alternate over whole melodic periods. One example would be the *corrido* “Quem vem la sou eu”.

The musical score for "Quem vem la sou eu" is in 2/4 time and shows alternating soloist and chorus periods. The first system (measures 1-7) is labeled "Period (soloist)..." and contains the lyrics: "Quem vem la sou e - u quem vem la sou e - u be - rim - bau ba - te - u ca - po -". The second system (measures 8-12) is divided into "Period (soloist)" (measures 8-9) and "Period (chorus)" (measures 10-12), with lyrics: "ei - ra sou eu QUEM VEM LA SOU E - U QUEM VEM LA SOU E -". The third system (measures 13-19) is labeled "Period (chorus)" and contains the lyrics: "- U BE - RIM - BAU BA - TE - U CA - PO - EI - RA SOU EU Eu ve -".

Transcription by the author based on a *roda* by the Capoeira Angola Center of Mestre João Grande in New York, September 2003.

Even though many contemporary *corridos* share the structure described above, they also exhibit many other uses of the structure. While an exhaustive explanation is beyond the breadth of this paper, in brief, the role of the chorus is more active, as its part is not always fixed, neither in melody nor in lyrics. Sometimes, the length of the chorus' part might even change within the same *corrido*. To demonstrate this sort of variation, the next example of a song heard in a *roda* by the *Grupo de Capoeira Abolição* in San José, Costa Rica, shows alternating melodic periods sung by the soloist and the chorus that differ both in melody and lyrics.

Transcription by the author based on a *roda* by the *Grupo de Capoeira Abolição* in San José, Costa Rica, March 2003.

An important thing to keep in mind when analyzing musical aesthetics of *corridos* in Capoeira is that most of the *mestres* develop a particular style of singing the Capoeira repertoire. That is why the melodies for different *corridos* frequently vary from group to group. Several examples might be provided, but I will center my attention on *Mestre Moraes*, who has a distinctive and well-known style.

According to *Mestre Otavio Brazil*⁴⁸, some *mestres*, such as *Moraes*, have a special way of singing, “*cantam pra dentro*”, which means that as they sing, the songs go into their bodies. Such concepts contribute to or perhaps result from the mystical discourse that continues to surround Capoeira. Based on videos and other recordings, the noteworthy technical aspects

⁴⁸ Personal interview with *Mestre Otavio Brazil* San Jose, Costa Rica, 2001.

of Mestre Moraes's singing style are: a) he interjects the melody with calls before and after his part (the soloist's part) in the *corridos* that he is leading, b) he overlaps tertiary melodic rhythms with the binary percussion base and c) his voice is very nasal.

Below are two transcribed versions of the *corrido* "Paranaue". The first one was taken from a recording that features Mestre Moraes and illustrates aspects of his melodic style. The second one was taken from another recording and shows a more standardized version, which is generally found in Capoeira *rodas* outside of Brazil.

$\text{♩} = 65$

Voice
Mestre Moraes

Pa - ra Pa - ra - na I - e! pa - ra - na - ue - pa - ra - na!

Atabaque, reco-reco
Pandeiro, agogo

5

PA - RA - NA - UE - PA - RA - NA - UE - PA - RA - NA Vou me, er

9

bo - ra vou me, em - bo - ra co - mo, eu já di - sse - que vou pa - ra - na

Transcription based on the version recorded by Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho "Capoeira Angola From Salvador" (1996).

$\text{♩} = 110$

Voice

I - e pa - ra - na - e - pa - ra - na pa - ra - na pa - ra - na - e

Atabaque, reco-reco
Pandeiro, agogo

5

pa - ra - na PA-RA-NA- UE - PA-RA-NA- UE - PA-RANA

Transcription based on the version recorded by Grupo de Capoeira Baraka, "Capoeira Baraka" (date unknown).

While the first version exhibits a more intricate rhythm combining binary and tertiary musical forms, the second one shows the repeated use of the following rhythmic pattern⁴⁹:



As Rio de Janeiro is not only the birthplace of Bossanova but also an important centre that influenced the early development of Capoeira, further investigation of the relationship between these rhythms could prove interesting.

Conclusion

In this paper, I proposed a division of the Capoeira song repertoire using specific criteria. Furthermore, I analyzed some poetic and musical elements of Capoeira songs in order to better understand the intricacy of Capoeira. There are different versions of Capoeira songs that are, simultaneously, unique and representative of differing microcosms within the realm of Capoeira, and part of a larger family of songs.

This work proves that it is possible to approach the universe of Capoeira through its music. This type of approach is indispensable given that Capoeira is an oral tradition where the *mestres* pass down their knowledge through stories most often in the form of songs. From a didactic point of view, the study of the song repertoire is important for the attainment of a better understanding of Capoeira. This is advisable for all Capoeira practitioners and especially for those not native to Brazil. The division of these songs by theme allows one to see how Capoeira songs are integrated into the ritual. Finally, the study of these songs makes it clear that they are a fertile source of historical, philosophical and technical information.

An analysis of the lyrics, poetic structure and musical aesthetic shows that although both “traditional” and “contemporary” styles have significant differences, the *corridos* of both styles still share a great number of elements in common. The styles diverge in the use of tertiary melodic rhythms that overlap a binary percussion base (“traditionalists”) compared to more syncopated melodic rhythms (“contemporaries”)⁵⁰; however, the styles parallel each other in such elements as the common themes, the responsorial nature of the songs, the alternation of melodic periods (or fractions of them), and the improvisation exhibited by the soloist.

⁴⁹ This rhythmic pattern is similar to the rhythm of many Bossanova songs, such as “*Berimbau*” by Vinicius de Moraes and Baden Powell, “*Gema*” by Caetano Veloso or “*Samba de Uma nota Só*” by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Newton Mendonça.

⁵⁰ Not that contemporary songs do not use tertiary melodic rhythms, but this musical figure appears very infrequently. Traditional songs are also syncopated but to a lesser extent than contemporary songs.

The tensions between Capoeira groups for the recognition as “authentic” and/or “traditional” represents a desire for reaffirmation as individuals and as groups in societies that suffer rapid change. Taking up and defending a tradition as one’s own can be seen as a way of resisting such change. Often overlooked and misunderstood is the fact that the roots of the entire ritual, including the music, are identical. As both sides are involved in the same fight for recognition, it is not surprising that the changes that they have incorporated into their practice go in the same direction. This has been depicted through a study of their music.