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The Role of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola in the Empowerment and Development of Children from the Community of Alto da Sereia

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SIT Brazil: Social Justice and Sustainable Development

**The Role of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola in the
Empowerment and Development of Children from the
community of Alto da Sereia**

Submitted by
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Abstract

Despite Brazil being one of the largest economies in the world, exclusion and child poverty remain as some of the most pressing social issues throughout the country. Child poverty is extremely problematic in Salvador da Bahia, where children from underprivileged communities are vulnerable to violence, exclusion, drug trafficking and prostitution. Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola is an organization founded by Mestra Janja Araujo in 1995, whose main mission is to defend the rights of children and adolescents, fight against racial and gender discrimination, preserve and promote Afro-Brazilian culture, and empower girls, children and women. This paper seeks to understand how Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira de Angola uses capoeira as a way of empowering and promoting the full development of children in the community of Alto da Sereia in Salvador. By participating in Grupo Nzinga's activities and conducting interviews with some of the members of the organization, I was able to study the relationship between capoeira and the development and empowerment of children. My research showed that Grupo Nzinga's capoeira pedagogy has great potential as an avenue for the development and empowerment of children, because it gives them autonomy, and access to relevant information, educational activities, and cultural experiences, as well as possibilities to develop new skills and learn important moral values that they can use on a daily basis. However, it is important to note that the work of Grupo Nzinga is extremely complex and that they do much more than empowering the children and promoting their full development.

Resumo

Apesar de o Brasil ser uma das maiores economias do mundo, a exclusão e a pobreza infantil permanecem como alguns dos problemas sociais mais prementes em todo o país. A pobreza infantil é extremamente problemática em Salvador da Bahia, onde crianças de comunidades pobres são vulneráveis à violência, a exclusão, ao tráfico de drogas e à prostituição. Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola é uma organização fundada por Mestra Rosângela Araújo em 1995, cuja missão principal é defender os direitos das crianças e dos adolescentes, lutar contra a discriminação racial e de gênero, preservar e promover a cultura afro-brasileira, e capacitar as meninas, crianças e mulheres. Este trabalho procura entender como o Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira de Angola usa a capoeira como uma forma de capacitar e promover o desenvolvimento integral das crianças na comunidade do Alto da Sereia em Salvador. Ao participar nas atividades do Grupo Nzinga e realizar de entrevistas com alguns dos membros da organização, eu consegui estudar a relação entre a capoeira e o desenvolvimento e empoderamento das crianças. Minha pesquisa mostrou que a pedagogia de capoeira do Grupo Nzinga tem um grande potencial como uma avenida para o desenvolvimento e empoderamento das crianças, porque lhes dá autonomia e acesso a informações relevantes, atividades educacionais e experiências culturais, bem como a possibilidade de desenvolver novas habilidades e aprender valores morais importantes que podem usar todos os dias. No entanto, é importante notar que o trabalho do Grupo Nzinga é extremamente complexo e que eles fazem muito mais do que capacitar as crianças e promover o seu desenvolvimento integral.

Definition of Terms

- Capoeirista: a person who practices capoeira. The term is not limited to one type of capoeira, but includes Capoeira Angola, Regional and Contemporânea. For the purpose of this study, the term is used to describe people who practice Capoeira Angola.
- Angoleiro/ Angoleira: a person who practices Capoeira Angola.
- Mestre/ Mestra: greatest degree of recognition that can be achieved in capoeira. The word “mestre” literally means “master” in portuguese, but it also denotes great expertise and evokes a high level of respect.
- Roda de Capoeira: activity or event in which the capoeiristas position themselves in a circle and two students practice capoeira in the center while the others play instruments, sing and clap around them as they wait for their turn. Each game finishes when the person playing the gunga says so, or whenever another capoeirista comes in-between the two who were playing before and starts to play with one of them.
- Berimbau: one of the most important instruments in capoeira. It is a musical arch composed by a rope of steel, a rustic stick, and a calabash, and it is played with a caxixi and a drum stick.
- Caxixi: small basket full of seeds that is used to play and accompany the berimbau.
- Gunga: biggest and most important berimbau. It directs the other instruments, conducts the rhythm and determines the end of each game during a roda de capoeira.
- Atabaque: afro-brazilian drum played with the hands and used in both Capoeira Angola and Candomblé rituals. Together with the gunga, it directs the rhythm of the orchestra.
- Pandeiro: tambourine used in Capoeira Angola to accompany the sound of the berimbau.
- Agogô: African instrument made of metal and played with a drum stick.
- Reco-reco: percussion instrument made of a small piece of wood with transversal cuts. It is played with a drum stick and makes a scraping sound. It accompanies the agogô.
- Ladainha: initial verse of a capoeira song.
- Ginga: the most basic movement of capoeira that includes some basic steps and a sort of rocking movement as the person moves from one side to another. The term refers to a well-respected African queen named Jinga, who reigned in Angola between the 16th and 17th centuries. In Capoeira Angola, the term ginga is linked to queen Jinga’s political action, and refers back to an idea of conflict, negotiation and magic. The term ginga represents the possibility of an indirect confrontation in capoeira, which is expressed through body language.

Methodology of Research

This project is the culmination of three weeks of research on Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola, a capoeira organization located in the community of Alto da Sereia in Salvador da Bahia. I spent three weeks living in Salvador and participating in the activities of Grupo Nzinga, which included going to weekly capoeira classes and rodas de capoeira in Alto da Sereia. The majority of my research was based on participant observation, as I participated in six capoeira classes, as well three rodas de capoeira at Grupo Nzinga. By learning alongside with the other students and participating in the capoeira classes, I was able to get some valuable insight about Grupo Nzinga's capoeira pedagogy as well as about the values and abilities that Capoeira Angola promotes. Through my participation in Grupo Nzinga, I was also able to gain some understanding about the relationships between the teachers and the students, as well as on the interactions between the students themselves. By participating in Grupo Nzinga's capoeira classes, I was able to share with the children and experience the frustration, the encouragement, the excitement and the fatigue that come with learning Capoeira Angola. This experience also allowed me to forge relationships with the children and understand the role that capoeira plays in their lives, learn from the other capoeiristas, and get to know the community of Alto da Sereia to some extent. In the course of these three weeks, I was also able to gain some valuable insight about the significance of Grupo Nzinga's work, mission, and objectives.

Throughout this research period I also conducted three semi-structured formal interviews as well as two informal interviews, and I was able to attend a public lecture on the philosophy of Capoeira Angola at Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA). In terms of formal interviews, I interviewed two of the teachers of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola, as well as Mestre Janja Araujo, the main founder of the group. In terms of informal interviews, I was able to talk to some adult members of Grupo Nzinga, as well as Mestre Poloca, one of the co-founders of the group. Through this experience, I learned about what Capoeira Angola symbolizes, as well as the types of values and abilities it promotes, and got some valuable insight on the relationship between capoeira and children's development in the community of Alto da Sereia. By interviewing Mestre Janja and Mestre Poloca, I learned more about the mission, objectives and background of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola, as well as about their capoeira pedagogy. I was also able to interview a young man from the community who has been a member of Grupo Nzinga since he was a kid, which was extremely significant for me. During this research period I also had the

opportunity to attend a public lecture from the doctoral program of Diffusion of Knowledge at the Education Campus of UFBA. This lecture was led by Philosophy professor Eduardo David de Oliveira and Mestre Cobra Mansa, and it consisted in a discussion about the philosophy of Capoeira Angola. During this lecture I was able to learn more about Capoeira Angola, including what it symbolizes, its philosophical foundation, and the values it promotes.

Although this project is mainly based on primary sources, multiple secondary sources were used as part of the foundation and theoretical background of the paper. These sources were drawn from a couple of books, documentaries, and articles that discussed the background of Capoeira Angola, and the relation between Capoeira Angola, human development and social justice. I was also able to access a dissertation written specifically about Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola and their capoeira pedagogy, which gave me valuable information about the mission and background of Grupo Nzinga, as well as the history of the community of Alto da Sereia.

Introduction

Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with 31%¹ of its inhabitants living in poverty and more than 53 million people living with less than \$1 dollar per day.² Children are particularly vulnerable in this scenario, because poverty creates conditions that can hinder or limit their development. In the state of Bahia, located in the Northeast of Brazil, 62,8%³ of the children that reside in urban sectors live in households that earn less than \$75 dollars per month. Children who reside in these impoverished communities become more vulnerable to drug trafficking, child prostitution and violence. Therefore, with the prevalence of child poverty in Salvador da Bahia, I believe it is crucial to examine some of the efforts that are being made to promote the development and the empowerment of children from underprivileged communities. Brazil's Statute on the Child and Adolescent "calls on the state and civil society to provide developmental supports for all children and youth"⁴, which includes opportunities that will contribute to their social, mental, moral and emotional development. This notion of developmental supports is extremely important because it goes beyond protecting children and

¹ Berndt 2009: 19

² Berndt 2009: 25

³ Castro 2001: 102

⁴ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga 1999: 3

providing them with a safe environment, and includes opportunities for social, intellectual and creative growth that are essential for the children's integral development.

I am interested in the use of capoeira as a vehicle for development, because I believe that this form of art can teach very important principles that are integral for a child's development; such as tolerance, respect, discipline, and conflict-resolution. This paper studies the work of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola, an organization located in Salvador da Bahia that has employed capoeira as a way of empowering children by contributing to their social, moral, mental and physical development. Throughout my ISP I seek to answer the specific question of how Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira de Angola uses capoeira as a way of empowering and promoting the full development of children from the community of Alto da Sereia. This research project is extremely relevant, because it studies and analyzes a unique approach that has been implemented to empower and promote the social, creative, mental and physical development of children from an underprivileged community. Children are particularly vulnerable to poverty, racism, sexism and exclusion, which is why it becomes extremely important to examine the resources that are being allocated to protect children, promote their integral development and ensure that their rights are respected. Therefore, this paper is relevant for society as a whole, because it explores issues of child poverty, exclusion and racism, and intends to analyze the efforts of a unique organization that seeks to address some of these issues.

In the course of this paper I intend to explore how capoeira empowers children and promotes their full development; how Grupo Nzinga protects the rights of the children; how Grupo Nzinga preserves and promotes Afro-Brazilian culture and why that is relevant for the children, how capoeira contributes to the children's growth; and how Grupo Nzinga fights against gender and racial discrimination and why this is significant for the children. This paper begins by giving some background information on Capoeira Angola, in order to give the reader a sense of why it is important to study capoeira. The second section of this research project explores the need for development as well as the potential of capoeira as a vehicle for development. This section starts by giving an overview of child poverty in Salvador da Bahia in order to illustrate the lack of opportunities available for children and the need for projects that empower kids and promote their integral development. After illustrating this need for development, this section goes over some projects, programs and initiatives that have already implemented capoeira as a way of promoting the full development of children from underprivileged communities in Brazil. The third section consists in a case study of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola and their capoeira pedagogy at the community of Alto da Sereia.

This last section is based on three weeks of intense research and explores how Grupo Nzinga uses capoeira as a way of empowering and promoting the full development of children from Alto da Sereia. The last portion of this section explores how Grupo Nzinga goes beyond empowering and promoting the development of the children, by opening their eyes to new possibilities of life.

What is Capoeira Angola?

There are many theories that explain the origins of capoeira in Brazil, which mention its African roots as well as the practice of capoeira in Brazil's urban and rural contexts. Some of the most well-known theories about the origins of capoeira suggest that this form of art was created by the black African slaves that were brought to Brazil from the start of the 1500s. Sara Abreu Machado explains this current of thought and states that capoeira was created by black African slaves in the "sezalas" or slave quarters, and originated from forms of African combat that they used to practice.⁵ Salvador da Bahia is considered a very important location in terms of the origins and preservation of capoeira, because it was a major port where many African slaves arrived after the 1500s, and during the 20th century it was the place where many of the first capoeira institutions and groups were born. In relation to the importance of Bahia for the preservation of capoeira, Lauren Miller Griffith states that "Bahia is often considered to be the cradle of capoeira because it was here that capoeiristas kept their traditional art alive despite its official prohibition in the late 1800s through the early 1900s."⁶ Salvador da Bahia is also extremely important for the purpose of this study, because it is considered to be the cradle of Capoeira Angola, the most traditional form of capoeira and the focus of this project. It is important to note that although this paper studies Capoeira Angola, there are various different styles of capoeira in Brazil, which include Capoeira Regional. This section will explore the main differences between Capoeira Regional and Capoeira Angola, as well as the values, foundation and significance of Capoeira Angola, in order to create a background that will orient the reader and illustrate why it is important to study Capoeira Angola.

Capoeira Angola vs. Capoeira Regional

Capoeira Angola and Capoeira Regional were born during the 20th century as part of an effort to preserve capoeira, while making it more socially acceptable. However, although

⁵ Machado, S. A. 2012: 32. Own translation

⁶ Griffith, L. M. 2014: 2

Capoeira Angola and Capoeira Regional share some of the same origins and historical roots, today they represent extremely different, and even opposite forms of capoeira. Capoeira Regional was created by Mestre Bimba, who wanted to legitimize capoeira and transform it into a more socially accepted sport. Between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, Mestre Bimba formed the Centro de Cultura Física Regional or Regional Center of Physical Culture, which was the first center of capoeira ever created and represents the origins of Capoeira Regional.⁷ Sara Abreu Machado explains that by creating Capoeira Regional, Mestre Bimba was able to legitimize and modernize capoeira, and gain access to a different audience that included doctors and intellectuals. Capoeira Angola was created in the 1930s, as part of a movement that opposed Capoeira Regional and defended the preservation of the traditional aspects of capoeira.⁸ In 1941, Mestre Pastinha organized the Centro de Capoeira Angola, the first center of Capoeira Angola ever created, where he promoted a more traditional and authentic form of capoeira in Salvador da Bahia. Pedro Abib states that just like Mestre Bimba, Mestre Pastinha also wanted to build a more socially accepted image of capoeira. However, contrary to the changes that Mestre Bimba instituted in Capoeira Regional, Mestre Pastinha focused on the African origins of capoeira, as well as its religious, festive and theatrical elements.⁹ In this way, by focusing on the fundamental principles of African tradition, Mestre Pastinha created a discourse that emphasized the ethical and loving side of capoeira. As a consequence, Mestre Pastinha created a new philosophy of Capoeira Angola, based on the values of companionship, respect, ethics, human rights and playfulness, which gave rise to a more symbolic and subjective style of capoeira.¹⁰ Pedro Abib explains that Capoeira Regional and Capoeira Angola developed in two very different ways, because while Capoeira Regional was more influenced by rationality and modern thought, Capoeira Angola retained important elements of African ancestry and rituality. According to Pedro Abib, Capoeira Angola also has a playful and festive component that is somewhat opposed to the efficiency and competitiveness of Capoeira Regional.¹¹ Therefore, Capoeira Angola and Capoeira Regional represent very different styles of capoeira, because they are ruled by completely different sets of values and imply very different ways of seeing the world. In terms of the esthetic differences between Capoeira Angola and Capoeira Regional,

⁷ Machado, S. A. 2012: 45. Own translation

⁸ Machado, S. A. 2012: 46. Own translation

⁹ Abib, P. 2005: 156. Own translation

¹⁰ Abib, P. 2005: 157. Own translation

¹¹ Abib, P. 2005: 159. Own translation

Lauren Miller Griffith states that “The Angola style of capoeira tends to be played more slowly and closer to the ground than is Capoeira Regional. Instead of speed and acrobatics, players rely on strength, flexibility and strategy to outdo their opponents.”¹² In this sense, Griffith argues that Angoleiros cannot rely solely on physical skills and must develop a sharp sense of strategy, because Capoeira Angola is more unpredictable and improvised than Capoeira Regional. During an interview with Anderson, one of the professors of Grupo Nzinga who everyone calls Barba, I asked him about the significance of Capoeira Angola, and about the main differences between Capoeira Angola and Capoeira Regional. He stated that “what is referred to as Capoeira Angola today is the oldest modality [of capoeira] that exists,”¹³ and explained that for him Capoeira Angola is a philosophical relation, something that is intangible and abstract instead of a purely physical thing.¹⁴ Therefore, while Capoeira Regional refers to a more objective and competitive style of capoeira, Capoeira Angola develops a more subjective and symbolic game.

Values, Foundation and Significance

As a term, Capoeira Angola is very difficult to define because it fits into many different categories and cannot be represented as only one thing, but as a combination of multiple elements which include; philosophy, dance, game, music, art and combat. For the purpose of this study, Capoeira Angola will be understood as a combination of such elements, and will be referred to as a form of art, dance and philosophy of life. In terms of the literature surrounding capoeira, there are multiple definitions used to describe it. Jackie Beth Shilcutt defines capoeira as “a blend of athleticism, combat, culture, camaraderie, and music”¹⁵, as well as a physical conversation or “dialogue-in-motion”¹⁶. On the other side, Audrey M. Ottier, describes capoeira as “a a rich artistic expression of Afro-Brazilian culture and heritage (...) [which] combines martial arts, dance, sport, play, music, ritual and performance (...) [and] encompasses its own practical phylosophy.”¹⁷ This last definition retains many of the classic components of capoeira such as dance, combat, art and music, but includes the philosophical aspect of capoeira and describes it as a way of life. In the course of my three weeks of research, I interviewed Mestra

¹² Griffith, L. M. 2014: 8

¹³ Lopes, A. Personal interview. May 13, 2015.

¹⁴ Lopes, A. Personal interview. May 13, 2015.

¹⁵ Shilcutt, J. B. 2014: 1

¹⁶ Shilcutt, J. B. 2014: 10

¹⁷ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 1

Rosângela Araujo, also known as Janja, the main founder of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola. As we talked about the significance of Capoeira Angola, Mestre Janja explained that “Capoeira Angola is an expression of the culture of the African people in Brazil, (...) that gathers a series of corporal and artistic elements.”¹⁸ In terms of these corporal and artistic elements she mentioned the game, the combat, the dance, the musicality and the theatricality, and stated that the expression of spirituality is also very important for Capoeira Angola.

During my three weeks of research at Grupo Nzinga, I heard the words “conversation” and “dialogue” multiple times as I practiced capoeira. Ever since my first capoeira class at Grupo Nzinga, I heard Barba repeat several times that capoeira was like a conversation and that we had to concentrate and be focused on our partners in order to respond.¹⁹ During my second capoeira class, I practiced with a girl called Tatiana who told me that Capoeira Angola is more like a conversation, in which you have to always look at your partner in order to mimic his movements, dodge and attack.²⁰ When I asked Tatiana about the objective of Capoeira Angola, she said that it is not about the competition but more about the dance and dialogue that goes on between the capoeiristas.²¹ Therefore, after participating in Grupo Nzinga’s capoeira classes, I concluded that Capoeira Angola is not only a form of dance, art, combat and philosophy, but also a physical conversation in which the capoeiristas have to evaluate the movements of their partners, strategize and respond by using the capoeira positions that they know. In relation to this dialogue, Augusto Passos da Silva states that the wisdom of an Angoleiro resides in the way he confronts his opponent, in the form he studies his strategy of attack and defense, and in how he acts before diversity outside of the roda de capoeira.²² This author emphasizes the importance of strategizing in Capoeira Angola, which can be as important as physical skills and strength when developed properly. Capoeira Angola is not governed by a determined set of rules and it can be very unpredictable, therefore in order to respond timely to an opponent’s movements, it is extremely important to improvise and to be clever and agile.

In terms of the aesthetics of Capoeira Angola, Pedro Abib explains that this style of capoeira does not have a defined form and instead calls it more of a “forma deformada”²³, or

¹⁸ Araujo, R. Personal interview.

¹⁹ Refer to field journal, page 5

²⁰ Refer to field journal, page 11

²¹ Refer to field journal, page 11

²² Passos, A. J. 2003: 109. Own translation

²³ Abib, P. 2005: 197. Own translation

deformed form. The author also explains that the *angoleiro* uses a wide array of cultural references to mold his game, which will always be particular and unique. According to Pedro, feelings are extremely important because they are embedded in each person's way of playing capoeira, which is why subjectivity and freedom are some of the main characteristics of Capoeira Angola. Pedro Abib also explains that respect for individuality is extremely important in Capoeira Angola, which he illustrates by using one of Mestre Pastinha's most famous sayings that goes; "cada qual é cada qual, e ninguém joga do meu jeito."²⁴ This means that everyone is unique and therefore plays capoeira in their own particular way. According to Pedro, Capoeira Angola can be described as an "unfinished work of art"²⁵, because it is always being remodeled by the capoeiristas, who express their feelings and reveal their individualities through their body language and the physical dialogue that is established between them. Abib explains that in Capoeira Angola the Mestres provide their students with the base, over which they will develop their own way of playing according to their personal characteristics.²⁶ This gives the students the opportunity to learn from each other, to improvise and to express their individuality and creativity in each game. This aspect of freedom was also discussed during a public lecture I attended at Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), where professor Eduardo de Oliveira and Mestre Cobra Mansa encouraged us to reflect on the philosophical foundation of Capoeira Angola, as well as on notions of freedom and expression. According to philosophy professor Eduardo de Oliveira, Capoeira Angola is the "história da expressão da liberdade, e dos dobramentos dela,"²⁷ because there is not just one "correct" way of playing capoeira and everyone has the freedom to play in their own particular way.²⁸ Professor Eduardo also explained that Capoeira Angola is all about bending the rules and having the freedom to express yourself, instead of simply imitating whatever the professor or mestre does. In relation to this, the professor stated that an "angoleiro que faz todo o que o mestre faz não é angoleiro," which means that an *angoleiro* who imitates everything a mestre does is not a real *angoleiro*.²⁹

Another very important characteristic of Capoeira Angola is its philosophical component and the ways in which it represents a way of life. Augusto Passos da Silva describes Capoeira

²⁴ Abib, P. 2005: 199. Own translation

²⁵ Abib, P. 2005: 200. Own translation

²⁶ Abib, P. 2005: 199. Own translation

²⁷ History of the expression of freedom and the bending of this freedom.

²⁸ Public Lecture, UFBA. Refer to field journal, page 33

²⁹ Public Lecture, UFBA. Refer to field journal, page 33

Angola as an art that simulates the game of life, where the capoeiristas represent all the paths that life offers including; innocence, badness, falseness, deception, cleverness, ignorance, and wisdom, as well as each person's peculiar way of being and living.³⁰ During the public lecture I attended at UFBA, we discussed this philosophical aspect of capoeira and explored the question of; what is Capoeira Angola? One of the students stated that capoeira can be partly described as a form of art because it promotes creativity and unleashes a person's free imagination. However, he also explained that Capoeira Angola cannot be limited to this definition, because it can also be seen as a way of life and a philosophy in itself.³¹ Following this discussion, the class came to the conclusion that capoeira is somewhat like a game of affirmatives, negatives and evasions that together emulate the "gran roda da vida"³², which represents real life. In the course of my three weeks of research, I interviewed Raphael, a young man who has been a member of Grupo Nzinga since he was a little boy. During this interview, Raphael stated that Capoeira Angola "goes beyond being a sport and is [more like] a philosophy of life, of wanting to be an angoleiro. (...) It is way of being [that is] completely different to any other lifestyle."³³ When I asked him about what being an angoleiro meant, Raphael explained that to him being an angoleiro is being wise and that "we cannot gain this [type of] wisdom from one day to another, but every mistake, [and] every success helps you to be wiser."³⁴ During my interview with Mestra Janja, she also mentioned the philosophical component of capoeira and stated that angoleiros "only have one possibility of defining capoeira, which is thinking about capoeira as a philosophy of life,"³⁵ because any other definition would limit capoeira.

Capoeira and Children's Development

Since the proliferation of children's programs during the 1980s and the creation of Brazil's Statute on the Child and Adolescent in 1990³⁶, there has been an increase in the number of

³⁰ Passos, A. J. 2003: 109. Own translation

³¹ Public Lecture, UFBA. Refer to Field Journal, page 33

³² The great circle or wheel of life. This phrase is a word play because it is using the word "roda" from "roda de capoeira" and relating this to real life.

³³ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

³⁴ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

³⁵ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

³⁶ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga 1999: 3

studies that examine the realities, needs and vulnerabilities of poor children, as well as the effects of different programs on their development and quality of life. The use of capoeira has been implemented by many organizations and programs as a strategy to foster the development and social integration of marginalized children, by promoting tolerance, respect, fraternity and non-violence, among other values. This section intends to give some background information about child poverty in Salvador da Bahia, in order to show the need for organizations that promote the empowerment and development of children. The other main objective of this section is to set the stage for the case study of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola, by reviewing studies that analyze the potential of capoeira to promote social inclusion and the integral development of children.

Child poverty in Salvador da Bahia: the need for development

In 1990, 53.5% of Brazilian adolescents and children lived in households that earned less than \$75 dollars per month.³⁷ Many of these children began to work at a young age and most of them either performed poorly in class, dropped-out of school, or were not enrolled in secondary education at all. Child poverty and poverty in general are more concentrated in the Northeast of Brazil, where “Nearly 40% of the urban poor households are found (...) and about one quarter of the children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition.”³⁸ Poverty affects children the most, because it makes them more vulnerable to violence, prostitution, criminality, drug trafficking, exploitation and abuse. Drugs are extremely present in impoverished communities, where “children as young as five are being recruited as *aviãozinhos* (messenger boys), the lowest rung in the hierarchy of drug factions.”³⁹ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga state that in the 1990s approximately 15,743 children and adolescents were working in the streets of Salvador da Bahia, while 468 children were actually living on the streets.⁴⁰ Rocio Castro explains that children living in poverty in Salvador do not have access to a good education, usually work on the streets, and are more vulnerable to malnutrition, exclusion and domestic violence. Audrey M. Ottier also states that children from underprivileged communities grow up in a marginal and harsh environment, where are not able to have a normal childhood and “lack the opportunities and resources to develop psychologically, educationally, socially and emotionally.”⁴¹ On the other

³⁷ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga 1999: 4

³⁸ Berndt 2009: 30

³⁹ Berndt 2009: 27

⁴⁰ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga 1999: 5

⁴¹ Ottier 2005: 92

side, children who live in poor communities usually come from dysfunctional families and develop many emotional problems, linked to domestic violence and lack of affection and attention. According to SOS Children's Villages International, more than 20% of children who are between 5 and 14 years old experience emotional problems in Bahia.⁴²

Rebecca Hegar states that children are the most oppressed minority, and that they can become twice as disempowered if they are members of another stigmatized group, which includes women and people from African descent. The problem of child poverty and exclusion is deeply rooted in issues of race and gender, as girls and afro-brazilian children are more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence; whether in the form of sexual violence in the case of girls, or in the form of police violence in the case of afro-brazilian children and adolescents. Castro explains that girls are constantly seen as sexual objects, while afro-brazilian children tend to be more vulnerable to social exclusion, poverty and violence. According to Castro, many of these girls who are victims of abuse and sexual violence, either seek protection by disguising themselves as boys, or opt for prostitution as a source of income.⁴³ These girls who are objects of sexual violence are usually very insecure and develop an extremely low self-esteem, because they are constantly deprecating themselves or being belittled by others. Audrey M. Ottier states that children from underprivileged communities are constantly exposed to violence, which is an even "stronger threat to girls, who are vulnerable to sexual assault and other physical abuse." This author also refers to the disadvantaged position of black girls in these communities by stating that "the position of black girls in poor neighborhoods (...) increases her likelihood to suffer as a result of patriarchal values and discrimination."⁴⁴ On the other side, family is also very important for a child's development, because it is the first social sphere in which children develop since they are born. Castro explains that a child's family is extremely significant for his or her future, because it can either be a source of possibility or a source of frustration. Children who grow up in poor dysfunctional families, where they are constantly exposed to violence and negligence, lack the necessary resources for their adequate development and thus, need a safe environment where their needs can be met and they can learn how to "be children".

Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga explain that the increase in street children in Brazil, led to the creation of multiple NGOs and children's programs during the 1980s. However, a great number of these organizations and initiatives focused solely on helping street children and

⁴² SOS Children's Villages International 2015

⁴³ Castro 2001: 104

⁴⁴ Ottier 2005: 92

keeping them off the streets, instead of supporting all children from impoverished communities and promoting their development. According to Brazil's Statute on the Child and the Adolescent, "all children and youth, by virtue of their stage in the human life cycle, need special protection, care and opportunities for growth, exploration and education"⁴⁵. This statute does not say that only street children need special care, but that all children should be protected and have access to more and better opportunities. Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga state that all children should have access to developmental supports, which refers "to community resources that offer young people safety; caring relationships; opportunities to develop skills, friendship and self-confidence; and activities and services that contribute to the cognitive, social, creative, cultural, vocational and emotional development of children and youth."⁴⁶ According to these authors, incorporating developmental supports into development programs can produce a positive shift, from interventions that focus on deficits, to approaches that highlight children's competencies and potential. Similarly, Marta Maurás states that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Brazil's Statute on the Child and the Adolescent, led to a radical change in terms of how children were viewed. Marta explains that after the enactment of the CRC, "girls and boys ceased to be regarded as objects of protection and became recognized as subjects of rights."⁴⁷ This shift from "protection" to "rights" is very important because it supports the claim that children should not only be protected but also supported in terms of ensuring that their rights are respected and that their needs are served. A child's development goes beyond a safe environment where they are protected from the "evils" of the street, and includes activities that can contribute to their social, moral, physical and mental growth. In these terms, Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga state that preventive approaches do not necessarily promote the integral development of children, because being "problem-free does not mean fully prepared."⁴⁸

Capoeira as a vehicle for development

Capoeira is an extremely dynamic activity that includes corporal, artistic, social and philosophical elements. This form of art has great potential to promote moral values, and to foster the social inclusion and development of underprivileged children and youth. During an interview conducted by the Ministry of External Relations of Brazil, Mestra Janja stated that

⁴⁵ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga 1999: 3

⁴⁶ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga 1999: 3

⁴⁷ Mauras 2011: 52

⁴⁸ Rizzini, Barker and Cassaniga 1999: 11

capoeira promotes heritage, as well as the values of respect and cooperation among others. She also explained that a good capoeirista has to be responsible, open, tolerant, friendly, and flexible within the larger context. Mestra Janja also referred to the character-building component of Capoeira Angola, stating that “being a capoeirista is something that brings together more than physical ability or musical talent, but also conduct that reflects the teachings and guidance of one’s group.”⁴⁹ This character-building element of Capoeira Angola is what allows capoeira to promote certain moral values and behaviors, while discouraging others. Capoeira groups have a very important role in terms of promoting moral values because they are “organized civil institutions that have an important influence on their members.”⁵⁰ Mestres are also very important, because they are opinion molders, leaders and role models, and therefore have a great impact on the lives, values and behaviors of their students. In terms of the values promoted by capoeira, Audrey M. Ottier, explains that “capoeira promotes camaraderie, respect for people’s differences, collective sharing of space and solidarity between people regardless of their gender, ethnicity, age and physical abilities.”⁵¹ According to Audrey, capoeira also promotes certain values and skills that can be used on a daily basis such as cooperation, responsibility, leadership, discipline and humility. Cooperation is one of the most important values in Capoeira Angola, because capoeiristas have to learn how to compete with their opponents instead of against them.⁵²

Capoeira engages students in a continuous learning process, through which they absorb practical lessons and apply them to their daily lives. According to Lauren Miller Griffith, capoeira can be interpreted as a type of problem-solving activity, because capoeiristas have to decide how to respond to their opponent by using the skills and lessons they have learned in class. This allows students to be active in their own learning process because they can choose what teachings to apply according to the situation. According to Lauren, capoeira encourages students to bend the rules as they “look for multiple ways to take on an adversary or solve a problem.”⁵³ Therefore, this form of art promotes self-expression instead of replication, because students are expected to assess the situation and decide what lessons to apply instead of simply reproducing the mestre’s movements. Audrey M. Ottier states that this process also promotes

⁴⁹ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 100

⁵⁰ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 121

⁵¹ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 74

⁵² Ottier, A. M. 2005: 146

⁵³ Griffith 2014: 3

intellectual development, because it “requires you to patiently analyze your opponent’s movements and strategies and develop your own strategies accordingly”⁵⁴, which promotes concentration, self-control and agility. According to Audrey, “when playing a game of capoeira, one has to be conscious of many things. One has to observe their opponent, analyze their movements, strategies and reactions (...). One has to be attentive, not only to their game, but to the rhythm of the music and the song lyrics, because songs convey powerful lessons.”⁵⁵ This process is extremely important because it also promotes emotional intelligence and healthy social interactions, as it teaches people to be patient and control their reactions, emotions and actions. Audrey explains that “it is about waiting for the right time to make the right movement,”⁵⁶ which is why capoeiristas have to be calm, concentrated, attentive and engaged throughout the game. On the other hand, Lauren explains that this process allows capoeiristas to learn from each other, which defies the idea that the teacher is the only person capable of teaching the students.

According to Jackie Shilcutt, capoeira allows the students to “take hold of the material they learn (...) [and apply it] beyond the class into their life scenarios.”⁵⁷ This notion of capoeira as a liberating form of education is extremely significant, because it emulates the teachings of Professor Paulo Freire, as it allows students to make the material their own and learn in-action. Ricardo de Souza also refers to the learning process of capoeira, by stating that it is a “system in which everybody learns”⁵⁸ from each other. According to Ricardo, instead of being like the formal educational system, capoeira is linked to culture and allows students to improvise as they sing, play instruments and practice capoeira. This cultural link is very important, because it allows capoeira to preserve Afro-brazilian culture and defy ideas about gender and racial discrimination. In relation to this, Audrey Ottier states that capoeira transmits local knowledge that the students can apply to their daily lives, which promotes the development of capoeiristas. According to Audrey “the types of knowledge transmitted through capoeira are necessary to deal with the challenges people face every day and fosters the self-development of players facilitating their ability to envision and achieve goals.”⁵⁹ In this way, capoeira teaches us to remain flexible

⁵⁴ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 85

⁵⁵ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 86

⁵⁶ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 87

⁵⁷ Shilcutt J. B. 2014: 23

⁵⁸ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 110

⁵⁹ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 86

and receptive when we undergo harsh situations, and to use these experiences to develop wisdom and spiritual and physical strength.

In terms of physical development, Shilcutt states that capoeira is very important as a form of exercise, because it promotes the emotional and physical wellbeing of capoeiristas. Audrey Ottier explains that capoeira is very physically demanding because capoeiristas must have great control over their bodies and movements, which involves strength, flexibility, speed and agility. According to Audrey, capoeira also builds flexibility and resistance through training, which promotes the physical development and wellbeing of capoeiristas. Audrey also explains that “capoeira is an important mechanism for developing motor skills, such as corporeal control, coordination (...), balance, improvisation, concentration, speed, timing and reaction to movements.”⁶⁰ It is important to note that capoeira does not only promote corporeal coordination, but also teaches capoeiristas to do multiple things at the same time, such as singing while playing capoeira, or singing and playing an instrument while watching a game. Lilia Benvenuti de Menezes states that capoeira demands a lot of coordination because it relies heavily on creativity instead of choreographed movements. Lilia also explains that capoeira demands agility, speed and quick thinking, because a capoeirista must be able to move quickly and respond according to what the situation requires, by attacking or dodging an opponent’s blows.⁶¹ According to Lilia, capoeira “demands intense physical effort”⁶² and can develop physical qualities such as; coordination, agility, balance, speed, endurance, strength and flexibility. In terms of endurance, Lilia states that capoeira builds endurance and creates technical skills through constant training. In terms of strength, capoeira involves a lot of movements that require one to leap, dodge, and jump, which throughout time build muscular strength. This author also explains that the practice of capoeira has multiple psychological benefits, which include the stimulation of the mind and an increase in self-esteem.

Burt and Butler studied youth aggression and the potential of capoeira as a form of therapy that could change the violent behaviors of disenfranchised and marginalized adolescents. These authors define disenfranchised and marginalized adolescents as “youth who (a) are ethnic minorities; (b) have low socioeconomic status; (c) receive minimal support and encouragement in schools, communities, and homes; and (d) have inadequate academic preparation.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 85

⁶¹ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 112

⁶² Ministry of External Relations 2008: 111

⁶³ Burt, and Butler 2011: 50

According to Burt and Butler, capoeira has specific characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of combat or martial arts, and allow it to change the aggressive behaviors of marginalized and disenfranchised adolescents. Burt and Butler explain that capoeira creates a safe environment that promotes teamwork, discipline, understanding of diversity, socialization, and respect. These values coupled with capoeira's nonphysical contact philosophy, give this form of art a lot of potential to change aggressive behaviors and to empower marginalized and disenfranchised adolescents. Burt and Butler also state that "capoeira is not about winning or losing"⁶⁴, but about reflecting on what went wrong and how to do it better in the future. This philosophy allows capoeira to be beneficial for marginalized and disenfranchised adolescents, because it promotes growth, self-efficacy and well-being, instead of anger and aggressive behaviors. Burt and Butler also recognize the potential of capoeira to promote social inclusion by fostering close relationships between the members of the group, which creates a sort of extended-family dynamic. According to Burt and Butler, capoeira encourages socialization and positive reinforcement, which is extremely important for marginalized and disenfranchised adolescents, because they can "gain behavioral and social benefits from knowing that someone cares and is concerned for their well-being."⁶⁵ Mestra Janja also refers to the potential of capoeira as a vehicle for inclusion during her interview with the Ministry of External Relations of Brazil, where she explains that "capoeira has played an important role in bonding together cultural communities, especially among children and youngsters living on the outskirts of the urban sectors."⁶⁶ In relation to this community-building component, Audrey M. Ottier states that capoeira groups develop a sense of community because they represent "communal spaces where members share a certain bond- they train together, share ideas, and often participate in activities outside of the context of capoeira."⁶⁷ Fabio Renato Martins Nunes is another author who studies the contribution of capoeira to the socialization and development of children and adolescents. According to Nunes, capoeira promotes mutual respect, cooperation, and friendly relations between children and adolescents, because it discourages aggressive behaviors and teaches students to appreciate their peers. According to Fabio, capoeira not only discourages aggressive behaviors but also promotes emotional intelligence, because the children learn to control their emotions and are able to understand the value of winning and losing.

⁶⁴ Burt, and Butler 2011: 51

⁶⁵ Burt, and Butler 2011: 53

⁶⁶ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 100

⁶⁷ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 73

The Ministry of External Relations of Brazil developed a book that explores the potential of capoeira as a vehicle for social inclusion, equality and citizenship, as well as other topics related to the history, values and benefits of capoeira. According to the authors, the Mestre is a very important figure in capoeira, because he acts like a role model and a form of guidance. The Mestre not only teaches his students about the basic elements of capoeira, but also exemplifies the standards, values and principles that should “guide their actions and influence [their] learning and behavior.”⁶⁸ The relationship between the Mestre and the students is also very important, because “it goes beyond the classroom and extends into many aspects of the student’s own life.”⁶⁹ The authors explain that a good mestre must care for his students and be aware of their school, family and community situations, which also includes lending emotional and intellectual support whenever necessary. According to the authors, “A great mestre does not merely educate for the capoeira circle, but rather, for life in its many dimensions.”⁷⁰ In terms of social inclusion, the authors state that capoeira “ought to daily foster reflection and value-affirming behavior, be based on affection and establishing healthy and constructive relationships.”⁷¹ When talking about children from dysfunctional families and conflict-ridden family structures, the authors state that capoeira can play a decisive role in these environments, by including these children and “providing a space to rebuild their lives.”⁷² According to the authors, when these children get to know another environment where there is discipline, dialogue, respect, understanding and love, their sense of worth and self-esteem reawaken, which improves their behavior and social skills as well.

Programs, Initiatives and Organizations

In the last 3 decades, a large number of projects that incorporate capoeira have been created in Brazil as a way of promoting community based development.⁷³ According to Pedro Abib, a great part of the non-formal education projects that are being developed in underprivileged communities in Brazil, incorporate capoeira as an educational activity. Abib explains that these programs that involve capoeira and other similar educational activities, have

⁶⁸ Ministry of External Relations 2008:116

⁶⁹ Ministry of External Relations 2008:116

⁷⁰ Ministry of External Relations 2008:116

⁷¹ Ministry of External Relations 2008:117

⁷² Ministry of External Relations 2008:120

⁷³ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 90

obtained excellent results because they work with values such as respect, self-esteem, solidarity and self-improvement.⁷⁴ According to the author, there is also a great sense of community in Capoeira Angola, which promotes values of solidarity, cooperation and fraternity and allows for the social inclusion of marginalized children and adolescents.⁷⁵ Grupo de Capoeira Angola de Pelourinho (GCAP) is an extremely important organization that has developed many of these types of projects in order to help underprivileged children and adolescents. The community based educational projects developed by GCAP “are based on the dissemination of historical, political and cultural knowledge entrenched in capoeira.”⁷⁶ Their activities include; capoeira classes and trainings, workshops on musicality and movement, and cultural tours among other activities. The focus of this organization is to develop the self-confidence, creativity, emotional well-being, and self-expression of disadvantaged children and adolescents.

Rita de Cácia Oenning da Silva analyzes the role of dance and music in lowering the involvement of children with drug trafficking in Recife and Olinda. According to Rita, forms of art and dance such as capoeira, “make it possible for children and teenagers from favelas (...) to distance themselves from the violent life of drug trafficking.”⁷⁷ This author states that dance groups can give children another option, and create a space in which kids and adolescents can develop and gain power to fight against drug abuse and drug trafficking. In relation to this topic, Rita explains that one of the people from the community confessed that he had many opportunities to enter the world of drug trafficking, but he did not take them because he got involved in capoeira, “which left him no time for drugs.”⁷⁸ Rita also describes the work of Pé no Chão, a particular NGO that uses capoeira and other forms of music and dance to educate the community and to combat the involvement of children in drug trafficking. Organizations like Pé no Chão, fulfill very important roles in Recife and Olinda because they keep the children “out of the drug wars and alive”⁷⁹, and promote a social movement that fights against drug trafficking, violence and injustice. These types of programs are extremely important because they do not only focus on keeping the children out of trouble, but also create safe spaces where children can engage in activities that will contribute to their adequate development, such as capoeira.

⁷⁴ Abib, P. 2005: 206. Own translation

⁷⁵ Abib, P. 2005: 210. Own translation

⁷⁶ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 92

⁷⁷ Oenning, R. 2006: 83

⁷⁸ Oenning, R. 2006: 87

⁷⁹ Oenning, R. 2006: 89

Audrey M. Ottier develops three cases studies based on different projects that incorporate capoeira as a source of empowerment, and as a vehicle for community development in various impoverished neighborhoods of Salvador da Bahia. After studying and analyzing the efforts of these organizations, Audrey concludes that capoeira is “a powerful tool for popular education, community based development and local empowerment.”⁸⁰ One of the projects studied by Audrey is called Nena Dengue Kilondonkilo and is located in the underprivileged community of Massaranduba in Salvador da Bahia. This project uses capoeira as a vehicle for popular education and socialization, and intends to foster a political and critical consciousness amidst an environment plagued with prostitution, violence, criminality and drug abuse.⁸¹ Nena Dengue Kilondonkilo implements capoeira as a way of luring the children away from activities like prostitution, criminality and drug abuse, by building up their social consciousness, self-esteem, and desire for education. This project intends to keep the children out of trouble by educating them and improving their quality of life, and their rationale is that “if you seek an education and conscientization, you will have a better quality of life.”⁸² Audrey also studied a project called Capoeirê, that works in different disadvantaged communities of Salvador in order to provide a socio-education to poor children and adolescents, and prevent them from “falling prey to the streets.”⁸³ This program does not only teach capoeira, but it also promotes Afro-Brazilian culture and educates students in different aspects of life; including drug use, family, sexual education, ethnicity, citizenship and the importance of education. Capoeirê also provides resources and opportunities for the students to professionalize in capoeira if they choose to follow this path. The third project studied by Audrey is called Projeto Social Engenho da Manhã, and it implements capoeira as a way of reaching out to young people and offering them a popular education. This project is located in the underprivileged neighborhood of Federação in Salvador da Bahia, and intends to educate young people in order to keep them out of trouble and “on a healthy path to self-development.”⁸⁴ Projeto Social Engenho da Manhã implements capoeira as an educational tool, because they believe that capoeira “provides cultural knowledge about Afro-Brazilian culture and the situation of black people in society, which is directly linked to poorer

⁸⁰ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 152

⁸¹ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 99

⁸² Ottier, A. M. 2005: 99

⁸³ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 97

⁸⁴ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 101

communities principally inhabited by afro descendents,” such as Federação.⁸⁵ This project also intends to use capoeira as a way of reducing emotional and physical violence among the community, because they believe that capoeira can combat violence by teaching discipline, self-control, and respect, while developing self-esteem and confidence. According to Audrey, these three projects are extremely important because they “help youth envision change, both in their own lives and in their communities, and equip them with capacities to take steps towards such change.”⁸⁶ These projects are also very important for the object of this study, because they all use capoeira as a way of promoting “self-esteem, self-confidence, self-valorization, and the valorization of Afro-Brazilian culture and history,”⁸⁷ as well as the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children and adolescents. The focus of these projects on Afro-Brazilian culture and history is also very important, because its has the capacity to empower afro descendents and help them overcome “inferiority complexes that are a result of social stigmas”⁸⁸ by promoting a process of valorization of Black culture, heritage and history.

Case Study: Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola

I spent the past three weeks doing research in Salvador da Bahia and studying Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola, an organization that seeks to defend the rights of children and adolescents, fight against racial and gender discrimination, preserve afro-brazilian culture, and empower girls, children and women in the community of Alto da Sereia. My investigation seeks to understand how Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira de Angola uses capoeira as a way of empowering and promoting the full development of the children from the community. Throughout the course of this research period I studied the relationship between capoeira and the empowerment and development of children from Alto da Sereia by participating in multiple capoeira classes and activities, and conducting interviews with some of the members of Grupo Nzinga. The first portion of this chapter intends to set the stage by describing the mission, values and objectives of Grupo Nzinga, as well as briefly explaining their work in Alto da Sereia. The second section of this case study seeks to give some background information about Alto da Sereia, including the needs, prospects and vulnerabilities of the community. This section also emphasizes the realities

⁸⁵ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 100

⁸⁶ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 152

⁸⁷ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 102

⁸⁸ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 114

of the children who live in the community, as well as their needs and vulnerabilities. The third section of this chapter studies how Grupo Nzinga uses capoeira as a political tool in order to defend the rights of children and adolescents, fight against racial and gender discrimination and preserve Afro-Brazilian culture. The fourth portion of this case study analyzes the relationship between Capoeira Angola and the physical, mental, social and creative development of children from Alto da Sereia. This particular section seeks to explore how Grupo Nzinga promotes the full development of children by implementing Capoeira Angola as an educational tool. The fifth portion of this chapter studies the potential of Grupo Nzinga's capoeira pedagogy as a vehicle for the empowerment of children, and explores the role of different activities as sources of empowerment. Lastly, the sixth section of this case study explores the capacity of Grupo Nzinga of creating different opportunities for the children, as well as the potential of Capoeira Angola as an avenue to new possibilities. This final section is very important because it goes beyond the notions of empowerment and development, and explores how Grupo Nzinga shows the children a different world and gives them access to new possibilities and realities. This research paper intends to explore the potential of Capoeira Angola as an educational tool, as a door to new possibilities, as vehicle for development and as a source of empowerment, by analyzing the work of Grupo Nzinga at Alto da Sereia.

Mission, Background and Values of Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola

Grupo Nzinga was founded in São Paulo in 1995 by Rosângela Araujo, now known as Mestre Janja. Throughout the 90s, Paula and Paulo Barreto, also known as Mestre Paulinha and Mestre Poloca, joined Mestre Janja's efforts as co-founders of the group. Today, Grupo Nzinga has headquarters in Salvador da Bahia, São Paulo and Brasília, as well as in Maputo, Mexico City and Marburg. Grupo Nzinga was established in Alto da Sereia in 2005, with the intention of interacting with the community and using Capoeira Angola as an educational tool for the children of Alto da Sereia.⁸⁹ This organization is located in the third floor of a building that is right at the base of the community, so many children who live in Alto da Sereia participate in the activities of Grupo Nzinga. When Grupo Nzinga arrived at Alto da Sereia, they joined efforts with the local school to reach the children from the community and encourage them to participate in the capoeira classes.⁹⁰ During an informal interview, Mestre Janja told me that Rodrigo and Leonardo were the first children to participate in Grupo Nzinga at Alto da Sereia.

⁸⁹ Machado, S. A. 2012: 127. Own translation

⁹⁰ Machado, S. A. 2012: 127. Own translation

She explained that the two brothers saw Mestre Poloca decorating the room where Grupo Nzinga would be established, and they asked him what he was doing. After they learned about Grupo Nzinga and the free classes of capoeira, they began to participate in the activities of the organization and also told other children from the community about the new capoeira group. With time, more and more children showed up and began learning Capoeira Angola with Grupo Nzinga and participating in their activities. The first generation of children that participated in Grupo Nzinga includes Leonardo, Rodrigo, Raphael, Marquinho and Bruna, among others.⁹¹ During another informal interview, Mestre Poloca told me that in the 10 years that Grupo Nzinga has been established in Alto da Sereia, they have had three generations of children and adolescents. According to Mestre Poloca, “each of those generations is remarkable and stays in the memory of the people that circulate through the group, every [generation] has its [own] features [and] peculiarities.”⁹² During the same conversation, Mestre Poloca also explained that the children usually start playing capoeira very young, but then leave Grupo Nzinga after a few years due to different reasons. He illustrated this by saying that from the first generation of children, Bruna was the only one who never left Grupo Nzinga, because Leonardo, Marquinho and Raphael all drifted away for a few years during their adolescence.⁹³ However, Mestre Poloca also stated that although many children move away from Grupo Nzinga at one point or another, when they leave “they go full of information, full of knowledge, of understanding. (...) [They learn] about sexuality, about sexually transmitted diseases, about the history of Africa, about the history of black men, about slavery, [etc.]”⁹⁴ Therefore, although many children might not stay in Grupo Nzinga, they are still positively influenced by the things they learned at the organization and the activities they participated in before they left.

In terms of the funding of Grupo Nzinga, during this same informal interview Mestre Poloca said; “we do not get [monetary] assistance from anyone, so everything that we do here is by [our] own resources, by [our] own efforts.”⁹⁵ According to Mestre Poloca, this raises some difficulties because they would like to promote other activities such as music lessons or academic reinforcement classes, but they do not have the resources to do so. During my interview with Mestra Janja we talked about the mission and objectives of Grupo Nzinga, as well

⁹¹ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 14, 2015.

⁹² Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

⁹³ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

⁹⁴ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

⁹⁵ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

as issues of funding and resources. Mestra Janja explained that many capoeira groups have networks, meaning that they establish the general headquarters in Brazil and then have many capoeira groups in other countries. According to Janja, it is very common for those international capoeira groups to send money every month to the Mestres in Brazil, who live from the money they receive from the different capoeira groups.⁹⁶ Mestra Janja explained that Grupo Nzinga is very different, because they do not receive their main income from capoeira groups and do not depend on monthly fees like other capoeira organizations. According to Janja, this makes a big difference because it allows them to be autonomous and self-sustainable and to impart the capoeira classes in an affectionate and loving way.⁹⁷ In terms of the relationship between Grupo Nzinga and their international headquarters in Mexico, Moçambique and Germany, Janja mentioned that Grupo Nzinga promotes cooperation and partnership among all the different groups, and stated that they all work under the same mission; to “protect the rights of children and adolescents in a way that creates a platform that fights against racism, promotes human diversity, and protects the human rights of girls and women.”⁹⁸

The foundation of Grupo Nzinga is their capoeira pedagogy and their main mission is to form capoeiristas. According to Mestra Janja, Grupo Nzinga is unique because instead of seeing children as a social project, they treat them like any other member of the group and promote a more egalitarian relationship between the teachers, the adults and the children. Contrary to other programs and organizations, Grupo Nzinga does not seek to take the children off the streets, but to occupy the streets and transform them into a musical and cultural hub.⁹⁹ In relation to this, during our interview Barba stated that the organization is somewhat successful in addressing the needs of the children because they “open the doors and leave them open”¹⁰⁰, so that any kid who is interested in capoeira and wants to participate can join. During my interview with Mestra Janja, she stated that Grupo Nzinga uses capoeira as a political practice; as a way of protecting the rights of children and adolescents, and fighting against sexism and racism.¹⁰¹ Janja explained that Grupo Nzinga fulfills this mission by “valuing the traditions of Capoeira Angola, the

⁹⁶ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

⁹⁷ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

⁹⁸ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

⁹⁹ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 14, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Lopes, A. Personal interview, May 13, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Araujo, Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

teachings of Mestre Pastinha, (...) and breaking with the vertical structures”¹⁰² present in society. When I talked to Mestre Poloca about the mission of Grupo Nzinga and his role in the organization, he stated that his major mission and challenge is to ensure that the children stay with Grupo Nzinga as long as possible, to “teach them everything he deems important, [to] teach them values, [and to] share the value of ideas and the joy of being together with them.”¹⁰³ Mestre Poloca also explained that Grupo Nzinga has the task of teaching the children to value themselves and to appreciate one another, which is a doable but very complex and difficult social construction. According to Mestre Poloca, this task is even harder to fulfill when



Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola at Alto da Sereia
Source: Mariana Cardona (research project, 2015)

the children come from dysfunctional families or conflict-ridden family structures, because they have little to no understanding of basic rules and moral values such as respect and cooperation for example. Poloca stated that these children usually learn values at home that are contrary to those Grupo Nzinga promotes, so the group has to de-construct these negative values and instill positive moral values by teaching them basic rules such as “when someone is talking you have to listen, when you want to talk you have to raise your finger, etc.”¹⁰⁴ In this way, Grupo Nzinga has the mission of teaching the children about some basic moral values and rules that they should learn at home, such as not being violent, listening to others, not saying bad words, speaking properly, etc.

In terms of the values promoted by Grupo Nzinga, Mestra Janja stated that they are constantly sharing their moral values with the children and discussing issues that involve discrimination, violence, abuse, etc. with them. As a consequence, Janja explained that Grupo

¹⁰² Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹⁰³ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

Nzinga has assumed the position of a vigilante within the community, because the people know about their mission, their values, the things they reject and what they stand for, and therefore contact them when something happens.¹⁰⁵ Grupo Nzinga is also very involved with the families of the children, because whenever they see that one of the girls is getting involved with prostitution or that one of the boys is engaged in drug trafficking, the first thing they do is to contact their families and try to lure the children away from these activities.

According to Janja, the biggest impact of Grupo Nzinga can be seen in terms of the values they promote, which “are many times contradictory to what [the children] learn inside their own homes.”¹⁰⁶ In relation to the types of behaviors they reject, Mestra Janja stated that Grupo Nzinga does not tolerate homophobia, discrimination against foreigners, nor any other form of discrimination. In addition to sharing these moral values with the children, Grupo Nzinga also recognizes and believes “that the children are intelligent and sensible enough to understand and confront when someone is teaching them to discriminate.”¹⁰⁷ This is extremely important because the children are exposed to a lot of discrimination, violence



Main stairway at the entrance of Alto da Sereia
Source: Mariana Cardona (research project, 2015)

and anti-values everyday in the streets, in their schools and even in their homes, and they must know how to face these situations.

¹⁰⁵ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

“I play Capoeira at Alto da Sereia”

The community of Alto da Sereia is located in Rio Vermelho, a very active, touristic, bohemian and urbanized neighborhood of Salvador da Bahia. Sara Machado explains that before the process of urbanization, Alto da Sereia “was a community where many fishermen lived and was recognized as one of the quilombos urbanos that exist in Salvador.”¹⁰⁸ Today, the community is somewhat like a series of alleyways, narrow corridors and small houses that were built up a “morro” or small hill. There is one main “escadaria” or stairway that goes up the morro, and there are many little and narrow streets that start on the sides of this long staircase and create many alleyways or “becos”, where there are many small houses located very close to each other. This main stairway is located right by Grupo Nzinga and there are houses to both sides of this staircase as well as a local school. The construction looks pretty unplanned and there is no apparent organization in terms of how and where the houses were built. As I walked around Alto da Sereia one day I noticed a lot of diversity within the community, because on one side I saw extremely small and poorly built houses but on the other I saw very colorful two-story homes.¹⁰⁹ I also noticed that usually more than one family lives in one house, and there was also a lot of difference in terms of the constructions because some houses definitely looked nicer than others. There is also a long staircase that leads directly to the sea on one of the ends of Alto da Sereia, which gives the community a privileged view of the ocean. After I walked around the community I noticed that although the houses are small and the construction looks disorganized and unplanned, the community definitely has its charm. Due to the way in which Alto da Sereia was constructed, the community depends on climbing stairs, which according to Mestra Janja created a stratification within the community. Janja explained that “the closer you live to the asphalt, the better your status is because the dependence you have on other people is lower.”¹¹⁰ Mestra Janja explained that it is very common for people to pay young boys and adolescents to carry their things to their houses up in the morro, hence the idea of dependency. In relation to this, Janja stated that the inhabitants of “Korea”, a narrow street that is located at the base of Alto da Sereia, live in very small houses and precarious conditions, but have an advantage in relation to the people who live up in the morro because they live closer to the asphalt and do not have to go up

¹⁰⁸ Machado, S. A. 2012: 117. Own translation

¹⁰⁹ Refer to field journal, page 18

¹¹⁰ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

the escadaria to get to their homes.¹¹¹ Mestra Janja also explained that Alto da Sereia “is a community that is much more threatened because it is not [located] in the periphery of the city. (...) On the contrary, it is [situated] in an area that is very valorized in a housing point of view and in a touristic point of view.”¹¹² Alto da Sereia is situated in a morro that is right by the beach, and the main entrance to the community is located in an important avenue called Avenida Oceanica, so the community is surrounded by beaches, restaurants, tall buildings, nice apartments and offices.

I n t e r m s o f t h e vulnerabilities of the community, Alto da Sereia faces some of the same problems as other underprivileged neighborhoods and communities, such as violence, criminality, teenage pregnancies, prostitution and drug trafficking. Mestra Janja explained that Alto da Sereia “is very close to an area of hotels (...) and there is sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, and



Alto da Sereia
Source: Mariana Cardona (research project, 2015)

there are people inside the community that arrange for those contraventions.”¹¹³ Janja explained that there is a plaza right next to the community, where there is prostitution and drug trafficking because it “is an area that has many hostels [and] many students”¹¹⁴, as well as tourists. So, when they see that one of the girls or boys from the community are going down to that space during the night, it is because they are probably involved with prostitution or drugs, respectively. Mestre Poloca mentioned this as well and stated that there have been “cases of young people who abandoned capoeira because they got pregnant”¹¹⁵, as well as adolescents from Grupo Nzinga who got involved in drug trafficking and prostitution. In terms of teenage pregnancies, Janja also

¹¹¹ Refer to field journal, page 12

¹¹² Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹¹³ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹¹⁴ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹¹⁵ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

mentioned that there have been a couple of girls from Grupo Nzinga who got pregnant when they were around 14 or 15 years old. In relation to this topic, Janja explained that teenage pregnancy is a way of accessing a better status within the community because “when you live in a very poor community and you are a woman who does not have children, then you are [like] any [other] woman, but when you have a kid you stop being [like] any [other] woman and you turn into a family woman.”¹¹⁶ According to Janja, this change in status is extremely significant for many of the girls from the community, because it represents the possibility of having their own family environment. In relation to drug trafficking, Janja explained that although Alto da Sereia was once controlled by a drug lord, after he died the community refused to get involved with drugs again and they do not have any major problems with drug trafficking today. She also stated that although there are some cases of young people who get involved with drug trafficking, it is not a major issue that sticks out like in other communities.¹¹⁷ When I talked to Raphael about the impact of Grupo Nzinga in his life, he said that capoeira moved him away from many wrong and risky situations. Raphael explained that in Alto da Sereia and Vila Matos, young people have the tendency of getting involved in criminality “because it is an influence that is very close to us, we sometimes see it happen by our side, and more and more young people are entering that world.”¹¹⁸ Vila Matos is a street that is about a block away from the entrance of Alto da Sereia and technically is part of the community because it is sort of the commercial sector of Alto da Sereia.

Violence is one of the most pressing issues that affects children from Alto da Sereia, and this problem includes physical, verbal and emotional violence. During the course of my research, I watched a documentary about Grupo Nzinga called “Eu jogo capoeira no Alto da Sereia”, or I play capoeira in Alto da Sereia. This documentary incorporates an interview in which three children are asked about the main problems of the community. While one kid states that the neighborhood is peaceful and that they do not really see the violence, the other two children say that there is definitely violence and that the neighborhood is not peaceful. In the end the three kids agree that there is a lot of verbal violence, shouting and fights.¹¹⁹ When I asked Barba about the main problems of Alto da Sereia, he said that the children “are exposed to a lot of violence

¹¹⁶ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹¹⁷ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹¹⁸ Souza, R. Personal Interview. May 15, 2015.

¹¹⁹ Eu jogo capoeira no Alto da Sereia 2013.

here”¹²⁰, and argued that drug trafficking is an issue that usually affects older teenager boys and girls more than children. During my interview with Mestra Janja we talked about this exposure to violence and she gave me an example that involves one of the children from the community. Janja explained that there is a little boy who occasionally goes to Grupo Nzinga who is exposed to violence on a daily basis because his mother’s partner beats her. Mestra Janja stated that when the kid plays capoeira, his way of playing is very aggressive and serious and he is always trying to strike his opponent.¹²¹ In relation to this particular situation, Janja explained that Grupo Nzinga tries to break down that notion of violence by playing with the boy and causing him to be touched by love and affection. In addition to the issue of violence, the children from the community are forced to grow up very fast and many of them come from dysfunctional families and have to assume important responsibilities from a young age. When I talked to Celeste, one of Grupo Nzinga’s adult members, about the community she explained that some of the children do not live with their fathers and that many of them spend a lot of time on their own as well. She also said that many of the children are raised by their grandmothers and that in various occasions they live with their cousins and parts of their extended family in the same house.¹²² Mestre Poloca also mentioned that within Grupo Nzinga, “Bruna is the only kid who has a normal family structure (...) [and] a well defined home.”¹²³ In relation to this, Mestre Poloca stated that most kids from Alto da Sereia come from very strange or irregular family structures where their fathers live with other women or their mothers live with other men for example. Poloca also argued that children from underprivileged communities are usually forced to grow up faster because they begin assuming great responsibilities from a young age, such as taking care of their younger siblings or staying at home alone. Therefore, Poloca stated that “the childhood of a kid from a community is shorter than the one of a kid [who lives in] a building”¹²⁴, because children from impoverished communities have to assume important responsibilities at a younger age than other children who are not poor.

In terms of the most pressing needs of Alto da Sereia, Barba and Janja mentioned entertainment or leisure options, quality education and a health center. According to Barba, the children from the community have certain needs but these are not extreme because they do not

¹²⁰ Lopes, A. Personal interview, May 13, 2015.

¹²¹ Araujo, R. Personal interview, May 17, 2015.

¹²² Mintzias, C. Personal interview, May 8, 2015.

¹²³ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

¹²⁴ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

suffer from famish or food deprivation for example. However, the community lacks options of entertainment or leisure, such as “having access to music, having access to art, [and] having access to movies.”¹²⁵ Barba explained that even though the children live right next to the beach, the community lacks other new, fun and entertaining activities because with time, the beach becomes somewhat like an extension of their homes and something they are used to. Janja mentioned that “the needs and weaknesses of Alto da Sereia are the same as any poor community that does not have the government's support for the necessary equipment, [including a] quality school [and a] health clinic.”¹²⁶ Mestra Janja explained that there is only one school in the community and it has no recreational area whatsoever, so the children spent “the entire morning sitting in a chair inside the classroom, because [they] do not have space for playing, for running, for having fun, [the school] does not have any of that.”¹²⁷ In relation to this topic, during one of the capoeira classes I witnessed a conversation between Ricardo and João Manuel, two members of Grupo Nzinga. They were talking about a particular book, and Ricardo asked João Manuel, a 9 year old boy from Alto da Sereia, why he did not look for the book in the library of his school. João Manuel replied by saying that his school does not have a library.¹²⁸ It is important to note that Ricardo is an adult member of Grupo Nzinga and he does not live in Alto da Sereia, while João Manuel is a young boy who lives in the community and attends the local school. This particular situation portrays the lack of resources of Alto da Sereia and well as the need for a quality school and education. In terms of the most pressing needs of the community, Mestra Janja mentioned that the children need first and for most “space to grow in a decent way.”¹²⁹ Janja explained that many of these children do not have a space of their own at home and that most of them “probably sleep on the floor, on a mattress that is later folded and put under the bed or on top of the wardrobe.”¹³⁰ According to Janja, this situation is extremely pressing because it does not allow for the children to stay at home in silence and study in their room for example. However, although Alto da Sereia faces many needs, problems and vulnerabilities, the community does have some good things which include a sense of solidarity and cooperation. Raphael lives in Vila Matos, which is technically not inside Alto da Sereia but ends up being a

¹²⁵ Lopes, A. Personal interview, May 13, 2015.

¹²⁶ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

¹²⁷ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

¹²⁸ Refer to field journal, page 29

¹²⁹ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

¹³⁰ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

part of the community anyways. When I asked him about what he liked most about Alto da Sereia, Raphael said that the people are very receptive and that “there is a lot of love and it is more like a community [where] everyone tries to help one another.”¹³¹ Janja mentioned this notion of solidarity and cooperation as well, and she stated that Alto da Sereia is a community where the people face the same difficulties in a more organic way.¹³²

Race, Gender and Children’s Rights

One of the main objectives of Grupo Nzinga is to use capoeira in a political way in order to protect the rights of children and adolescents, preserve and promote Afro-Brazilian culture, and fight against sexism and racism. This section seeks to explore the ways in which Grupo Nzinga uses capoeira as well as other activities in order to fulfill this mission. According to Audrey Ottier, capoeira is both educational and political because “it promotes education and activism surrounding issues of racism, discrimination, tradition, (...) gender, violence, and at-risk youth.”¹³³ In relation to gender, during an interview with the Ministry of External Relations of Brazil, Mestra Janja stated that “capoeira is no longer specifically for men- assuming it ever was.”¹³⁴ This is also illustrated by the fact that there are many capoeira organizations led and even founded by women such as Grupo Nzinga, as well as some capoeira groups where women form the majority. However, capoeira must still overcome the challenge of embracing diversity and giving equal treatment to women, because in certain capoeira groups women still undergo actual and symbolic forms of oppression and violence. According to Mestra Janja, although there have been advances towards gender equality within capoeira, the playing field is not leveled nor representative of women, specially “when we look at the small number of women promoted by the graduation system.”¹³⁵ She also explains that there are some “traditional” capoeira groups that continue oppressing women and denying them equal treatment by not allowing them to be lead singers or play the conga drums in some rodas de capoeira. During an informal conversation, I asked Janja whether she thought that the fact that Grupo Nzinga was founded and led by a woman made a difference, to which she responded by saying that she hoped it made a great difference.

¹³¹ Souza, R. Personal Interview. May 15, 2015.

¹³² Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

¹³³ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 74

¹³⁴ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 99

¹³⁵ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 99

In the context of Grupo Nzinga's fight against sexism, during our interview Janja stated that one of their main objectives is to empower women and fight for equal treatment. In this sense, she explained that Grupo Nzinga is very different to other capoeira groups because women can do things that they are not allowed to do in other groups, such as lead songs and play the berimbau in a roda de capoeira.¹³⁶ During a formal interview, I asked Janja about the ways in which Grupo Nzinga empowers women through capoeira. She explained that Grupo Nzinga tries to empower women everyday by "their attention so that they do not reproduce the patters (...) that have been established by our society (...), [and state that] the boys assemble the berimbaus while the girls sweep the floor, or that the girls play agogô, reco-reco and pandeiro but do not play the berimbau"¹³⁷, for example. Mestra Janja stated that Grupo Nzinga does not accept nor allow these sexist patters, because they believe that everyone has to play berimbau just like everyone has to sweep and clean the floor. According to Janja, this construction of equity expands and makes an impact outside of the group, as many women who are not members of Grupo Nzinga want to participate in the activities of the group because they know that at Grupo Nzinga they will be able to do things that they are not allowed to do in their own groups, such as lead a song or play the berimbau. Janja explained that Grupo Nzinga stimulates and promotes these activities, specially when it comes to playing the berimbau because this instrument is "the symbol of power within capoeira."¹³⁸ When I talked to Celeste about Grupo Nzinga's fight against sexism, she told me that the Mestres promote equality between men and women, and between children and adults. According to Celeste, there is no distinction between men and women, and children and adults in Grupo Nzinga because they all practice capoeira together as a group instead of being separated by age and gender like in other capoeira organizations.¹³⁹ This is extremely important in terms of the empowerment of girls and women, because instead of teaching them that they cannot play against boys because they are "more fragile" or "weaker", Grupo Nzinga shows women and girls that they are equally capable and valuable as boys. Celeste also mentioned that "machista"¹⁴⁰ comments are not allowed, encouraged nor tolerated in

¹³⁶ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 14, 2015.

¹³⁷ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

¹³⁸ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

¹³⁹ Mintzias, C. Personal interview. May 8, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Sexist and misogynist. A person, action or comment that belittles, deprecates and discriminates against women.

Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola, and she affirmed that he feels extremely protected at Grupo Nzinga.¹⁴¹

During my three weeks of research at Grupo Nzinga I was able to participate in three rodas the capoeira and listen to some of the lyrics of the capoeira songs that they played. Throughout those rodas de capoeira I noticed that there were a couple of songs that evoked inclusion and the participation of both men and women in capoeira. One of the songs I was able to understand clearly talked about Capoeira Angola and said; “tem homem e tem mulher.”¹⁴² When I asked Janja about this particular song, she said that it originally went “Sou homem, não sou mulher”¹⁴³, but Grupo Nzinga changed the chorus to “tem homem e tem mulher” in order to be more inclusive and fight against sexism and the oppression of women.¹⁴⁴ I thought this was extremely empowering for girls and women, because it stated their right to participate in this form of art and conveyed a notion of gender equality within capoeira. By using these particular lyrics, Grupo Nzinga is not only promoting the participation of women in capoeira, but also actively empowering women and fighting against sexism by changing the lyrics of the song in order for it to be more inclusive and less machista. On the other side, I believe that what children are exposed to is extremely significant for their development, so if they are constantly listening to songs that talk about women’s right to participate in capoeira they will probably develop the notion that women should participate in this form of art.

In relation to race, Audrey Ottier states that “the process of learning capoeira is infused with the conscientization and valorization of Afro-Brazilian culture and history, as it offers an alternative to the hegemonic vision of blacks, black history and black culture.”¹⁴⁵ Grupo Nzinga participates in this process by protecting, preserving and promoting Afro-Brazilian culture, history and heritage through capoeira as well as other activities. During my three weeks of research at Grupo Nzinga, I noticed that this promotion and valorization of Afro-Brazilian culture was even present in the decorations of the room where we practiced capoeira. Inside this room there are many pictures that are somehow related to African culture and heritage, including a map of Africa. According to Mestre Janja, they used to have that same map of Africa painted on the floor of the room, and every time one of the Mestres travelled to an African country they

¹⁴¹Mintzias, C. Personal interview. May 8, 2015.

¹⁴² [Capoeira] has men and it has women

¹⁴³ I am [a] man, I am not [a] woman

¹⁴⁴ Refer to field journal, page 14

¹⁴⁵ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 77

would highlight that specific country and dedicate a portion of the class to talk about its culture, history, etc.¹⁴⁶ As I participated in the rodas de capoeira, I was also able to hear the lyrics of some of the capoeira songs that they were playing. The great majority of the songs were related in some way to African culture and many of them even incorporated lyrics in Yoruba, which is an African language. Other songs were in Portuguese and integrated African culture in some other ways, by mentioning Catholic saints and different Orixás, or by referring to African countries for example.¹⁴⁷ I was able to understand the chorus of one particular song that went; “Eu venho de Angola, eu venho de Angola”¹⁴⁸. During my last roda de capoeira I also noticed that a couple of the capoeira songs talked about African culture and countries.¹⁴⁹ One of them went; “Quando eu cheguei de Aruanda, trouxe o meu berimbau dentro da minha capanga”¹⁵⁰, and the other said “Tudo é diferente na Angola.”¹⁵¹ During my interview with Mestre Janja, she stated that the children like the songs in African language because they are different and new to them. She also mentioned that not all the songs are religious and that many of some of them talk about African culture and historical events such as the independence of Mozambique and South Africa. Janja explained that these songs gain a notion of spirituality because they reconnect us to a common past and are linked to a project that seeks the improvement of society.¹⁵²

In terms of the role of Grupo Nzinga in the preservation of Afro-Brazilian culture, Raphael stated that the group tries to rescue their African origins through Capoeira Angola.¹⁵³ In relation to this same topic, Barba stated that Grupo Nzinga is related to religiosity and activities that are somehow linked to African culture, history and heritage such as samba, Candomblé and popular parties or specific holidays.¹⁵⁴ However, it is important to note that during our interview Mestre Janja stated that Grupo Nzinga’s mission is not to create a religious construction. Janja also explained that they have never actively encouraged the children to choose or adopt any religions

¹⁴⁶ Araujo, R. Personal Interview. May 17, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Refer to Field journal, page 13

¹⁴⁸ I come from Angola, I come from Angola

¹⁴⁹ Refer to Field journal page 30

¹⁵⁰ “When I arrived from Aruanda, I brought my berimbau in my bag.” The word Aruanda makes reference to a made up place, linked to African culture and Candomblé.

¹⁵¹ “Everything is different in Angola.”

¹⁵² Araujo, R. Personal Interview. May 17, 2015.

¹⁵³ Souza, R. Personal Interview. May 15, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Lopes, A. Personal Interview. May 13, 2015.

of African matrix. According to Janja, Grupo Nzinga intends to teach the children that capoeira, candomble, and samba for example, all “share the same historical experience of persecution, of prohibition, and of discrimination,” in order to show them that they cannot be capoeiristas and discriminate these other elements linked to Afro-Brazilian culture and religion.¹⁵⁵ In the course of my three weeks of research I also had the chance to watch a documentary about the day of Yemanjá, an African goddess who is celebrated during February 2nd in Salvador. In this documentary, Mestre Poloca states that samba, capoeira and candomble are inseparable, because they are connected intrinsically.¹⁵⁶ At

the end of this same documentary a man illustrated the importance of the day of Yemanjá for Afro-Brazilian culture by saying that this day “is one of the prettiest, most splendid manifestations of Africa surviving inside America.”¹⁵⁷ In terms of other activities outside of capoeira, Mestra Janja stated that Grupo Nzinga promotes different activities and classes that are linked to other forms of Afro-Brazilian culture, such as samba for example. Janja explained that Tião Carvalho, a musician,



Map of Africa at Grupo Nzinga
Source: Mariana Cardona (research project, 2015)

dancer, and composer linked to Grupo Nzinga, sometimes imparts classes on different folkloric dances that are connected to Afro-Brazilian culture, such as bumba meu boi, cacuriá, tambor de crioula, and jongo. Mestra Janja stated that the children are always invited to participate, and that the purpose of doing this is to show the children that “capoeira is not isolated in that context of Afro-Brazilian culture, and that there are many elements of capoeira that you can find in jongo, (...) in samba chula, (...) [and] in congada.”¹⁵⁸ Janja also mentioned that Grupo Nzinga promotes Afro-Brazilian culture through the orchestra of berimbaus, because they use this as a way of

¹⁵⁵ Araujo, R. Personal Interview. May 17, 2015.

¹⁵⁶ Yemanjá protege quem protege o mar 2013.

¹⁵⁷ Yemanjá protege quem protege o mar 2013.

¹⁵⁸ Araujo, R. Personal Interview. May 17, 2015.

teaching the children how to interpret African and Brazilian rhythms that are not necessarily linked to capoeira, such as funky for example.

In terms of the protection of the right of children and adolescents, Mestre Poloca mentioned Brazil's Statute on the Child and the Adolescent specifically and stated that Grupo Nzinga works directly with that document. According to Mestre Poloca, all the children from Grupo Nzinga have a basic notion of what their rights are, and they all know that if they experience any type of violence at home, at school or on the street they can denounce for example. Poloca told me that in the past they used to work more directly with the statute and talk about it with the children by reading certain articles to them and saying "look, if someone does this to you at school, in the street, at home, you have rights, you can protest, [you] can



Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola
Source: Mariana Cardona (research project, 2015)

denounce.”¹⁵⁹ On the other side, Mestre Poloca told me that at Grupo Nzinga they also emphasize human rights and discuss topics such as racism, slavery and the history of black people in Brazil, in order to educate, sensitize and make the children more aware of this reality. Poloca also explained that children do not pay to participate in Grupo Nzinga's activities and because “they are mostly black children, (...) [what they] are doing is a type of affirmative action.”¹⁶⁰ Mestre Poloca stated that the work of educating the children and promoting Afro-Brazilian culture in Alto da Sereia somehow represents that notion of affirmative action, because it is an endeavor that seeks to benefit a group that has traditionally been more disadvantaged in relation to other factions of society.

¹⁵⁹ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Barreto, P. Personal interview, May 18, 2015.

Physical, Mental, Creative and Social Development of Children

This section intends to explore how Grupo Nzinga's capoeira pedagogy promotes the physical, mental, creative and social development of children from the community of Alto da Sereia. In terms of the physical development that is promoted through Capoeira Angola, I based most of my results, reflections and conclusions on my personal experience in the classes, activities and rodas de capoeira at Grupo Nzinga. Ever since my first class of capoeira I realized that this form of art was much harder than it looked, because it required a lot of concentration, strength, balance, flexibility, agility and rhythm. As I practiced the different capoeira positions during my second class at Grupo Nzinga, I realized that it is not about doing the movements quickly but about delivering each position gracefully as well, which demanded a lot of concentration, equilibrium, skill and control over my own body. This was very hard to do, but at the same time it helped me understand why Barba and other capoeira teachers constantly say that the most calm capoeiristas are the best capoeiristas.¹⁶¹ During my second week of research at Grupo Nzinga, I attended a capoeira class that was pretty physically demanding due to the exercised we did. At the beginning of the class, Mestre Poloca separated us in two lines and told us to practice our ginga for about half an hour. This was not as easy as it sounds, because we had to be moving constantly and it was almost like we were doing a series of small jumps because everything had to be done on the tips of our toes.¹⁶² Mestre Poloca told us we had to be active, agile and quick on our feet during a game of capoeira, and that is exactly what we practiced. This activity was very physically demanding because it required you to be constantly moving and doing small jumps, which eventually took a toll on my leg muscles. However, this exercise was great to practice coordination and to develop strength, endurance and agility because you basically had to be on the top of your game for the entire time.

During my last week of research at Grupo Nzinga, there was another particular class that was extremely dynamic and fun but very physically demanding as well. That specific day, after stretching and practicing our ginga, we did a set of exercises that included a head-stand and a series of "fake blows" that intended to threaten your opponent and make him think that you were going to attack. The head stand was extremely difficult to do and very physically demanding, because it required a lot of balance, equilibrium, skill and upper-body strength which I did not have. However, I noticed that Caique, Thaila and João Manuel did it very well and in an

¹⁶¹ Refer to field journal, page 11

¹⁶² Refer to field journal, page 20

effortless and gracious manner, much better than what I did or attempted to do.¹⁶³ After this exercise we practiced the “tesoura”, a movement that resembles a pair of scissors because it requires you to be on the floor and get into a plank-like position with your legs open. The purpose of this exercise is to somehow entrap your opponent in-between your legs. This particular exercise is which pretty fun but very physically demanding as well, because it requires a lot of on upper-body strength and agility. Towards the end of the class we did wheelbarrows around the room, which was extremely entertaining but also exhaustive because we had already done a lot of very physically demanding exercises, and wheelbarrows require a lot of coordination and upper-body strength as well. Overall, this class was very dynamic and we practiced a lot of different movements that required a lot of coordination, balance, skill, equilibrium and strength.¹⁶⁴

During the course of my three weeks of research at Grupo Nzinga I also noticed that Capoeira Angola required a lot of coordination, not only in terms of having control over your body movements but also in relation to music. As I participated in the capoeira classes, I got the chance to play most of the instruments, including the berimbau, agogô, reco-reco and pandeiro. Although I did not learn how to play the berimbau properly, I like to think that I was able to do a pretty decent job with the other three instruments. However, during my last week at Grupo Nzinga I realized that no matter what instrument I played, it was extremely hard for me to play an instrument and sing or actively watch a game of capoeira at the same time, without messing up the harmony or getting confused. While I recognized this about my musical skills, I also noticed that most of the children did not seem to have problems with this issue, and some kids like Thaila for example, were even able to hold a conversation while playing an instrument and maintaining the rhythm.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, capoeira not only teaches the children how to dominate certain movements and play musical instruments, but also how to balance these activities and have the coordination to sing while playing capoeira, or to play an instrument, sing and watch a game of capoeira at the same time. During my interview with Barba, I asked him about the skills that the children learn through capoeira and how these can be incorporated in their daily lives. He responded by stating that the children’s reflexes improve and that they become more agile, alert, concentrated, and active in what they do.¹⁶⁶ When I interviewed Raphael, I asked him

¹⁶³ Refer to field journal, page 27

¹⁶⁴ Refer to field journal, page 27

¹⁶⁵ Refer to field journal, page 25

¹⁶⁶ Lopes, A. Personal interview, May 13, 2015.

whether capoeira promoted his physical development. He responded by saying that his “body developed very well with that process of each year making an effort and being in capoeira, training.”¹⁶⁷

However, during our interview Raphael also mentioned that the physical skills he learned through capoeira were nothing compared to how much he developed mentally. In relation Raphael said; “I think [capoeira] certainly worked more with my head than with my body.”¹⁶⁸ When I asked him why capoeira promoted his mental development so much, Raphael stated that it forced him to want to be better everyday, not so much in terms of his way of playing capoeira but in relation of his way of being. According to Mestre Poloca, capoeira is part of a process of “auto-conhecimento,”¹⁶⁹ because after understanding a determined movement of capoeira we have to assimilate the information and incorporate it in our minds.¹⁷⁰ This process involves a lot of patience and discipline, because the children must be constant and remain at Grupo Nzinga in order to let time transform them into great capoeiristas. During my interview with Raphael, he also mentioned this concept of discipline, by stating that playing capoeira encouraged him to stay out of trouble because Grupo Nzinga promoted a lot of rigorousness and discipline. Raphael explained that when he was a kid, the Mestres were very rigorous and encouraged them to be disciplined, which meant that they always had to be on time and that they could not be messing around during the classes. According to Raphael, that discipline and rigorousness gave him the insight to open his mind to good things and transformed him into a man that is more focused on what he wants.¹⁷¹ During my interview with Mestre Poloca, he also referred to this concept of discipline by stating that you “have to be on time, [you] have to come everyday [and] in the days that [you] do not show up I will argue, [I will] complain.”¹⁷² Mestre Poloca also mentioned a girl named Julia, who was a member of Grupo Nzinga but had not participated in their activities during the past three months. The day of our interview, Julia went to Grupo Nzinga and Poloca greeted her by asking her what her name was and telling her that he did not remember her, although he clearly did. According to Mestre Poloca, this sort of game was his way of pressuring Julia to come back to Grupo Nzinga by somehow telling her; “how is it that you disappear for

¹⁶⁷ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

¹⁶⁹ The understanding of the self

¹⁷⁰ Refer to field journal, page 17

¹⁷¹ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

¹⁷² Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

three months?”¹⁷³ Mestre Poloca also stated that in order to encourage the children to stay at Grupo Nzinga, every time one of them does not go to class he tells them that they were missed, so they know that the group appreciates and cares for them. In relation to this, Poloca explained that Grupo Nzinga also focuses a lot in showering the children with love and affection, as well as promoting values of respect, cooperation and appreciation for others. Mestre Poloca also mentioned that although capoeira requires a high degree of commitment and discipline, the children also have a lot of fun at Grupo Nzinga because they are constantly celebrating and laughing together. Poloca explained that this idea of celebration is an essential aspect of African culture and illustrated this by saying; “we are always celebrating because celebration is important, (...) we celebrate for any reason.”¹⁷⁴

Grupo Nzinga’s focus on love, affection, and respect also has the ability to improve the children’s self-esteem, which is something Barba mentioned when I interviewed him. According to Barba, the mestres and mestras are always trying to lift the children’s self-esteem and give them some autonomy, by encouraging them to express themselves freely and be the owners of their own voice.¹⁷⁵ Both Mestra Janja and Mestre Poloca mentioned how lifting the children’s self-esteem and promoting their freedom of expression can have a positive effect on their performance at school. According to Mestra Janja, the children are “not afraid to express themselves (...) [because] they are not afraid of making mistakes.”¹⁷⁶ During our interview, Janja also explained that the children learn that they are not alone and that they are appreciated at Grupo Nzinga, which gives them great confidence and raises their self-esteem. Mestra Janja stated that this increase in their confidence and self-esteem, improves their performance at school because they are less inhibited and therefore, more likely to participate. Janja illustrated this by telling me that some teachers from the local school actually ask the children from Grupo Nzinga to wait before answering a question in order to let their classmates have the opportunity to answer as well. During my interview with Mestre Poloca, he also mentioned this positive relation between capoeira and school work and he actually stated that all the children who at one point or another participate in Grupo Nzinga improve their performance at school. According to Poloca, this happens because Grupo Nzinga works very hard to raise the children’s self-esteem, and “when you have a high self-esteem (...), then other things flourish, other things open as

¹⁷³ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

¹⁷⁴ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Lopes, A. Personal interview. May 13, 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

positive,”¹⁷⁷ which is reflected in their school performance. Mestre Poloca also explained that everything the children learn through capoeira is somehow connected, because the information that Grupo Nzinga teaches them today has to do with the information they learned yesterday, and the information they learn tomorrow will have to do with the information they learn today.¹⁷⁸ According to Poloca, this also helps to improve the children’s performance at school, because it teaches them how to link or connect different facts and pieces of information. Mestre Poloca explained that in Capoeira Angola, the children start by learning the ginga and then the meia-lua, and then other more complicated positions. Therefore, capoeira is somewhat similar to the formal education system in this area, because the knowledge the children absorb becomes more complex as they advance and are exposed to more complicated information.

On the other side, Capoeira Angola has the potential to promote the mental development of children because it fosters a liberating education, by allowing each person to learn a position, adapt it according to their own individualities, and apply it depending on the situation. Therefore, the roda de capoeira for example, is an instance where the capoeiristas can take things from their pool of knowledge and use them according to the situation, and in response to their opponent’s movements. During my three weeks of research I was able to participate in this liberating learning process, which I would describe as invigorating but very hard at times, because it required you to quickly assess how to respond to your opponent’s movements without overthinking your every move nor remaining stiff. In the course of my first week at Grupo Nzinga, Barba taught me some of the basic movements of capoeira and emphasized that I did not have to replicate those positions in that exact way, but that I should adapt them according to my opponent’s movements.¹⁷⁹ The fact that Capoeira Angola is not based on replicating or imitating the mestre’s movements, gives the students a certain degree of freedom to interpret, appropriate and use the capoeira positions however they see fit during a game or a roda de capoeira. This freedom also fosters important problem-solving and concentration skills because the capoeiristas are presented with a situation to which they must respond by using the knowledge of capoeira that they already have. During my time at Grupo Nzinga, I also learned that capoeira is not just about being strong and dominating each position, but also about the way you strategize and respond to your opponent’s movements. I realized this during a roda de capoeira, when I saw Lucas playing with a man that was clearly bigger and probably stronger than him. Although you

¹⁷⁷ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Barreto, P. Personal I interview. May 18, 2015.

¹⁷⁹ Refer to field journal, page 6

could say the odds were against Lucas because the other man was probably physically stronger and more fit than him, Lucas was able to stand his ground because he was fast, patient and agile, and he was also able to strategize and respond to the man's movements very well.¹⁸⁰ This illustrates the importance of the thought process behind capoeira and shows how this form of art can contribute to a person's mental development by fostering concentration, patience, quick-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Individuality and freedom of expression are other extremely important values that are promoted at Grupo Nzinga. In this way, Grupo Nzinga fosters the creative and artistic development of the children in many ways, by encouraging them to express themselves through music, art and dance, as well as other activities that are not always related to capoeira. During my interview with Mestra Janja, I asked her about the ways in which Grupo Nzinga promotes freedom of expression and creative development through capoeira. Janja told me about an activity that they used to do a few years ago and consisted in discussing various topics with the children, and then telling them to form groups and make up *ladainhas* that talked about those issues. Mestra Janja mentioned that they did not have to write an entire capoeira song, but that they encouraged the children to come up with a couple of verses that incorporated the themes that they had discussed previously.¹⁸¹ Janja also explained that Grupo Nzinga promotes the creative development of children by incorporating and embracing new capoeira songs written by some of the members of the organization. Marquinho, one of the members of Grupo Nzinga that has participated in the organization since he was a little boy, has written a couple of capoeira songs that Grupo Nzinga actually plays during *rodas de capoeira* or regular training sessions.¹⁸² In relation to this musical aspect of capoeira, Janja also mentioned that Grupo Nzinga not only teaches children how to sing, but also how to improvise while singing at a *roda de capoeira*. According to Janja, improvising is the hardest aspect of singing at *rodas de capoeira*, because it requires the singer to pass relevant information related to that particular moment to the capoeiristas who are playing.¹⁸³ Therefore, learning how to improvise promotes the creative and artistic development of the children because it promotes their individuality and encourages them to express themselves through the music. In the course of my research at Grupo Nzinga, I was able to witness two situations in which the children made up *ladainhas* or raps and expressed

¹⁸⁰ Refer to field journal, page 30

¹⁸¹ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

¹⁸² Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 14, 2015.

¹⁸³ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

themselves through song. One of these instances happened during my second week at Grupo Nzinga, after a roda de capoeira. In this particular situation, I watched as João Manuel and Caique went running into office of Grupo Nzinga and told Poloca that they had something to show him, which consisted in a capoeira song that they had created in order to celebrate him.¹⁸⁴ The other situation happened after my last roda de capoeira at Grupo Nzinga, when João Manuel, Lucas, Bruna, Mestre Poloca, Raphael, Barba and I started making up raps and ladainhas.¹⁸⁵ Mestre Poloca had an application on his phone that allowed you to create raps to a certain beat, so everyone gave it a try, including me. While some of us made up raps and ladainhas, João Manuel and Barba danced hip-hop and came up with some new steps. João Manuel also made up a ladainha about capoeira at Grupo Nzinga that went;

*No Alto da Sereia,
No Alto da Sereia,
Só tem um lugar,
Que é a Capoeira,
Pra dançar, pra treinar.*¹⁸⁶

These two instances are a perfect illustration of how Grupo Nzinga promotes the creative development of children through capoeira as well as other forms of music, art and dance. At Grupo Nzinga, the children are able to unleash their imagination and express themselves freely without any inhibitions, which not only promotes their creative and artistic development but also has the potential of empowering the kids because it shows them that they are capable of producing something especial.

During the course of my three weeks of research at Grupo Nzinga, I was also able to witness how the mestres and mestras encouraged the children to develop their creativity, unleash their imagination and express themselves freely through music and dance. Starting from the simple exercise of doing the ginga, Capoeira Angola is always promoting and appreciating the individuality and creativity of each person, by allowing everyone to play capoeira in their own way instead of instituting one correct way of playing. During one of my first capoeira classes at Grupo Nzinga, Barba stated that capoeira represents freedom and explained that everyone does the ginga in their own way, which meant that I had to do the ginga according to my own personal

¹⁸⁴ Refer to field journal, page 22

¹⁸⁵ Refer to field journal, page 31

¹⁸⁶ In Alto da Sereia, in Alto da Sereia, there is only one place, that is Capoeira, to dance, to train.

“style” by expressing my individuality and creativity through my body language.¹⁸⁷ This sense of freedom illustrates the potential of capoeira to promote creativity and individuality, because it allows children to unleash their imagination and express themselves as they play, which creates many different ways of playing capoeira. During my informal interview with Celeste, we talked about the participation of the children in the rodas de capoeira. According to Celeste, Grupo Nzinga promotes an environment where the children can express themselves freely without feeling embarrassed, which is why they sing, play instruments and practice capoeira with no hesitation or fear of making a mistake. Therefore, the children are extremely active during the capoeira classes and the rodas de capoeira, because they are encouraged to participate without feeling intimidated or inhibited.¹⁸⁸ During my second week at Grupo Nzinga, I went to a particular capoeira class that illustrated this creative and uninhibited learning process. That particular day, as I walked inside the room I noticed that most of the children and adults who had arrived early had already grabbed an instrument and started playing some music, so I walked over and grabbed the pandeiro. Barba and Lucas started playing the atabaque and coming up with new rhythms and variations, and before I knew it everyone was playing a determined instrument under Barba’s directions. Although it all started randomly, suddenly there was an impromptu orchestra playing different variations of Capoeira Angola, which included the sound of multiple berimbaus, some pandeiros, two atabaques, one agogô and one reco-reco. Everyone participated in this “impromptu orchestra” and each person had a type of solo, in which they had to come up with a fun beat and play it with their particular instrument. As the orchestra got bigger, we all formed a circle and Poloca taught everyone how to play funky, a type of Afro-Brazilian music, with the berimbaus. He also encouraged the children to dance or rap to the rhythm of the music. After this, João Manuel went into the middle of the circle and started dancing a mix of funky, hip-hop and freestyle, even incorporating some capoeira positions in his dance moves.¹⁸⁹ This experience was extremely fun and created a very artistic and joyous environment, where everyone was able to express themselves through music and dance. The fact that we had to come up with “solos” during this impromptu orchestra also promoted the creative development of the children and in many ways unleashed their imagination, as many of them came up with crazy and fun beats. The fact that João Manuel was able to go into the middle of

¹⁸⁷ Refer to field journal, page 10

¹⁸⁸ Mintzias, C. Personal interview. May 8, 2015.

¹⁸⁹ Refer to field journal, page 20

the circle and dance also shows the kind of environment that is promoted at Grupo Nzinga, because he did not seem intimidated or inhibited at all while he danced.

The community-building component of Grupo Nzinga is also something worth mentioning, because it fosters values of cooperation, solidarity and respect, which promote the social development of children by improving their interpersonal skills and social interactions. During my interview with Barba, I asked him whether he thought capoeira made any positive impacts in the life of the children. He responded by saying that in Alto da Sereia “the children are exposed to a lot of violence, and here [at Grupo Nzinga] they learn to get along [better] with [other] people.”¹⁹⁰ Barba also mentioned that the children at Grupo Nzinga are more calm and less violent than other children from Alto da Sereia. During my interview with Raphael, I asked him whether capoeira taught him how to interact better with other people. He replied by saying that capoeira made him more peaceful and that if he had not gotten involved with Grupo Nzinga, he would be completely different from the man he is today. To illustrate this change Raphael said; “I think that capoeira brought me peace, and [it] is teaching me to disseminate peace in other people.”¹⁹¹ Leonardo, another young man who has participated in Grupo Nzinga since he was a little boy, says something similar when he is interviewed for the documentary “Eu jogo capoeira no Alto da Sereia”. During this interview, Leonardo states that capoeira changed him completely; his form of speaking, his behavior, and many other things. He explains that before he was a little rude to other people, but now he has become more calm and laid-back.¹⁹² These two individual cases show the potential of Capoeira Angola to promote the social development of children by improving their interpersonal and social skills, because both Leonardo and Raphael became more calm and pacific people through their participation in Grupo Nzinga.

During my interview with Mestre Poloca, I was able to ask him whether he had witnessed any changes in the behavior of the children that have participated in Grupo Nzinga for a long time. Poloca replied by saying that the children start to exert a powerful influence at home by taking the values they learn at Grupo Nzinga back to their families. In relation to this, Mestre Poloca stated that Grupo Nzinga is doing the reverse movement, because they are teaching certain values to the children, who end up taking what they learn back to their homes and influencing their families. According to Poloca, Grupo Nzinga is somehow influencing some families from the community, because whenever the parents of these children do something that

¹⁹⁰ Lopes, A. Personal Interview. May 13, 2015.

¹⁹¹ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

¹⁹² Eu jogo capoeira no Alto da Sereia 2013.

is wrong or that goes against the values they learn at Grupo Nzinga, the kids tell them that what they are doing is not right.¹⁹³ Although I personally believe that this opinion is a little too optimistic, Grupo Nzinga is indeed raising important issues within some of the families from Alto da Sereia. Grupo Nzinga is also executing an important task by teaching the children certain values that they would probably not learn about at home or at school.

In the course of my three weeks of research at Grupo Nzinga, I was able to see how the organization uses their capoeira pedagogy to promote positive social interactions and values such as cooperation, respect and partnership during the classes and activities. During my first capoeira class at Grupo Nzinga, I participated in an activity that was very interesting and promoted very important social skills in my opinion. This activity consisted in getting the children to play capoeira inside a small chalk circle that Barba had drawn around each pair of students. In this scenario, the children had to practice the capoeira positions that they had learned that day but without stepping out of the circle, which restricted their movements. According to Barba, this exercise intended to teach the students how to “ceder”¹⁹⁴, which required each capoeirista to give their partner room to practice his movements instead of always trying to get their way.¹⁹⁵ I thought that this exercise was very interesting because it was a way of teaching the children important social values such as cooperation, partnership and negotiation. As they engaged in this exercise, the children were somewhat required to cooperate and negotiate because if one of the capoeiristas refused to give room to their partner, the couple would eventually step outside of the circle. Therefore, this exercise was somehow like a succession of flowed movements inside a restricted space (chalk circle), where both capoeiristas had to negotiate the space and yield a little in order to achieve the purpose of the game, which was not to step outside of the circle.

During my last week of research at Grupo Nzinga, I encountered another situation that was interesting to me because it encouraged the children to respect each other and play a “fair game” of capoeira. Towards the end of this particular capoeira class, we all formed a sort of small roda de capoeira in order to practice the exercises that we had learned before during the training. As João Manuel and Caique approached the pé do berimbau¹⁹⁶ to play capoeira, Mestre Poloca told

¹⁹³ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

¹⁹⁴ Portuguese word for concede, yield or cede. It does not mean fail or give up, but to somehow give way to the other person to do what he or she wants.

¹⁹⁵ Refer to field journal, page 6

¹⁹⁶ Literally means at the foot of the berimbau. It is the starting point of a capoeira game at a roda de capoeira, in which both players come to the foot of the gunga, the biggest berimbau, and wait until the person playing it directs the orchestra and allows the game to start.

them that he wanted “um jogo bonito, respeitoso e divagar.”¹⁹⁷ He also encouraged the boys to yield and play without “superioridade”, which means without thinking they are superior to their counterpart and without always trying to make the first movement.¹⁹⁸ I thought this was very meaningful because Poloca encouraged the boys to respect each other and play capoeira in a gracious, calm and respectful way, without any superiority complexes. During that same week, I witnessed another situation at one of the capoeira classes that I thought was very meaningful as well because it illustrates how Grupo Nzinga encourages the children to care for and worry about each other. Towards the end of this particular capoeira class, Barba addressed all of us and asked the children about Julia, the girl who had not participated in Grupo Nzinga’s activities for the past three months. After they talked about Julia’s situation and why she was not going to capoeira class, Barba encouraged the children to leave their house five minutes earlier before going to Grupo Nzinga, in order to stop by her house and motivate her to go to capoeira class with them.¹⁹⁹ In my opinion, this situation was extremely meaningful because Barba not only encouraged the children to care for Julia and worry about the fact that she is not going to capoeira, but also motivated them to be active and do something about it by going to her house before each capoeira class in order to get her to go with them.

Empowerment of children

One of Grupo Nzinga’s main objectives is to empower not only women but also boys and girls from the community by giving them access to information and new opportunities to learn in an environment that includes them and does not belittle them due to their young age. This idea of empowerment as access to information is also tied to development because development can be described as “a process of enlarging people’s choices and increasing the opportunities available”²⁰⁰, which includes chances to learn. According to Mestre Poloca, children and adolescents have access to a lot of information at Grupo Nzinga, because they talk about many different issues with them, including sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancies, the dangers of drug trafficking, violence, and other problems that are considered relevant and that are prevalent in the community. Mestre Poloca explained that “information in

¹⁹⁷ A beautiful, respectful and calm game.

¹⁹⁸ Refer to field journal, page 25.

¹⁹⁹ Refer to field journal, page 28

²⁰⁰ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 12

power, and if you give information you are somehow making that person more powerful.”²⁰¹ Therefore, Grupo Nzinga is empowering those young people by giving them access to information and preparing them for the future. Poloca also mentioned that the issues they discuss with the children are extremely important because they are problems that traditionally affect people from African descent the most, and as the majority of the children are Afro-Brazilian this becomes very relevant for them and in some ways helps to prepare them for the future. In relation to this topic, Audrey Ottier states that the process of conscientization involved in capoeira has the potential to empower people, because it makes people more aware of their social position in society and prepares them to “take steps to assert their agency in different ways to improve their own lives.”²⁰² By talking about these issues and giving the children relevant information, Grupo Nzinga is empowering young people from Alto da Sereia by making them more aware and preparing them for the future and some of the situations they might encounter. During my interview with Mestra Janja, she stated that even when Grupo Nzinga is focused on giving love and attention to the children, we “cannot lose sight of the world in which they are being raised, and for which they should be prepared as well.”²⁰³ Janja stated that this process of preparation and conscientization includes teaching the children about different issues and showing them how to recognize a series of data. Mestra Janja illustrated this by giving me an example and telling me about something that happened while they were on a trip with the children in Brasilia. Janja told me that the last time they went to Brasilia, they stayed in a great hotel with many amenities and facilities. Many of the children that went on that trip were not used to the facilities of the hotel, and some of them had never even been in an elevator before. Janja explained there was one thirteen year old boy who asked her how the elevator worked in a determined moment. After explaining the boy how to use the elevator, what buttons to press and how to navigate through the hotel using the room numbers, Janja told him that she would be in her room in case he needed anything. As Janja said this, a woman who was riding the elevator with them asked her “you are letting him go alone like this in the elevator?”²⁰⁴ Janja replied by telling the woman that the boy was no longer alone, because now he knows how to use the elevator. According to Janja, the boy “was alone when he did not have the knowledge”²⁰⁵, but

²⁰¹ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

²⁰² Ottier, A. M. 2005: 151

²⁰³ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

²⁰⁴ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

²⁰⁵ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

now that she gave him that information he is no longer alone and he knows that if anything happens he can call her or go to her room. Another relevant matter is Grupo Nzinga's pedagogy of autonomy, in which the children are given a certain degree of freedom and are taught valuable lessons for the future. According to Barba, the Mestres are always trying to lift the children's self-esteem and give them autonomy by letting them express themselves freely.²⁰⁶ Mestra Janja mentioned this idea of autonomy as well as stated that even when they are doing other activities outside of capoeira, they always try to give the children autonomy.²⁰⁷ In relation to this, Mestra Janja also explained that they do not ignore the sensibility and ability of children to understand certain things, which is extremely important in this pedagogy of autonomy.²⁰⁸

According to Audrey Ottier, empowerment is "tied to the ability to transcend boundaries that can otherwise be restricting or oppressive. These divides include age and gender (...) and particularly class and race."²⁰⁹ Grupo Nzinga represents this notion of empowerment because they do not separate the children according to age and gender, so boys, girls, men and women train and practice capoeira together. During an informal interview, Celeste told me that there is no distinction between men, women, children and adults at Grupo Nzinga, because they all practice capoeira together as a group instead of being separated by age and gender like in other capoeira organizations. According to Celeste, there is no "special treatment" towards adults or children, meaning that the children are not belittled or treated differently just because they are younger. To illustrate this, Celeste said that in Grupo Nzinga children can go into the kitchen and wash their dishes just like the adults do, they can help the professors and mestres as they clean up the room, and they can go and grab different capoeira instruments and practice with no hesitation or fear of being reprimanded.²¹⁰ In this sense, in Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola children are not discriminated against, restricted or excluded just because they are younger and "inexperienced". I noticed this during my first roda de capoeira at Grupo Nzinga because I expected to see girls playing against girls, boys playing against boys, and adults playing against each other, but instead I saw everyone playing together as a group.²¹¹ From this experience I concluded that capoeira, completely reverts and challenges the widespread values of western

²⁰⁶ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

²⁰⁷ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

²⁰⁸ Araujo, R. Personal I interview. May 17, 2015.

²⁰⁹ Ottier, A. M. 2005: 72

²¹⁰ Mintzias, C. Personal interview. May 8, 2015.

²¹¹ Refer to field journal, page 4

society, which include traditional gender roles that state that girls are more fragile than boys and therefore should only play against other girls, and that children should not play against adults because they are younger and inexperienced. At the same time, I think that making no distinctions in terms of who should play with whom makes capoeira extremely inclusive as a form of art and dance, as it teaches children the values of integration and inclusion instead of separation and exclusion. During my interview with Mesta Janja, she stated that contrary to the formal educational system, “Capoeira Angola does not segregate the children, it does not separate the children by age for example, (...) it does not fragment knowledge [by saying that] this knowledge is for this age, and that knowledge is for that age, and it does not separate children from adults either.”²¹² This is very important because it allows boys, girls and adults to share the same space and experience capoeira together, not playing against each other but playing with each other and learning from the other capoeiristas. When I interviewed Barba, I asked him what his favorite thing about working at Grupo Nzinga was. He replied by saying that the thing he likes the most is “being with the children, is knowing that child and adult can learn and occupy the same space.”²¹³ He also stated that the children teach adults to be more sensitive and less inhibited at Grupo Nzinga, because children tend to be happier than adults and therefore they help them to be happier as well. During my three weeks of research at Grupo Nzinga, I was able to witness what Barba said about children and adults sharing the same space and learning together. One of my main observations was that the children seemed to have pretty good relationships with the adults and they all interacted and goofed around with each other no matter their age. I think I was surprised by this, because this is not usually what happens in other activities. Normally, children are separated from adults and in the odd case that they are not, adults still interact mainly with other adults and children with other children. On the other hand, relationships between unrelated adults and children are not common in the world, because children are constantly excluded and treated like they are too inexperienced or naive to understand certain things. What I saw at Grupo Nzinga was completely different, because children were not excluded nor treated differently just because they were younger; they were encouraged and challenged just like adults, and they were expected to behave with a certain level of responsibility and responsiveness as well.

On the other side, children are also considered important at Grupo Nzinga, and they are encouraged to teach others who know less about Capoeira Angola than them, even if these

²¹² Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

²¹³ Lopes, A. Personal interview. May 13, 2015.

people are older or more educated than them. During my informal interview with Mestre Poloca, he explained that in time is extremely important in the tradition of Capoeira Angola, “because if I am older than you in capoeira, you have to respect me, even if you are three times older than me according to your chronologic age.”²¹⁴ Poloca gave me the example of Bruna, a sixteen year old girl who has been playing capoeira at Grupo Nzinga for ten years. In relation to Bruna, Mestre Poloca said; “Even if you are a doctor [or] a famous lawyer (...), if you come here you'll have to bow down to her here because she is older than you, so you owe her respect.”²¹⁵ This notion of age also teaches children the value of responsibility and community, as well as the importance of the collective because they learn to look after each other. On a determined conversation after a capoeira class, I talked to Janja about this notion of age and she explained that the children that have participated in Grupo Nzinga for a while learn that they are “old” in capoeira, and therefore they are responsible for the newer members that know less about Capoeira Angola than them.²¹⁶ I was able to see how this worked during various capoeira classes, because although João Manuel and Thaila are only 9 and 13 years old respectively, there were many instances where Barba asked them to help newer members of the group and show a couple of adult capoeiristas how to do certain movements properly. During a particular capoeira class, Barba paired Thaila with me and told her to go over a couple of movements with me. In this specific instance, Thaila was extremely encouraging and helpful as she went over some basic positions with me, including the “negativa”, the “meia-lua”, the “rabo de arraia” and the “rodeiro”.²¹⁷ At the same time, she did not seem bored, disengaged or inhibited while she was teaching me. This experience made me look at development and children’s programs differently, because it made me see children not as a social project but as agents that should have a say in their own development and should not be treated differently just because they are younger.

During my interview with Janja, she explained that at Grupo Nzinga, the children learn “that they are dealing with two different ages all the time; one age that is biological, that is chronological, that is [linked to] the body and [to] the development of the children, and another age that [represents] the age that they have inside the community, their membership [in Grupo Nzinga].”²¹⁸ Therefore, Janja stated that there are many occasions in which the children are older

²¹⁴ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

²¹⁵ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

²¹⁶ Refer to field journal page 11

²¹⁷ Refer to field journal, page 16

²¹⁸ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

than a new adult capoeirista that just entered the group, because they have practiced capoeira and been a part of Grupo Nzinga for a long time. Mestre Janja mentioned that in these cases, the children are “invited to perceive themselves as older, as someone who has been there for more time”²¹⁹, and encouraged to assume the responsibility to receive, teach, stimulate, and orient those new people who enter Grupo Nzinga. Throughout time, the idea is that the children assume more responsibility and leadership within Grupo Nzinga, so that one day they can even teach Capoeira Angola to other people like Raphael. During my interview with Raphael, I asked him why he decided to teach capoeira at Grupo Nzinga. He responded by saying that it had always been a dream of his and that ever since he was a little boy he had “to reach that goal of teaching capoeira one day.”²²⁰ Raphael also stated that this experience was extremely gratifying, because he came into Grupo Nzinga knowing nothing about Capoeira Angola and today he is teaching to other people at this same organization. This can also be seen as a source of empowerment, because Raphael is now sharing his knowledge of Capoeira Angola with other people, and he is giving back to the community and to Grupo Nzinga, an organization that made a great impact in his life.

Capoeira as an avenue to new possibilities

This section explores the potential of Capoeira Angola as an avenue to new opportunities, as well as the ways in which Grupo Nzinga shows the children a different possibility of life. This final section is very important because it works somewhat like a conclusion, as it goes beyond the notions of empowerment and development, to explore how Grupo Nzinga shows the children a different world and gives them access to new possibilities and options. Grupo Nzinga goes beyond Capoeira Angola and provides the children with new educational opportunities and cultural experiences that include trips, movie showings, and music and dance classes, among other activities. During my interview with Mestre Poloca, he told me about the cineclube, an activity that goes on every Thursday at Grupo Nzinga and consists on a movie showing. Poloca explained that they always present very good films at the cineclube, and encourage the children to go. This initiative intends to give the children the opportunity of watching movies, because most of them do not have the money to go to a movie theater and therefore do not have access to the art of cinema.²²¹ Mestre Poloca explained that even though many of the children who go to

²¹⁹ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

²²⁰ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

²²¹ Barreto, P. Personal Interview. May 18, 2015.

the cineclube do not attend the capoeira classes, Grupo Nzinga is giving all the children access to new opportunities that they do not have at Alto da Sereia. Poloca also stated that there are many children from the community who have never been to Pelourinho²²², and most of them have never visited other Brazilian cities or states. Therefore, Grupo Nzinga's work is extremely important because they present the children with these opportunities and give them access to a different reality, by taking them on multiple trips and providing them with many educational opportunities. Mestre Poloca explained that Grupo Nzinga not only introduced many children to Pelourinho, but also took them to cities outside of the state of Bahia, such as São Paulo and Brasília, opening their eyes to new possibilities and showing them different realities.²²³

According to Mestre Poloca, capoeira is an art that englobes many different types of knowledge and information, including history, music, art, dance, etc. Therefore, the children are exposed to many cultural experiences and educational activities by participating in Grupo Nzinga, which enriches their daily life and gives them access to certain opportunities that they would not get to know otherwise.²²⁴ Poloca also mentioned that Grupo Nzinga allows the children to meet people from different backgrounds and get to know various cultures, because the group is constantly receiving visitors from foreign countries and other regions of Brazil. Celeste also brought this up during our conversation, and stated that Grupo Nzinga allows the children to "travel" even when they remain in Alto da Sereia because they are able to learn more about the world and meet people from different places and cultures.²²⁵ Therefore, although the initial approach of Grupo Nzinga is to teach the children capoeira, this activity gives them access to other educational opportunities and experiences and increases their cultural repertoire. Mestre Poloca explained that capoeira opened the doors of the world for him, because it allowed him to travel all around the world and get to know different cultures and people. Therefore, now he wants to give that same opportunity to the children by creating "that path for them (...), so they can get to know many [different] countries [and] travel the world teaching capoeira [and] sharing knowledge."²²⁶

On the other side, Grupo Nzinga shows the children a new and different possibility of life, by giving them access to all these educational opportunities and cultural experiences. During our

²²² Historical area of Salvador.

²²³ Barreto, P. Personal Interview. May 18, 2015.

²²⁴ Barreto, P. Personal Interview. May 18, 2015.

²²⁵ Mintzias, C. Personal interview. May 8, 2015.

²²⁶ Barreto, P. Personal Interview. May 18, 2015.

interview, Mestre Poloca told me that they have lost many children to drug trafficking and to prostitution, but he stated that they are trying to break that pattern through capoeira.²²⁷ Therefore, Grupo Nzinga shows the children that they do not have to get involved in drug trafficking, prostitution or criminality, by opening their eyes to a different reality and somehow giving them the opportunity to do more with their lives through capoeira and the other activities they promote. Mestra Janja also mentioned this by saying that Grupo Nzinga is a “reference to another possibility of life”²²⁸ at Alto da Sereia, because it allows the children to grow in many aspects and shows them that they have other options outside of prostitution, criminality, drug trafficking and teenage pregnancies. Raphael represents this idea of a new possibility of life because although he has experienced many hardships and has great needs in his personal life, he turned his life around and is now teaching capoeira to other students. When I asked Raphael whether being a part of Grupo Nzinga made a positive impact in his life, he said that without capoeira he would not live and would not know the meaning of passion.²²⁹ During our interview, Raphael explained that he went through some very hard phases in his life when he left Grupo Nzinga a couple of years ago, and stated that when he came back to group and talked to Mestre Poloca he told him; “Raphael, for us to know what is good in life we have to know what is bad, and we have to learn to follow the good at the right time, because if time passes you cannot turn back [and] you lose the chance of recovering from what took you to the bad side.”²³⁰ Raphael told me that these words made an impact in his life and that capoeira rescued him and transformed him into the man he is today by removing him from the wrong path he was following. In relation to this, Raphael told me that without capoeira his life would not be how it is today, because capoeira brought him happiness and peace and gave him a second chance. Raphael’s story is extremely inspiring because he turned his life around after he went back to Grupo Nzinga and is now teaching Capoeira Angola to other students. In the last couple of years, Raphael has worked hard to turn his life around and these efforts have not been in vain because according to Mestra Janja, Grupo Nzinga is probably going to send him to their headquarters in Germany very soon, so that he has the opportunity of experiencing a different kind of life for a while.²³¹

²²⁷ Barreto, P. Personal Interview. May 18, 2015.

²²⁸ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

²²⁹ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

²³⁰ Souza, R. Personal interview. May 15, 2015.

²³¹ Araujo, R. Personal interview. May 17, 2015.

Conclusion

Throughout my project I sought to understand how Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira de Angola uses capoeira as a way of empowering and promoting the full development of children from the community of Alto da Sereia. For this purpose, I read extensively on the foundations of Capoeira Angola and on the potential of this form of art as a vehicle for development and empowerment. I also did some research on programs and initiatives that have implemented capoeira as a way of promoting the development, conscientization and education of children and adolescents from underprivileged communities. Throughout my three weeks of field research at Grupo Nzinga, I used participant observation and a mix of formal and informal interviews to obtain information about the organization and draw conclusions based on the work they are doing with the children from Alto da Sereia. After analyzing the information I obtained from my fieldwork and considering my previous research, I have reached the conclusion that Grupo Nzinga has managed to implement capoeira effectively in a way that promotes the development and empowerment of children by giving them autonomy and attention, improving their self-esteem, and teaching them important values like respect, cooperation, and non-violence, as well as essential physical and mental skills such as concentration, agility, discipline, and leadership, among others.

On the other side, Grupo Nzinga has been able to incorporate capoeira in a political way in order to defend the rights of children and adolescents and fight against sexism and racism by educating the children, raising their awareness and not replicating the traditional and oppressive structures that have been established by society. Grupo Nzinga has also been successful in preserving and promoting Afro-Brazilian culture through capoeira, music, dance, and other educational activities. These educational and cultural activities have the potential of empowering the children by giving them access to relevant information and offering them an “alternative to the hegemonic vision of blacks, black history and black culture.”²³² In a community that is majority Afro-Brazilian, this mission is very important because it gives people the opportunity to reclaim their culture, raise their awareness about their own situation and be more involved in their own development through a process of valorization and conscientization.

²³² Ottier, A. M. 2005: 77

Considerations

In terms of the limitations of my research, I think limited time and lack of immersion in the community were two restricting conditions. One of the biggest constraints of my research was the limited amount of time I had to develop it. Grupo Nzinga is a very complex organization, and developing a comprehensive study of their capoeira pedagogy would take more time and resources than the ones I had, which limited my objectives throughout the project. Another issue that limited my project was the fact that I was not able to be completely immersed in the community. I would have liked to actually live in Alto da Sereia because I think it could have given me more contacts within the community, as well as a better sense of the conditions and most pressing issues that the people face on a daily basis. Although I understand that this involves information, contacts and dedication that many researchers might not have, I would recommend potential researchers to live in Alto da Sereia, because I believe it could have made a big difference in my project.

It is also important to note that even though capoeira has great potential to promote development and empowerment, it is not perfect. During the lecture I attended at UFBA, Professor Eduardo emphasized the fact that we must avoid idealizing Capoeira Angola and creating a world of fantasy in terms of the values it promotes, because it incorporates many negative values from both the white western and the black African societies, which includes capitalism, homophobia, racism, and machismo among others.²³³ According to Mestra Janja, although there have been many advances towards gender equality within capoeira, there is still a long way to go because Capoeira Angola still faces some challenges in terms of fully and properly including women and giving them equal treatment²³⁴. On the other side, although Grupo Nzinga makes a change in the lives of some children, it does not impact the lives of most of the children from Alto da Sereia because not all the children fit in the organization's capoeira pedagogy. Barba mentioned this point during our interview and he said that "the group has a proposal and some children fit in that proposal and continue [in Grupo Nzinga, but] the majority does not. It is not the majority [of children] who come. It would be great if it was the majority, but it is not like that."²³⁵ Poloca illustrated this point by saying that in the beginning "25 or 30 children enter [Grupo Nzinga], and two years later there will be 6 or 7, and throughout time there

²³³ Public Lecture, UFBA. Refer to field journal, page 34

²³⁴ Ministry of External Relations 2008: 100

²³⁵ Lopes, A. Personal interview. May 13, 2015.

will be even less due to many reasons,”²³⁶ including teenage pregnancy, family disapproval, or a new work situation.

However, even though I understand that Grupo Nzinga does not reach all the children from the community and that Capoeira Angola is not perfect, I believe that Grupo Nzinga is making a positive impact in the lives of many children and families, and that capoeira has great potential to empower and promote the development of children and adolescents from underprivileged communities. Throughout my research I also learned that Grupo Nzinga goes beyond these notions of empowerment and development by giving the children access to new educational opportunities and cultural experiences and showing them another possibility of life. Grupo Nzinga makes an extremely important impact in the community, not only by empowering the children and promoting their development, but also by showing them that they have other options outside of Alto da Sereia and that they do not have to get involved in prostitution, criminality or drug trafficking. By giving the children access to different cultural experiences and educational opportunities such as trips, dance classes, movies and other recreational activities, Grupo Nzinga opens their eyes to a different reality and somehow teaches them that they can do more with their life and that they have a say in their future. Participating in Grupo Nzinga completely changed my perspective on children’s programs, because it made me see children not as a social project but as agents that should have a say in their own development and should not be treated differently just because they are younger. At Grupo Nzinga, children are treated with love and respect and are given this autonomy that allows them to have a say in their future and development. In the course of my three weeks of research I came across a quote from Brazilian psychiatrist Roberto Shinyashiki that says; “A grande verdade é que você é a pessoa que escolhe ser. Todos os dias você decide se continua do jeito que é ou muda. A grande glória do ser humano é poder participar de sua autocriação.”²³⁷ I believe this quote illustrates the potential of children and people in general to be the agents of their own development. Once we recognize this potential and give children the necessary resources to grow and make informed decisions, I believe they can thrive even if they come from underprivileged and complicated backgrounds. This is why Grupo Nzinga’s work is so important, because by empowering and promoting the integral development of children from Alto da Sereia, they are preparing them to be the agents of their own development and future.

²³⁶ Barreto, P. Personal interview. May 18, 2015.

²³⁷ The truth is that you are the person you choose to be. Every day you decide if you continue [being] the way you are or [if you] change. The great glory of human beings is to be able to participate in their own self-creation.”

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Appendix

1. Could you have done this project in the USA? What data or sources were unique to the culture in which you did the project?

I probably could have not done this project in the USA, because although I know there are some groups of Capoeira Angola in the country it would not have been the same. Capoeira is something that is linked to Afro-Brazilian culture, so I needed to be in Brazil to experience this form of cultural expression as a whole. At the same time, Grupo Nzinga is based in Brazil so maybe I could have done a similar project in the USA with another capoeira group, but not with Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola.

2. Could you have done any part of it in the USA? Would the results have been different? How?

In order to do this project in the USA, I would have had to do my research with another capoeira group that works at an underprivileged community in the US. I do not know if there exists a community like this in the USA and I also do not know if it is something that I would like to pursue there because I think that capoeira is a very exoticized in the US. At the same time, I do not think that there are many groups of Capoeira Angola in the US, and focusing on a more contemporary form of capoeira like Capoeira Regional, would have changed my research project completely. Lastly, Brazil's social issues are unique to the country due to its racial composition and income distribution. Therefore, the focus of my project would have changed a lot because I would have encountered slightly different social issues and problems if I have developed my research in the USA.

3. Did the process of doing the ISP modify your learning style? How was this different from your previous style and approaches to learning?

The process of doing the ISP completely changed my learning style because I had never done interviews nor based my research on primary sources. This project also taught me to be more organized and to use my time wisely because it was very demanding and time consuming. At college I am used to writing papers, but they are mostly based on secondary sources. Therefore doing the ISP taught me how to use and analyze primary sources such as interviews and participant observation. Throughout the ISP period, I was able to learn how to develop a quality project by integrating secondary sources, primary sources and analysis.

4. How much of the final monograph is primary data? How much is from secondary sources? Most of my monograph is primary data because secondary sources only account for about one third or less of my project. I developed my monograph as a case study of Grupo Nzinga, so other than some background information and my literary review, I used mostly primary sources.

5. What criteria did you use to evaluate your data for inclusion in the final monograph? Or how did you decide to exclude certain data?

I created an outline and developed themes according to my problem statement and the questions I wanted to address throughout my monologue. Then I read through my field journal and highlighted the information that was relevant according to those themes. I would have liked to use all the data I gathered but it was not possible because I had no time and I needed to develop a monograph that was connected to my problem statement.

6. How did the "drop-off's" or field exercises contribute to the process and completion of the ISP?

During my first drop-off at Emaús, I was able to interact with children and learn about a project that focuses on promoting the development of children from underprivileged communities as well. Although this project was very different to Grupo Nzinga, it taught me a lot about programs that are directed towards children as well as about the approaches that are being developed to address child poverty. During this particular drop-off I also learned how to conduct an interview, and I was able to practice my portuguese and work on my skills as an interviewer.

7. What part of the RME most significantly influenced the ISP process?

By discussing ethics and post-colonial theory I was able to be more self-critical and reflective during and after the ISP period. This class helped me acknowledge my own background and "cultural baggage" and be more critical about my assumptions and beliefs, which was very important during the ISP period and allowed me to develop great reflections. The RME class taught me to question the way I think and my assumptions, which helped me as I participated in the capoeira classes at Grupo Nzinga because I learned to be critical about my own observations and ask myself; why do I think this way?

8. What were the principal problems you encountered while doing the ISP? Were you able to resolve these and how?

When I got to the field I had the idea that I was going to base my research on interviews because I intended to interview a lot of adult members of Grupo Nzinga that had joined the group when they were little. However, due to scheduling problems and time constraints I was only able to interview Raphael. Nevertheless, this interview was extremely significant and it was probably worth three interviews because it gave me information that was essential for my project. Initially I also wanted to interview the mothers of some of the children from Grupo Nzinga, but this was not possible either because I was not able to establish the necessary contacts with any of the mothers. However, I was able to participate in 6 capoeira classes and 2 rodas de capoeira, which gave me a lot of extremely important information. I also conducted 3 formal interviews and 2 informal interviews and I attended a public lecture at Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), which was very beneficial for my research. Therefore, although I was not able to conduct all the interviews I wanted, I could obtain all the information I needed and develop a very good and relevant foundation for my monograph.

9. Did you experience any time constraints? How could these have been resolved?

I would have liked to interview more people and participate in more capoeira classes, but I did not have time for that. However, I think that was a minor time constraint because in the end, I gathered all the information I needed.

10. Did your original topic change and evolved as you discovered or did not discover new and different resources? Did the resources available modify or determine the topic?

My topic did not change much, but there were some aspects of my project that did change a little. My perception of Capoeira Angola as a sport for example, changed completely after participating in Grupo Nzinga's capoeira classes and attending that lecture at UFBA, because I learned about the foundations of Capoeira Angola and was able to understand it

more as a philosophy of life and as a representation of Afro-Brazilian culture, music, art and dance. My perception of children's programs completely changed as well after I interviewed Barba, Mestre Janja and Mestre Poloca, because it made me see children not as a social project but as agents that should have a say in their own development.

11. How did you go about finding resources: institutions, interviewees, publications, etc.?
I found my interviewees by going to the activities of Grupo Nzinga, including capoeira classes and rodas de capoeira. During my first capoeira class I met Celeste and Barba, two of my interviewees. I met Mestre Poloca, another of my interviewees, in the course of my second week at Grupo Nzinga. Mestre Janja introduced me to Raphael during my first roda de capoeira at Grupo Nzinga and I engaged in a conversation with him and asked him whether I could interview him. I met Professor Eduardo at Grupo Nzinga before the ISP period and he invited me to attend his lecture at UFBA that coming week. During that lecture, I met Sara Machado and she told me about her masters thesis and encouraged me to read it. This document became very important for my monograph because it gave me valuable background information about Alto da Sereia, Capoeira Angola and Grupo Nzinga. I was also living at Mestre Janja's house, so I was able to interview her there and talk to her occasionally about my project. In terms of publications, Mestre Janja has a room full of books in her house and she allowed me to go through some of them so that I could find relevant information for my project. Some people at Grupo Nzinga also told me about the documentary "Eu jogo capoeira no Alto da Sereia", and I was able to access it through youtube.
12. What method(s) did you use? How did you decide to use such method(s)?
I used participant observation and a mix of informal and formal interviews. As I said before, I was planning on basing my project mostly on interviews but this was not possible. Therefore, I used a lot of participant observation, which turned out great because it allowed me to participate in many of Grupo Nzinga's activities. I chose interviews and participant observation because I thought they were appropriate methods according to my project. Participant observation allowed me to be more immersed in the community and see some of the work that Grupo Nzinga is doing with the children. Interviews gave me more background information on Alto da Sereia, Capoeira Angola and Grupo Nzinga which was equally useful. I could also hear about personal experiences and anecdotes through the interviews I conducted, which was extremely important for my research.
13. Comment on your relations with your advisor: indispensable? Occasionally helpful? Not very helpful? At what point was he/she most helpful? Were there cultural differences, which influenced your relationship? A different understanding of educational processes and goals? Was working with the advisor instructional?
My advisor was helpful because she gave me very relevant information about Grupo Nzinga and their capoeira pedagogy, as well as interesting anecdotes during her interview. Mestre Janja also helped me to establish contact with some of my interviewees, like in the case of Raphael for example. She also gave me access to a lot of books and secondary sources that turned out to be very useful for my project. Lastly, she gave me valuable information about Alto da Sereia and showed me around before a roda de capoeira one day, which was very beneficial for my research.

14. Did you reach any dead ends? Hypotheses which turned out to be not useful? Interviews or visits that had no application?

I did not reach any dead ends, but I had to change my conception of Capoeira Angola as a sport and children as a social project.

15. What insights did you gain into the culture as a result of doing the ISP, which you might not otherwise have gained?

I gained important insights into Afro-Brazilian culture by working at Grupo Nzinga, because Capoeira Angola is partly a representation of Afro-Brazilian culture, dance, music and art. Therefore, I gained a lot of knowledge about Afro-Brazilian culture in an extremely fun way and through a context that I would have not been able to access otherwise. I also gained some important insight about social justice issues in Brazil by talking to some of the people who live in Alto da Sereia and visiting the community itself.

16. Did the ISP process assist your adjustment to the culture? Integration?

The ISP process definitely improved my level of portuguese and made me more confident in terms of speaking the language, which I believe is an essential part of integration into Brazilian culture.

17. What were the principal lessons you learned from the ISP process?

As I said before, this experience completely changes my perception of children's programs, because it made me see children not as a social project but as agents that should have a say in their own development and should not be treated differently just because they are younger. In terms of my personal growth, I learned to be patient and adapt to different situations, because even when things do not go the way you expected them to go, if you make an effort everything works out in the end.

18. If you met a future student who wanted to do this same project, what would be your recommendations to him/her?

I would definitely recommend potential researchers to stay and live in the community of Alto da Sereia. I understand that this involves information, contacts and dedication that many researchers might not have, but I believe it would have made a big difference in my project had I actually lived in the community.

19. Given what you know now, would you undertake this, or a similar project again?

I would definitely undertake this project or similar one because I learned a lot about development, social justice and the use of a unique form of art and dance as a vehicle for the empowerment and development of children. On the other hand I learned a lot about myself and way able to grow as a person through this experience.