

Stanzas and Sticks: Poetic and Physical Challenges in the Afro-Brazilian Culture of the Paraíba Valley, Rio de Janeiro

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My father was a tenant farmer
And a great sharecropper
He sang *calango* all night through
And never lost at rhyming
 Martinho da Vila¹

Benedito Gonçalves, after a challenge game with one of those present, left with Salvador for the road, and on this occasion he, the witness, saw Benedito assault Salvador with a number of blows.²

Guaratinguetá, 1890

APPROACHING MALE CHALLENGES

In her seminal work on free men in a slave society, Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco emphasized the pervasiveness of violence among free poor men in the Paraíba valley during the nineteenth-century Brazilian Empire. Physical aggression happened frequently between men who were neighbours, co-workers, friends, or even related to each other, she wrote, and these 'violent altercations were not sporadic', but part of 'the flux of everyday life'. For Franco, that violence 'permeates the entire social organism, emerging in the less regulated sectors of life, such as leisure relations, and projects itself on to the codification of fundamental cultural values'. On the basis of nineteenth-century criminal records in the municipality of Guaratinguetá, she notes that while fights originated in various contexts, they always derived from verbal challenges. It is these 'poetic disputes', and their relationship with physical challenges between males, that I examine in this article.

Although Franco perceived the importance of the *desafio* (challenge) in the popular culture of the region, she greatly underestimated, in my view, its creative potential and the variety of its social functions. Perhaps her reliance upon criminal records, combined with a curious neglect of other types of source, conditioned her somewhat negative assessment of popular culture in

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Fig. 1. Calango singing at Quilombo São José, 2007, with João Batista Azedias (left) and Manuel Seabra (second left).



Fig. 2. Manuel Seabra (left) and Jorge Fernandes playing sticks at Quilombo São José, 2007.

the Brazilian ‘valley of slavery’.³ I argue, in contrast, that the various types of verbal and physical challenge were crucial to the development of original cultural forms in the Paraíba valley. Verbal challenges were at the heart of three cultural practices which crystallized after emancipation, in 1888, and which represent the most widespread and important forms of rural folk culture in that region. They are the *jongo*, the *calango*, and the *folia de reis*.

Jongo refers to a rhythm, a type of lyric and a dance whose origins are located in West Central Africa.⁴ *Calango* stands for a sung duel accompanied by music and a couples dance. *Folia de reis* (Kings’ Folly’) is a theatrical performance, or ‘folly’, inspired by medieval Iberian mystery plays about the three wise men or ‘kings’ who visited the newborn Jesus.⁵ Physical challenges were present in all three, but were also at the core of *jogo do pau* (stick play) and the fighting that erupted at social gatherings.

Limited communication between historians and anthropologists/folklorists in the decades after the Second World War may explain why Franco showed no interest in further exploring the role of challenge in the *caipira*, or rural culture, of the Paraíba valley.⁶ Thirty-five years before the publication of her work, however, the European or African origins of the *desafio* or challenge had already been the subject of academic debate between outstanding sociologists and folklorists such as Luís da Câmara Cascudo, Roger Bastide and Mário de Andrade. Cascudo explored the Iberian origins of the *desafio* in his classic *Vaqueiros e cantadores* (1938), and categorically asserted that: ‘The improvised challenge (*desafio*), accompanied by musical instruments, does not exist in African lands’.⁷ Roger Bastide, while praising Cascudo’s book and acknowledging the Iberian origins of the *desafio* of North-eastern Brazil, indicated that poetic challenges existed in many societies.⁸ By transforming apparent hostility into play, they contributed to social cohesion and to ‘smoothing out of customs’.⁹ Furthermore, he wondered: ‘Is it not curious that these duels, in which the *caboclo* and the black take part, should contain nothing from the more primitive Indian and African societies...?’¹⁰ Mário de Andrade took this further, asserting: ‘As to the Africans, I think it is impossible to accept that they had no custom of poetic-musical bouts’. His research on the rural samba of São Paulo led him to believe that ‘a satirical attitude’ is one of the characteristics of African and black singing.¹¹ Bastide pursued the debate in another article, where he suggested that the Brazilian *desafio* was located, like the *mutirão* (the work exchange between equals in rural communities), at a ‘crossroads, where three roads coming from Africa, the Indies and Portugal meet’. He concluded not only that poetic challenges were known in Africa, but that ‘the Brazilian black, influenced by whites, transformed and enriched the African challenge’.¹² Bastide thus raised an issue that I shall pursue here: the interaction between various forms of challenges and their insertion into new cultural practices.

Half a century later it is of course possible to discuss verbal-poetic challenges in the light of a much more copious literature. Recent work has shown the importance of verbal challenges, mainly in poetic forms, in

countries as diverse as Indonesia, Italy, Fiji, Bolivia and Turkey.¹³ This suggests the widespread prevalence of ritualized verbal challenges between males. Similarly, stick-play (and fighting with sticks) has been a feature of many societies in Europe, Africa and Asia. Irish and Portuguese men excelled in it, as well as Southern African ethnic groups such as the Zulu. It was or is also prominent in the Philippines, Southern India and the plantation societies of the Caribbean.¹⁴ Interpretations of verbal and physical challenges have been many and various: displaced aggression, conflict resolution, social control, the construction of male identity, adolescent rite of passage, conferral of status, and development of verbal and physical skills have all been identified as underlying reasons for contests. In fact, the social context of verbal challenges differs so much in each case that generalization is often inappropriate. Here I argue that the verbal and physical challenges that developed during the post-emancipation period in the Paraíba valley reflect very specific processes that can be linked to the formation of the 'Black Atlantic'. That is, they represent creative adaptations of various kinds of materials developed by enslaved Africans and their descendants in Brazil in the context of slavery and post-emancipation.

Studies of verbal challenges in the specific context of plantation America or post-emancipation societies initially focused on 'playing the Dozens' in the USA. According to Roger D. Abrahams, these verbal duels are typical for an African-American boy growing up in a 'mother-orientated family', where the construction of his masculinity requires a 'violent reaction against the world of women which has rejected him, to a life filled with expressions of virility and manliness'.¹⁵ Henry Louis Gates, expanding on the work of Abrahams and others, demonstrated in his seminal work how verbal duelling such as 'playing the Dozen[s]' belonged to the rhetorical strategies of African Americans generically known as 'signifyin(g)'.¹⁶

My aim here is to describe the context and explain the various types of challenge in the popular culture of the Paraíba valley, drawing both upon the existing literature and on fieldwork carried out since 2005 in various communities of that area. After sketching the social context of the 'games' (*brincadeiras* or *folgedos*) during which poetic and physical challenges took place, I discuss the different types of challenge, and the circumstances in which they could turn into rougher contests or violent brawls.

The analysis of so dynamic a phenomenon as popular culture requires some kind of chronological framework. Establishing precise temporal boundaries is however very difficult when dealing primarily with oral memory. The abolition of slavery in 1888 is of course a landmark, but when does 'post-emancipation' end? I am inclined to see the 1960s as the turning point when important processes of modernization, from the introduction of electricity to access to television, started to change daily life in the Brazilian interior. Obviously the timescale for these changes differed for each town and hamlet in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Interviewees themselves provide clues regarding the time frame. 'Sidoca', a former participant in



Fig. 3. Fofo (Jorge Maurício) singing, Grupo Calango Itakomosi (Vassouras).



Fig. 4. Feijão (Luiz Fernando Candido) singing, Grupo Calango Itakomosi (Vassouras), 2007.

Folia de rei (Kings' Follies) in Miracema, recalls: 'I saw a lot of stick fighting, when I went to these dances, in those up-country villages. I was a young chap then'. Since he was born in 1933, we can safely assume that the *calango* dances followed by stick fighting took place at least until the 1950s.¹⁷ Interviewees refer to that past as 'formerly' or 'in days of old' (*antigamente, de primeiro*), but at the same time leave no doubt that they are not talking about the 'times of slavery'. While the oldest informants experienced those 'days of old', and for that very reason are called the 'ancients' (*antigos*) the younger generations only know this period from hearsay.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF MALE CHALLENGES

Challenges between males were as much part of everyday life as they were features of the special events that marked out the seasonal rhythm of the life of rural communities – for instance the celebrations of patron saints such as Saint Benedict, particularly worshipped among black communities, Abolition (of slavery) Day on 13 May or the Christmas cycle from 24 December to 6 January. Challenges could either take oral poetic forms, or consist of physical contests. Both types had their rules and did not necessarily descend into violence – that is, result in physical harm. However, according to all testimonies, brawls did happen quite frequently, the outcome usually being a generalized fight between all men present at a venue. They used swiping kicks (*rasteiras* or *pernadas*), sticks and even knives and sickles. These brawls were seen as a continuation or a 'normal' consequence of the non-violent verbal and physical challenges.

Verbal duels at work were most common during the *mutirão*, the traditional labour exchange between peasants practised in many parts of Brazil. Because the *mutirão* brought together people from the community or neighbourhood, it provided an excellent occasion for challenges. Maria Sylvia Franco already reported that 'the challenge [*desafio*] occurs between the factions which coincide with the working parties that have been allocated specific tasks'.¹⁸ Folklorists also highlighted the competitive spirit that prevailed among participants in a *mutirão*. The rural worker who finished his task first initiated the *brão*, that is, the challenge song whose function was to stimulate the other workers.¹⁹ Singing during work took the form of *jongos* or *calangos*. It seems that the former were particularly used in slavery times. According to Stanley Stein, slaves worked close enough to be able to hear each other singing. The leaders of working groups challenged each other or poked fun at the master and overseer.²⁰ After Abolition, 'duel singing' remained important in all communal work, yet it seems that the *jongo* lost ground to the *calango* in the working context, even in predominantly black communities. Teresina de Jesus, from the maroon community of São José, for example, remembers *calangos* being sung while the hay was mown.²¹

According to Alceu Maynard Araújo, the last worker to finish his task in the *mutirão* was called *caldeirão*. 'It was common for the others to poke fun at the *caldeirão*. Nobody wanted to be the *caldeirão*.'²² Typically whoever

finished first would provoke the *caldeirão* with jibing verses, to which the latter had to respond in kind. In other words, in the context of the *mutirão*, a physical challenge (who worked harder) was combined with a verbal contest, and seems to have occurred predominantly between males. Masculine identity was hence constructed as much through hard manual labour as through the ability to sing and rhyme. These *desafios* during communal labour could also result in stick-play between two men or even whole working parties.

Roads were another arena for daily encounters, and for that reason also became the scene of challenges and brawls. These arose, for example, when two groups of muleteers met. As Jorge Fernandes remembers:

In the old times [*de primeiro*], things were odd to this point. Every *fazendeiro* [owner of a big estate] milked his cows, collected [the milk] in the can, and had an employee to take it to the cooperative, on the donkey's back. That group, right, went together, and another group came from there to here. Everybody tied up his donkey to a pole to be able to fight, and then they hit each other, right, in the middle of the road. A wooden handle... Holy Mary!... They went for the stick, one on the receiving end, the other hitting. And then, fine, they untied their donkeys, mounted their animals, and everyone went their own way.²³

All sources concur, however, that both poetic and physical challenges were particularly associated with leisure. From slavery times on the challenge was a feature of sites of social encounter, 'appearing again as the link between entertainment and aggression'.²⁴ Yet the challenges that were part of recreation in communities were usually friendly, and clearly non-violent. The *jogo do pau* ('stick-game'), for example, was played on Sundays by peasants and rural workers employed on estates. On the two Cardoso *fazendas*, in the municipality of Vassouras (RJ), workers played on a stone or cement floor. According to one interviewee, the owner even encouraged the practice, because he recognized its recreational value for his employees.²⁵ 'Sticks' was also played on Sundays in the black community of São José. The aim was to measure various types of skill in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. As Manoel Seabra likes to tell:

When Sunday dawned, we went to play sticks. People came together. Then we played until... When one left the game, another one entered. Then we played *malha* [a kind of bowling of Portuguese origin]... After the *malha* game, we went to bathe at the waterfall. The whole bunch of people went. After the bathing, they came here, and played football. It was fun...²⁶

It was also common for adolescents and young men to play sticks in front of a grocery shop (*venda*). Then the game was accompanied by alcohol consumption and the audience commented on the skills of individual players or

the current game. In these circumstances people started to bet, and the competition would become more serious.

The regular dances (*bailes*) were another unfailing occasion for challenges. There were various pretexts for them – for example the end of a *mutirão*.²⁷ In the rural areas of Brazil television was not available until the 1970s and even radios were rare until the 1950s. So *bailes*, which took place about every fortnight, were an important source of entertainment. Neighbours and family members organized them together.²⁸ Dance, during this period, meant *calango* above all. The term refers to both a musical genre and a dance. An accordion, a tambourine (*pandeiro*) and a drum accompanied the singers.²⁹ Men and women danced in couples holding each other. The steps, according to folklorists such as Cascudo, are similar to the urban *samba*.³⁰ Yet the *calango* was, at its core, ‘a form of challenge’.³¹ And according to oral memory, it was the challenge of the *calango* that often led to a brawl:

There was singing, there was the *calango*. They started to sing *calango*, and there was this contest. The one who defeated the other in the *calango* . . . the one who was defeated didn’t like it, and there a fight started, and the guys who were in the audience, right, they always booed . . . The one who lost was booed, and of course that was difficult for him, right? Then the stick hit hard . . . The fight started, and the cudgel struck with no holding back.³²

The regularity of the fights explains why every man came ready-armed with a cudgel. They hid them when entering the house where the event was happening. As Jorge Fernandes explains:

When there was a dance, everyone carried his stick, right? When the guys arrived, some slipped the stick in the top of the hut, in the roof of the hut. Others hid the stick in a thicket of cane, or grass. They used this for self-defence because once midnight arrived, the fighting broke out. It was rare to have a dance without a fight. Then the dance stopped, everything finished.³³

Jongos too took place on weekends or holidays, in particular 13 May, Abolition Day. In contrast to the *calangos*, this dance was always performed in the *terreiro*, that is, the courtyard next to the house, consisting of stamped clay or earth. Whereas *calangos* were not religious, *jongos* had links to Afro-Brazilian religion and acknowledged African ancestors in the form of *pretos velhos* (‘old blacks’). For that reason *jongueiros* maintained close ties with *macumba*, later *umbanda*, and prominent singers were often priests or held other offices at Afro-Brazilian shrines.³⁴ There are also a number of formal similarities. *Jongo* strophes, for instance, are called *pontos*, as in *macumba* and *umbanda*. Indeed this association between *jongo* and *macumba*



Fig. 5. Manoel Seabra, jongueiro, stick player and calango singer, 2007.

is precisely one of the reasons for the decline of *jongo* until it began to be revived in the 1980s: the Catholic Church actively discouraged its practice, and the Protestant churches that spread after the Second World War vehemently opposed it. Hence after conversion to Protestantism the *jongo* disappeared even in many close-knit black communities. For the same reason *jongueiros* today tend to stress its secular character.³⁵

Jongo is a ring dance accompanied by two or three drums, with substantial regional and local variations. In the most common type, dancers form a great circle in front of the drums, with a woman and a man in the middle.³⁶ According to Ribeiro, 'these two engaged in real dance and tap-dancing duels'.³⁷ More serious than the physical challenges in the dance performance, however, were the sung duels, called *pontos de demanda*. The term *demanda* has again a similar meaning in *macumba* and *umbanda*, where it refers to putting a spell on somebody. Accordingly *jongo* challenges between singers could result in the loser having to hand over his drums or even being 'tied up' (*amarrado*), that is, 'bewitched' and physically immobilized until the end of the performance at dawn. The atmosphere of a *jongo* could hence become potentially dangerous. Maybe for that reason children were not allowed to participate in them until quite recently. As in the dance, women as well as men joined in *pontos de demanda*, clapping and also singing, although they never beat the drums.³⁸ Often a *jongo* in the courtyard was complemented by a *calango* inside the house, and might similarly lead to challenges and fights.³⁹

The annual celebrations of the Nativity cycle created a context of intense social interaction which also favoured challenges, especially between men. In many regions of Brazil, the *folias de reis* ('Kings' Follies') brought together men and women of all ages who shared a devotion to the Biblical magi or Three Wise Men. Revellers (*foliões*) for a Kings' Folly usually had to commit themselves for at least seven consecutive years. They came together at Christmas, and paraded each night until Epiphany (6 January). Participants often did not return home during this period, but stayed with the Kings' Folly, especially if they lived at a distance from its headquarters. The consumption of large quantities of food and alcohol was part and parcel of these celebrations, which intensified social interactions not only between the members of the group and their families, but also between the *folia* and the wider world. Some *folias* travelled over great distances to perform, expanding their everyday social relations. The Christmas period thus facilitated moments of communion and reasserted social links, but it also opened up wider horizons and allowed approaches to hitherto unknown people. Consecutive nights of celebration, lack of sleep, alcohol consumption and religious exaltation might well induce peculiar states of mind, and lower many barriers.⁴⁰ No wonder then that some aspects of the *folgado* (revelry) also bred challenges, confrontations and brawls. It is possible either to argue that fights in this context only expressed the memory of previous clashes or latent conflicts, or, on the contrary, that the Kings' Follies specifically



Fig. 6. Manuel do Calango (Manuel Salvador de Souza) (Valença), 2007.

favoured hostilities. Whatever the reason, any serious *mestre* (headman in charge) would inevitably insist on the Folly's rules of conduct, which every reveller (*folião*) was supposed to observe. These included limits on alcohol consumption, as well as rules of social etiquette when revellers entered other homes, such as not invading the kitchen or not spitting on the ground.⁴¹

In contrast with the *calango* and the *jongo*, the *folia de reis* was characterized by formally structured groups of between twelve and twenty men, who followed the same banner (*bandeira*), led by the owner (*dono*) or master (*mestre*). It was the responsibility of the *mestre* to maintain instruments and uniforms, and to arrange visits to private houses that had agreed to receive the *folia*. The Kings' Folly was a men's pastime, and the role of women was limited to support, providing clothes and food.⁴²

As in the *calango*, the accordion holds a central role in the *folias* in the state of Rio de Janeiro. It is accompanied by a guitar, a *cavaquinho* or *viola* (small guitar) and percussion instruments (triangle, tambourine, *chocalho* and a range of drums called *bumbo*, *caixa* and *tarol*). In some locations wind instruments (trumpet, saxophone, clarinet) were and are still used.⁴³

Alongside the master a clown character (*palhaço*) is particularly relevant here. There are various explanations of his role. In the state of Rio de Janeiro, the clowns are usually identified with the soldiers of the biblical King Herod, which confers ambiguity.⁴⁴ Many people believed that the clowns had signed a pact with the devil. Most clowns today resist any such association. Their 'uniform' (*farda*), however, includes a 'helmet' (*capacete*) and a mask whose function is clearly to terrify the audience, in particular the children. In previous times the clowns used masks made of leather from wild animals, such as the *tamandua*. Today the masks are made of plastic and hair, their appearance reminiscent of a dog's head (a metaphor for the devil). Some clowns also decorate their cudgels with a real dog's skull, which reinforces their association with 'the dog', that is, the devil.

A whole set of taboos and prohibitions is aimed at controlling the clowns and the dangerous forces they represent during the journey of the *folia*. In the procession their place is at the front, but they are not supposed to walk ahead of the *folia* banner. In many groups the clowns do not sing together with their companions. In the old days, when a Kings' Folly was received in a house, the clowns did not enter but remained outside and played with the children. In some cases they were only allowed to enter once the *folia* had performed. They are also not allowed to play inside the house. Many clowns did not enter churches, and if they did, they had to take off their masks. In former times they were also not allowed to put on or take off their masks in public. During the Folly's closing ceremony the clowns ritually take leave of their uniform.⁴⁵ The money they earn for their performance does not have to be shared with the other members of the group – they can give them a portion, but there is no obligation.

The clown represents subversion, whilst the ‘owner’ or *mestre* of the Kings’ Folly defends order. The clown is a complement to Catholic devotion, the other face of the Kings’ Folly. He not only terrifies the children, but also disconcerts the authorities, who fear his irreverence. According to Andrade, ‘his mission was to scare the children and to insult the plantation owners where the *folia* found shelter’.⁴⁶ The clown obviously represents the less orthodox element within the ‘Catholic’ *folia*. His role within the Folly is that of the trickster, a ubiquitous character in the popular cultures of plantation America.⁴⁷

Was there any significant difference between the performers of *jongos*, *calangos* and *folias*? In Brazilian folkloric studies it has been common to equate specific cultural traits with ‘race’. Since the pioneering work of Sílvio Romero, the quest for identifiable origins has dominated the various strands of historiography and has resulted in stereotyping of most popular forms accordingly. Hence the *jongo* has either ‘originated in Africa’ or is closely associated with ‘the Black’ (*o negro*).⁴⁸ The *folia*, in contrast, is everywhere classified as of Portuguese origin because of its insertion into the Christian cycle of the Nativity.⁴⁹ Racialization has been more ambiguous in the case of the *calango*.⁵⁰ Yet overall the *calango* has become a symbol of miscegenation and fusion, like the *mestizo*. Martinho da Vila, for instance, sings that the *calango* is a ‘*caboclo* samba’.⁵¹ In other words, the racial ascription is made on the basis of supposed ‘origins’, rather than the performers’ class and colour backgrounds, or even the core characteristics of each form.

These three forms of expression have in fact much more in common than is usually assumed. *Jongo* and *calango* verses, for example, can be identical. According to participants, *mironga*, or magic, permeates *jongo* as well as *folia* and is even taken into *calango*.⁵² The same rural workers, in the majority Afro-descendants, performed *jongos*, *calangos* and *folias* and played sticks.⁵³ Their ancestors were enslaved on the coffee plantations, and lived in the communities, villages or towns of the Paraíba valley or at some stage migrated to the suburbs of cities such as Rio de Janeiro. Hence it is hardly productive to focus on each of these cultural forms in isolation.⁵⁴ Yet the characterization of the three forms in terms of contrasting racial stereotypes continues today.⁵⁵

DEMANDAS AND MARTELOS: POETIC CHALLENGES

‘Beyond Nova Friburgo everybody is a *calango* singer.’

Martinho da Vila⁵⁶

In Brazil, verbal duelling is integral to the North-eastern *desafio*, but is also present in many other cultural forms, such as *capoeira* or *bumba-meu-boi*.⁵⁷ Most of these are strongly identified with the Afro-Brazilian heritage but have also appropriated Iberian oral traditions. In *jongos* and *calangos*, as

well as in *folias*, verbal challenges take the form of rhymes. Stylistic elements of their poetry may of course help to understand how far their formation is based on continuity or rupture with previous traditions, as well as illuminating their development after Abolition and the close relations of the three with each other. Any reflection upon the character of the poetry in these verbal challenges needs to address the linguistic rupture caused by slavery. The loss of African vernaculars occurred all over plantation America, but with significant regional variations. The descendants of enslaved Africans created Creole languages on many Caribbean islands, yet in the United States, the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean and Brazil the colonizers' languages prevailed. The linguistic rupture apparently weakens Bastide and Andrade's argument in their dispute with Cascudo regarding the 'African origins' of the verbal challenge in Brazil: how far could African poetic forms be translated into the colonizer's language?

No doubt linguistic structures shape literary forms. The poetry used by Afro-descendants in the three regions of the Americas listed above relied on the Spanish, English or Portuguese literary canons, and for that reason is often seen as an example of 'miscegenation' or 'acculturation', that cannot be 'purely African', rather than as forms that were appropriated and further developed by them.⁵⁸ Portuguese literary traditions – rhymes, length of lines, stanzas – shaped the poetics of the challenges examined here. At the same time, European sources for the nineteenth century have emphasized the richness of Angolan oral literature, suggesting links between *jongo* rhymes and equivalent Angolan forms from the past.⁵⁹

Rhyming was central to *calango* and *folias*, and figures in *jongos* as well. The *calango* has no specific metre, although lines of five or seven syllables predominate. As Cásia Frade highlighted, these types of verse – *redondilha maior* and *menor* – can be found in many other popular forms in Brazil.⁶⁰ *Folia* and the *jongo* also use them, but in *folia* lines of eight or more syllables are also frequent. The structure of stanzas is again quite open. *Jongos* and *calangos* both use short strophes of four lines (*quadrilhas*), but longer stanzas are common, especially for challenges, and are also widely used in *folias*.⁶¹ In other words, in all three forms the poetry does not seem to have been constrained by a rigid metre, allowing reappropriation and insertion of other cultural contents. *Jongo* verses seem to be the most informal, as they can even occur without any rhyme.

Yet how important is this formal structure in defining the character of the poetry?

For a start, what is or not 'poetry' is difficult to define independently from cultural context. The distinction between prose and verse can be quite arbitrary and in many languages there was no equivalent to the European concept of poetry.⁶² Accounts from Congo and Angola emphasize improvised character and solo/chorus structure rather than providing details about poetic forms.⁶³



Fig. 7. Old clown mask made from animal skin (Collection Paulo Rogério da Silva, Miracema).



Fig. 8. Clown mask from Folia de Reis (Collection Paulo Rogério da Silva, Miracema).



Fig. 9. Clown masks from Folia de Reis (Collection Paulo Rogério da Silva, Miracema).

The languages of enslaved Africans had considerable impact on the American versions of the colonizers' languages, however, to the extent that Brazilian Portuguese or Cuban Spanish can be considered as creolized forms of their Iberian matrix. The Portuguese spoken by the free lower classes in plantation areas was very similar to the vernacular of the Creole slaves.⁶⁴ Poetic forms had to change accordingly, but we do not really know what slaves and freedpeople sang. According to one of Stanley Stein's informants, an ex-slave, *jongos* were originally sung in 'African language' and were called *quinzumba*, while those in Portuguese, which became more common in the Paraíba valley as the Africans died out, were called *visaria*.⁶⁵ Unfortunately no transcription of any *jongo* verse in a Central African language is known. The distinction is not absolute, of course, as many older *pontos* in Portuguese incorporated African terms.⁶⁶ This means important Central African concepts and meanings could be retained. We need moreover to be careful not to focus exclusively on the form, or even the content of oral poetry, but to take into account their role and meaning in the overall performance.

Jongo de Demanda

Jongo verses have only been systematically collected since the mid twentieth century. Various types of *ponto* were then sung during a celebration – specifically for instance to greet, praise, enchant or say farewell (*saudação*, *louvação*, *encante*, *despedida*). Only *pontos de demanda* (duel songs) contained a challenge to other singers in the audience. In most communities, singers distinguished friendly challenges (which kept the older term *visaria*), where the elder challenged the less experienced *jongueiros* or the audience in what was still a friendly atmosphere. *Pontos de gurumenta*, by contrast, called for a proper fight.⁶⁷

The *jongo* challenge consisted in an exchange of sung verses (strophe and antistrophe) between two individuals. Each contribution had to be deciphered by the opponent, who then had to reply with another appropriate stanza. Another form consisted in one singer presenting a *ponto* in the form of a riddle to challenge the general audience. It was repeated in chorus by those present, and if someone stood up and sang a stanza that provided the solution, he (or she) had the right to sing another *ponto*. If nobody stood up to solve the riddle with another stanza, the first singer repeated it until the riddle was 'untied'. This could provoke a real fight, if for instance someone stood up and sang a *ponto* that deliberately failed to provide the hidden meaning.⁶⁸ Furthermore, in a verbal duel between two singers, the one who failed to reply satisfactorily to a challenge risked remaining 'tied' (*amarrado*) for the rest of the night. For that reason it was crucial to ask older and more experienced singers for permission before singing oneself in a *jongo* circle, in order not to provoke the more powerful. As Manoel Seabra explains:

Yes, one sang for the other, right? He tied [cast a spell on] the drum. The other knew that the drum was tied, so he untied it, right? It was like

that . . . In the old times, if someone arrived and right away challenged at the drum, he would be tied. If he arrived, and asked the oldest, the headman of the *terreiro* for permission, then nothing would happen. But if he entered [the *jongo* circle] without permission, he was immobilized until dawn. Only after everybody had left would the old *jongueiro* untie him, walk around him, strike him, pass his hat over him [to lift the spell], and then he could stand up and leave.⁶⁹

Similarly to the Cuban *puya*, the singers who stood out by virtue of their improvisation were called *galos* (cockerels). The most respected and feared for the magic power of their *pontos* were called *cumbas*, that is, sorcerers.⁷⁰ This symbolic world of guessing riddles maintained close links with Congolese and Angolan traditions of the last generation of enslaved Africans in the Paraíba valley.⁷¹ The *pontos* reproduced and built upon 'traditional' Central African themes, images, and mindsets in the Americas. Robert Slenes suggested that the term *jongo* is derived from Kikongo and Umbundu expressions meaning 'fight with the mouth' or 'the word is an arrow'.⁷² If the Central African input is beyond doubt for *jongo*, it is important to acknowledge that this magical 'tying' of an opponent was also a feature of the *folia*, and to some extent even of the *calango*.

Calango

The *calango* has received much less attention from folklorists and anthropologists than the *jongo*.⁷³ It is performed in the states of Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo and Rio de Janeiro and displays great variation in rhythmic structure and musical aspects. In Rio de Janeiro, *calango* is most of the time performed by two solo singers who challenge each other, and as Cásia Frade notes:

the characteristic of the *calango* is the challenge sung in strophes of four lines – *quadrás* – with rhymes in the second and fourth verse; and of six lines – *sextilhas* – with rhymes in the second, fourth and sixth verse, or with a changing number of lines; the latter happens when the rhyme is easy.⁷⁴

The *calango* challenge is characterized by singers adopting one basic rhyme or 'line' (*linha*). There are thus *calangos* following the 'á', 'é' or 'ão' lines.⁷⁵

Dexterity in improvisation distinguishes a good *calango* singer, but in the interior of Rio de Janeiro state verses known by heart are also sung – at least today. As Zé Epifânio explains, 'the *calango* singer recites verses and improvises at the same time'.⁷⁶ In fact the distinction is artificial, since singers of various forms of popular culture combine their own improvised verses with others from the public domain in a creative bricolage. *Calango* is just another example of the oral-formulaic style of composition found in many cultures, which makes a linear genealogy of 'origins' a risky enterprise.⁷⁷

In the *calango* one singer typically has to use the last verse of the opponent as a starting point, and so on until one errs or gets tired, and gives up. According to other testimonies, various people in a circle could participate in a *calango*, which would make the outcome less foreseeable. There were no limits as to the themes used in the challenge, but it seems that disparaging comparisons with animals were very common, or verses that described negatively the skin colour of an opponent.⁷⁸ *Calango*, thus, was less bound by rituals and its free form meant poetry content depended more on the ideas and world-views of individual performers.

It was important, however, to maintain a minimum of decency so that the families in the audience were not disrespected, and this was one of the main reasons why verbal challenges could result in real fights. When it was thought that a singer had been offensive and demonstrated a lack of respect for the audience, the poetic challenge could become a physical confrontation. Sidoca remembers the case of a *calango* that degenerated into a fight when a drunken man used a swear-word in his strophe:

And in those days, for God's sake, man, you couldn't say a thing, not one little thing like that, OK, if the ladies at the dance heard it, you were expelled or you had to start a stick fight. Once we were singing a *calango*, you understand? I too was part of the *calango*, the *calango* was beautiful, right? And this guy said a foolish verse, you understand? . . . We were four in a circle like that, and there was a drunken man sitting here, next to the accordion player. The accordion player there, the guy here, and me standing here by one end of the bench. And then the [*calango*] round was coming from there to here. One sings, the next sings, the other sings, and here it comes. . . . When it came to the man next to me, and it was going to be my turn to sing the drunkard stood up: 'Oh, what a beautiful *calango*, I want to sing in this *calango* too'. I said, 'Hey, you can't sing now, you have to wait for your turn'. . . . When it was my turn, I sang like this:

Mr Mané Bento, tuck your shirt inside your trousers
It was the police sergeant who gave the order

Then the drunkard said his verse:

Boning knife closes the bite of the vulture
I'll get mad, your old smell of arse

[Laughs] The circle . . . they broke the guitar over his head: it went through it up to his neck. Man, I never saw so much hitting, pieces of bamboo, pieces of *pindola*, this thing you cover huts with, and all together they hit the man. I laughed so much about the verse, I couldn't hold it in any longer. But I said: they're going to kill him . . .⁷⁹

The *calango* consisted in a verbal challenge with clear and formal rules. Yet the borderline was thin between what was acceptable and what was an insult and an attack on the honour of the opponents or of the families in the audience. For that reason, the *calango* represented a chance for tough guys to show what they were made of, without the risk of appearing aggressive and looking for a fight. But *calango* singing was not limited to men only. Women could and did participate, and could challenge men.⁸⁰

The Encounter between Kings' Follies and the 'Clown's Hammer'

Rhymed verses also have a crucial function in the *folias*. They can be recited or sung, and there are different types of chants according to each phase of the revelry. The master of the *folia* needs to have a good knowledge of the Bible, and to be able to learn by heart or invent verses that relate to relevant episodes of the Old and the New Testaments. According to Castro and Couto, the chants are inspired by the traditions of popular Catholicism, but also by the 'conceptions that are current in the Afro-Brazilian cults (*macumbas*) from Rio de Janeiro, and the sufferings of Saint Sebastian (patron saint of the city)'.⁸¹ Even today many *folias* are still associated with *umbanda* shrines.

The verses in the *folia* have a mnemonic function. The rhyme helps the *mestres* and clowns to remember histories, episodes from the Bible, or more general themes of public interest. When reciting they transmitted knowledge and their own reflections to their communities, where the majority used to be illiterate. Illiterate clowns asked people to read verses out to them and in this manner some of them learned whole books by heart. As in the case of the *calango*, the clown's poetic performance tended therefore to be formulaic in style. Challenges in the Kings' Folly could take oral poetic forms or not, but they were always inserted into a complex ritual. The most propitious moments for physical and poetic challenges were the so-called 'encounters' of two *folias* in the public space.⁸² Two basic types of poetic disputes characterized this occasion: the challenge between *mestres* and the challenge between clowns.

The challenge between masters was based on their knowledge of the Bible, in particular the birth of Christ and the episode of the Three Wise Men. As Sebastião Teresa, the owner of a *folia* in Miracema, describes it:

The masters of the Folly start to sing, a dozen or so verses each. When one stops, the other sings. After the singing, the master of the banner [of the Folly] offers a gift [a small sum of money] to the other one. The other one does the same. In the prophecy, if there was one incorrect verse, the other one can say, 'Listen man, the verse here should go like this!'⁸³

The better their 'foundations', that is, knowledge of the 'prophecies', the easier it was for one *mestre* to catch the other out. One very common method was to stop singing one's verses at the most complicated moment of the plot, and leave it to the other master to continue. He would only be

able to do so if he knew that particular episode well. Otherwise the first master could point out his mistake, and consider himself the winner of the dispute. Another technique was to produce a riddle, as in the *jongo*, and leave the other to solve it.⁸⁴

Once the masters of the Folly had finished, the moment came for the clowns to play. These ‘games’ (*brincadeiras*) were as much physical as poetic. The clowns used a whole range of verses in their game: thanks to the host, jokes to entertain the audience, *trovas* (verses prepared in advance), *romance* and *peleja* (verses taken from a book), biblical episodes (for example Abraham being tested by God to prove his faith, or the end of the world), improvisations, *calango* (improvisation on the basis of the text of a known song) – and the *martelo* (‘hammer’), a challenge.⁸⁵ Their repertoire consisted of a combination of strophes learnt by heart and improvised lines.⁸⁶

The *martelo* or challenge between two clowns is thus less a competition in knowledge (although this is also possible), than a provocation of one by the other in poetic form.⁸⁷ The challenge between the clowns Cascadura and Mamut might serve as an example:

Cascadura

In the hammer I don't know
Of any poet that can eat me
Scratching the earth in front of me
Does not cut any ice with me
I have a hot tongue
To utter any disgrace
A lash with my whip
Leaves marks on the skeleton

Mamut

I like to play with clowns
I don't like to play alone
My fellow-countryman is inciting well
Can I provoke a little bit more?

Cascadura

Colleague you'd better get prepared
I came here to poke your tongue
I came here to destroy your fame
I came here to pull out your tongue
In the factory of my verse
I put an end to your witchcraft [*mandinga*]
I don't believe in grumbles
You can go your way
If you want to dispute with me, my friend
You'd better take it slowly

Because I have more weight
 And I'm surrounded by thorns
 I'm going to cut you in small pieces
 Like meat for a sausage
 Call the priest, confess yourself
 And say mass
 Because the vulture will eat your carcass . . .⁸⁸

The result of the Follies encounter depended as much on the performance of the masters as on that of the clowns. Sometimes the members of a Folly recognized that their knowledge of the bible and the arts of rhyme were inferior, and admitted defeat. Various statements record that an experienced master could thus destroy a weaker opponent, and even question his knowledge of the 'foundations' and his capacity and legitimacy to lead a King's Folly. The term 'burial' (*enterro*) was used to describe the situation where a Folly was taken by surprise in a house due to a lack of vigilance of its clowns, who were supposed to check if other Follies were approaching. In that situation a *folia* could not leave without going through a series of tests. The 'burial' of a Folly was hence another opportunity to challenge the knowledge of its master and clowns. Yet outcomes of challenges were not always so clear cut. As with the *calango*, it was for the audience to decide the winner. These were delicate moments, and poetic disputes could easily erupt into physical challenges and fights. A clown in particular could so provoke, or as Sebastião Teresa says, 'damage', his opponent that the latter would lose his temper, and respond not only with verses, but with his stick. Clowns carried sticks for a good reason.

PHYSICAL CHALLENGES: CUDGELLING, SWIPING KICKS AND *CHULAS*

Physical challenges were exclusively male in the popular culture of Rio de Janeiro state – with the exception of dance.⁸⁹ Challenges included playful modes as well as more aggressive forms, as in fights and brawls. Popular games were played according to unwritten rules. *Jogo do pau* (stick play), *pernada* (swiping leg), *chula de palhaço* (game between clowns) and the *malha* game were the most popular games by which men measured their strength and physical dexterity.⁹⁰ Stick play and the clowns' games were the most ritualized forms of physical challenge.

Jogo do pau and *pernada*

Sticks for playing and fighting were of medium size, about a metre long. Techniques varied significantly according to the location. The most common strokes were *estocada* (thrust), *quebra-queixo* (jaw breaker), and *mata-cobra* (snake killer). Two men or boys played against each other; each had to defend himself from the other's blows. Training and playing developed dexterity of manoeuvre and appropriate responses

(defence or counter-attack), developing the resources available for deployment in a game or in a fight. Women did not usually play sticks, but as with *capoeira*, there were some exceptions. The late spouse of Manoel Seabra, for example, learned stick-play from her husband, and it seems that she was good at it.⁹¹

The game had its rules and rituals. If two men met and wanted to play, they greeted each other and maintained a kind of friendly dialogue whilst starting to play sticks. Another rough game between men or adolescents was the *pernada*, which consisted in throwing the opponent to the ground by swiping at his leg(s). Africans and their descendents used this technique in various regions of Brazil, from the *punga dos homens* in Maranhão to the *batuque* in Bahia. Clearly these throwing techniques have been absorbed into contemporary *capoeira*.⁹² In the Paraíba valley too the *pernada* was a feature of male recreation and a precious resource in fights. João Batista Azedias remembers:

My father also taught us, he put us in the backyard, and gave swiping kicks. [He taught us] to defend yourself against a stick blow, to hit with the cudgel, to take the stick from the opponent. To play sticks. So he could hit us with a cudgel, give a swiping kick, we knew how to protect ourselves from that.⁹³

The *pernada* could be a game in its own right. But it often went together with stick play or fighting:

You could do both together. Sometimes with only a stick in the hand, if you didn't want to hit another person, you didn't. If you wanted to give a swiping kick, if I thought that the cudgel would not be useful, I would swipe with the leg.⁹⁴

Since stick play and the *rasteira* were also the main resources in violent conflicts, both were seen as much more than an innocent game. The better a man was at both techniques, the better were his chances of not getting hit or thrown in a fight, be it in a dance venue or on the road. That is why the father of João Batista Azedias insisted so much to his sons that 'a man never walks around unprepared'; and he was not joking:

My father was like that: if I got a beating somewhere, when I arrived home I had to keep quiet, otherwise he would give me another beating. He said that this was for me to learn how to hit.⁹⁵

The athletic Sunday games, in particular stick play and the *rasteira*, thus fulfilled an important function. They prepared adolescents or young men for any contingency; they taught how to defend oneself and one's family against

offence and provocation from peers. In other words, these skills were fundamental to defend male honour and assert masculinity.⁹⁶

Physical Challenges in the Kings' Follies

Physical challenges also complemented poetic disputes in the *folia*. The procession, the reception by supporters in their homes, and the meeting of two Follies constituted highly ritualized events. The role of the clowns was to protect the *folia*, and for that reason their place was at the front of the procession, next to the banner. When one Folly met another, the clowns drew a dividing line on the ground just ahead of their banner. The clowns of the other folly were expected to respect that line. Crossing it meant they were lacking respect and usually resulted in a fight.⁹⁷ When the banners of the two Follies crossed the encounter started. Each clown had to stay put next to his banner. When the poetic bout between the masters of the follies had ended, it was time for the clowns to play. They challenged each other not only through verses, as described above, but also through a physical performance, called the *chula*.⁹⁸ They jumped, crouched, turned somersaults, and mimicked each other. In short, the *chula* was a theatre-like performance, which allowed each clown to display the full range of his acrobatic and theatrical skills. Each bodily technique had a name, often inspired by the movement of the animals the clowns mimicked, for example the 'chula of the monkey', or the 'cuddle of the vulture'.⁹⁹ Clowns made good use of their sticks in their performance by jumping over them or using them to keep the audience at bay.

Various interviewees point out that in former times, the clowns' performances were more physical, while today they mainly recite verses. I believe that the *chula* also prepared clowns for more serious physical confrontations. Former clowns assert that in 'olden times', the encounters between Follies frequently resulted in fights, to the point that the police intervened and prohibited Follies altogether. The reasons for the brawls varied, but generally they resulted from the challenges that were issued when two *folias* met. The fight could begin with a disagreement over the performance of the masters or the clowns. Nobody liked to admit defeat, especially when losing had such dramatic consequences: according to tradition, the winner took all the instruments of the *folia* that lost. Since contests often had no clear outcome, discussion followed, which usually involved the audience, and the result was commonly decided by violent means, including use of the clowns' sticks. If clowns got carried away in the poetic contest, the *martelo*, and the challenge went beyond what was considered acceptable, at some stage a clown would reach for his stick to reply to his opponent. Fights also occurred when men from the audience took offence at the clowns' games.

We can now sum up the various modes of physical challenge between males, and reflect upon their rationale. Individual fights and collective brawls broke out for a variety of reasons, but challenges or insults usually

figure as the most prominent – at least in criminal records.¹⁰⁰ It is of course to take explanations offered by the accused in a criminal enquiry at face value. Courts generally wanted to find out whether there was some resentment between protagonists prior to a fight, or instead a brawl arose ‘spontaneously’ from the circumstances of the dance and excess of alcohol consumption. In the first case the prosecution could argue for premeditation, which increased the penalty. In the second, the defendant could invoke the influence of drink, and escape a severer sentence.¹⁰¹

Several oral testimonies, however, suggest that often fights were not just between individuals but involved larger groups: extended families, workers on an estate, or whole communities such as São José da Serra. So when a fight erupted on the dance-floor, the reason for the quarrel mattered little. The dispute quickly generalized, and each side formed according to existing networks, opposing ‘outsiders’ to ‘insiders’.¹⁰² The provocation of outsiders could start with *calango* verses such as the following:

Hey guys! Look at this
All come here and see
I never saw old cows
Grazing on other people’s pasture.¹⁰³

In such a case the outsiders could ‘untie’ the challenge with another verse. But if they did not know one or did not want to ‘undo’ the provocation, they attacked the singer physically. In that sense, confrontations during dances reproduced those in the fields or on the roads. They were part of the relations between groups and communities, which could co-operate for survival, but also competed for resources (land or labour) or for the right to court women, in particular those of another village. In other words, these fights – and more generally all the challenges – represented one side of the ambivalent relationships between men and communities.

Ritualization can meanwhile explain why brawls, though frequent, typically did not go beyond established limits. Fights rarely resulted in deaths, because usually no firearms were used. The most common weapon was the stick. An experienced player knew how to defend himself from blows and avoid injury. And those who got hit rarely wanted to show off their wounds. As Jorge Fernandes explains:

The guys were all good. They played, and fought with the cudgel. It was with the cudgel and the arm. There wasn’t any of the violence of today, no... Today there is a lot of violence, right? Any little row, and one takes the life of the other. But in the old days no, they beat the head of each other bloody, and the blood stuck on their heads. But it all ended there, in the brawl, during the dance... They spent a few days [curing their wounds], and everything was fine. [...].¹⁰⁴

For those who were not at ease with the stick, the *rasteira* (swiping kick) provided a good alternative. That is how João Azedias earned his nickname of ‘cabrito liso’ (‘smooth goatie’):

I gave a lot of swiping kicks . . . I never gave a blow with a stick or a knife. I never aimed to hurt anybody, thank God. People even called me ‘smooth goatie’, sometimes they came to hit me with a cudgel, I lay on the ground and brought them down with a swiping kick. They fell in the middle of the crowd.¹⁰⁵

The *rasteira* technique is also mentioned in the north-east of Rio de Janeiro state. Even though many clowns hit with the stick they always carried with them, others fought with the *rasteira*. As Sebastião Teresa explains, when a clown provoked another clown, if the latter retaliated on the same level, everything could end peacefully. But if one lost his temper, a fight broke out:

Clowns fought with *rasteira*. They gave it with the left or the right foot. They sat on the ground, supported by one hand and gave *rasteira*.¹⁰⁶

Rural workers even used tools such as sickles in fights, but given their dexterity, these seldom caused deaths.¹⁰⁷ The use of knives, in contrast, was more likely to result in serious injuries, if still much less than firearms. A case study for neighbouring Minas Gerais shows that firearms had been used in sixty-two percent and blades (*armas brancas*) in twenty-six percent of homicides.¹⁰⁸

Without idealizing the ‘olden times’, it is necessary to emphasize that this violence was very different from the violence of today. As informants such as Jorge Fernandes point out:

No, it was good, because there was no violence like now. Today one really wants to kill the other. But in former times, no . . . fights were with sticks If you knocked somebody down, that was it. The guy who could still bear it, endure it, would find a stick and take revenge. He would hit with the stick as well. The guy who was the best, then, did win, but he only won the fight, there was not all this violence of one killing the other, no.

. . . there was a moment when the head of a guy cracked [*rachar*] and the blood dripped . . . that’s right, from the head, but one thing was clear: nobody would go and call the police. The disagreement ended right there, at the dance . . . The police only came if there was some death, if there was some violence, some death. But this thing of cracking the other guy’s head with a stick, that was nothing, that was normal . . .¹⁰⁹

In other words, in most cases the brawls that originated during dances had no serious consequences. They were seen as a diversion or almost a sport, an occasion for a man to show his worth. There was no intention to kill or to maim the opponent, only to distinguish oneself and to 'shine' (*brilhar*). For that reason we have to be careful when extrapolating attitudes and behaviour from criminal sources, because they usually record only the cases when a fight did turn into 'real' violence, that is, went beyond the acceptable boundaries.¹¹⁰ The cases of physical injury registered in criminal records only signal those moments at which the ritualization of poetic and physical challenges failed. Indeed, the increasing dissemination of firearms (revolvers) among the poor male population of the countryside was to render fights as a 'normal' continuation of male challenges during dance functions no longer viable.¹¹¹ Numerous episodes heard from informants suggest that the rules of the game changed with the wide availability of firearms.

CONCLUSIONS

The Brazilian song-writer João Bosco has extolled the capacities of the *cavaquinho* (Brazilian ukulele), which can 'wound, maim, hurt like a dagger' and even incite a general brawl (*'pega na geral'*).¹¹² In the Paraíba valley, poetic challenges accompanied by music also provoked and excited men to the point that they started fights. Rather than seeing this as an expression of uncivilized roughness I have tried to argue here that these challenges and brawls constituted fairly ritualized encounters through which male rural workers, most of them descendants of slaves, could 'shine' in a number of ways. What is more, the violence of physical challenges between friends in communities, competing groups of young men or strangers on the roads needs to be relativized. A bloody head, a swollen knee or bruising seemed acceptable risks for young men in return for social recognition. Living in a social order that relegated them to menial labour and low pay, forced them into patron-client relationships, and demoted them to the bottom of the post-emancipation social and racial hierarchy, the assertion of their own worth through physical challenges could become crucially important. Excelling in verbal duels likewise allowed participants to assert their dignity and prove their equality to others. As Elisabeth Travassos concluded in her analysis of the Northeast Brazilian *desafio*, the verbal challenge

has sustained its popularity and vitality by promoting a horizontal ethic among individuals whose weapon is their poetic talent, and the singers strive not to contaminate their identity as poets with the social identities they carry outside the performance area.¹¹³

From today's perspective, hitting each other may seem an odd way of promoting one's dignity, but such practices were previously very common in

both European and African societies.¹¹⁴ Given that in some places men steal the cattle of people they want to impress, these rustic duels do not stand out as particularly extraordinary or violent.¹¹⁵ In fact, as the stick players' testimonies substantiate, they were clearly seen as fun, making fighting an 'agreeable recreation' as, for example, in nineteenth-century Ireland.¹¹⁶ These practices and their cultural meaning can hence be compared to 'traditional sports' in other Atlantic societies or to some forms of duelling in Europe.¹¹⁷ As a recent analysis of the wider meaning of violent contests asserts: 'A challenge is, in other words, a form of respect'.¹¹⁸ So the widespread use of challenges in rural Afro-Brazilian culture in Rio de Janeiro state afforded practitioners respect and a sense of equality that was otherwise denied to them.

At the same time these physical and verbal challenges promoted social cohesion among emancipated slaves who squatted on land belonging to their former master, among the free workforce on larger estates, or within the hamlets and towns that developed in the post-emancipation period. Furthermore they helped to pass on to younger people sets of values and precious experiences of older generations.¹¹⁹

So what made the physical and poetic challenges of the Paraíba valley special? It was, I would argue, the fascinating combination of very different types of challenge within a complex web of Afro-Brazilian cultural forms. Some challenges were exclusively male, in particular within the *folia*. But women could shine as much as men in the *pontos de demanda* of the *jongo* and in *calangos*. One could of course argue that Catholic patriarchy dictated the rules of the *folia*, but let us not forget that there was substantial variation in Central African societies too regarding gender roles and family structures. Gender roles in Afro-Brazilian culture still await more detailed analysis.

The examination of *jongos*, *calangos*, *folias* and *jogo do pau* shows not only the richness of cultural expression in the Paraíba valley, but also that each of these forms cannot be analysed in isolation. Their performance by broadly the same social actors has resulted in intensive circulation of all kinds of material since their formative period: they share instruments, verses and rhymes, images, and even aspects of their spirituality. At the same time, the prevailing religious and political power structures ensured differentiated treatment (repression, tolerance, support) and contributed to the compartmentalization of these forms. *Jongo* is still performed in the courtyard and *calango* under a roof. The bible knowledge of the *folia* coexists but does not merge with knowledge of the African-derived 'foundations' of the *jongo*. The *jongo* evokes Central African world-views, whilst in the *calango*, verses that demote black people can be part of the rhetorical strategy. One should beware, however, of jumping to easy conclusions regarding 'resistance to' or 'accommodation of' these practices. As Muniz Sodré has demonstrated, we should pay as much attention to the 'performative' as to the 'constative' side of the poetic challenge.¹²⁰

Fusion and convergence were complemented by juxtaposition in what can be described as a broad, and often contradictory, process of creolization. The ample circulation of elements and the overlapping identity of performers (the same people involved in the different forms) invalidates the classification of these practices along strictly ethnic or racialized lines, although such classification remains integral to much contemporary discourse and policy. Thus not only the recently revitalized *jongo*, but also the *calango* and *folia* are significant expressions of Afro-Brazilian heritage, deserving to be treasured and supported as much as the former. Fortunately a recent decision to incorporate the *folia* into the official 'intangible cultural heritage' of Brazil is a step in the right direction, and will no doubt enhance its visibility.¹²¹

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1 'Meu pai era colono / e meeiro muito bom / Calangueava a noite inteira/ Não perdia verso não': from 'Linha do ão', Martinho da Vila, *O Pequeno Burguês*, CD Track 2.

2 From a criminal record, Guaratinguetá, 1890, quoted in Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco, *Homens livres na ordem escravocrata* (1969), São Paulo, 2nd edn, 1976, pp. 39–40.

3 Franco, *Homens livres*, p. 35.

4 Edison Carneiro distinguishes three types of belly-bouncing dances from Congo/Angola that have developed in Brazil: the *côco*, the *samba* and the *jongo*. *Samba de umbigada*, Rio de Janeiro, 1961, p. 15.

5 For the origins of *folias*, see Affonso M. Furtado da Silva, *Reis Magos: História, Arte, Tradições: fontes e referências*, Rio de Janeiro, 2006, pp. 18–43; and Suzel Ana Reily, *Voices of the Magi: Enchanted Journeys in Southeast Brazil*, Chicago, 2002, pp. 5–6, 29–31.

6 *Caipira* is the term (noun and adjective) commonly used in the states of Minas Gerais, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro for the poor inhabitants of the interior. It does not have a racial ascription. See Antonio Candido, *Os parceiros do Rio Bonito: Estudo sobre o caipira paulista e a transformação dos seus meios de vida*, São Paulo, 1987, p. 28.

7 Luís da Câmara Cascudo, *Vaqueiros e cantadores*, São Paulo, 2004, p. 192.

8 Roger Bastide, 'Dos duelos de tambores ao desafio brasileiro', in Roger Bastide, *Sociologia do folclore brasileiro*, São Paulo, 1959, pp. 66–73. (Reprinted from his *Psicanálise do café: estudos de sociologia estética Brasileira*, Curitiba, 1941.)

9 Bastide, 'Dos duelos de tambores', pp. 68–9.

10 Bastide, 'Dos duelos de tambores', p. 72. *Caboclo* means a person of Native Brazilian ancestry. It can also refer to a peasant more generally, or to spirits identified with Brazilian Indians.

11 Mário de Andrade, 'O desafio brasileiro', *Estado de São Paulo*, 23 Nov. 1941. Reprinted in *Cartas de Mário de Andrade a Luis da Câmara Cascudo*, Rio de Janeiro, 2000, pp. 163–7. Câmara Cascudo wrote a reply a month later, asserting that it would have been his 'greatest happiness' to record that the challenge was part of African customs, but that he could not do so because 'all the books that I have read studying the black in his continent have been silent regarding this intellectual form of poetic competition'. Moreover, he noted, all the examples quoted by Bastide were of recent origin, and therefore 'uncharacteristic': 'Desafio africano', manuscript dated 28 Dec. 1941, reprinted in *Cartas*, pp. 168–70. Cascudo was nevertheless often keen to assert the African origins of Brazilian art forms. He passionately defended, for example, the African origins of *capoeira* against Brazilian nationalists who maintained that this martial art was invented from scratch by slaves in Brazil.

12 Roger Bastide, 'Ainda o desafio brasileiro', reprinted in Bastide, *Sociologia do folclore brasileiro*, pp. 76–8.

13 John R. Bowen, 'Poetic Duels and Political Change in the Gayo Highlands of Sumatra', *American Anthropologist* 91: 1, March 1989; Elizabeth Mathias, 'La Gara Poetica: Sardinian Shepherds' Verbal Dueling and the Expression of Male Values in an Agro-Pastoral Society', *Ethos* 4: 4, Winter 1976; Don Brenneis and Ram Padarath, "'About Those Scoundrels I'll Let Everyone Know": Challenge Singing in a Fiji Indian Community', *Journal of American Folklore* 88: 349, July–September 1975; Thomas Solomon, 'Coplás de Todos Santos in Cochabamba: Language, Music, and Performance in Bolivian Quechua Song Dueling', *Journal of American Folklore* 107: 425, Summer 1994; Alan Dundes, Jerry W. Leach and Bora Özkök, 'The Strategy of Turkish Boys' Verbal Dueling Rhymes', *Journal of American Folklore* 83: 329, July–September 1970.

14 Thomas W. Gallant, 'Honor, Masculinity, and Ritual Knife Fighting in Nineteenth-Century Greece', *American Historical Review* 105: 2, April 2000; John W. Hurley, *Irish Gangs and Stick-Fighting in the Works of William Carleton*, Xlibris (print on demand), 2001; Marie-Helen Coetzee, 'Zulu Stick Fighting: a Socio-Historical Overview', *Journal of Alternative Perspectives*, Sept 2002, http://ejmas.com/jalt/jaltart_Coetzee_0902.htm (accessed 29 April 2003); Michael Joseph Ryan, 'Hard Knocks on a Thick Skull: Training the Body for a Closed Habitus in a Venezuelan Civilian Combative Art', PhD thesis, Anthropology Department, Binghamton University, 2007; Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870–1900*, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 167–75 on stick fighting; Phillip B. Zarrilli, "'Doing the Exercise": The In-Body Transmission of Performance Knowledge in a Traditional Martial Art', *Asian Theatre Journal* 1: 2, Autumn 1984; E. Veiga de Oliveira, 'Stockspiel in Basto', Publikationen zu *Wissenschaftlichen Filmen*, Sektion Ethnologie, 9: 38, Göttingen, 1979; Tony Wolf, 'Juego de Palo: Stick Fencing of the Canary Islands', *Journal of Western Martial Arts*, May 2000, http://jwma.ejmas.com/php-bin/jwma_content.php?LLM=0&Tab=articles&MD (accessed 24 Jan. 2012).

15 'Playing the Dozens', *Journal of American Folklore* 75: 297, July–September 1962, p. 214.

16 *The Signifying Monkey: a Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, New York and Oxford, 1988, pp. 80–1. Irony, deception and other rhetorical strategies, which Gates subsumes under the umbrella term 'Signifyin', are equally common in Brazil. A good example is the figure of Pai João (Father John), usually identified as a Brazilian version of Uncle Tom or Uncle Remus – though as Martha Abreu has shown, this is largely due to a misinterpretation by folklorists and academics, who did not grasp the irony of his apparent subservience. Pai João often challenged the constraints imposed on black people in the aftermath of emancipation, and

used rhetorical strategies that are clearly equivalent to Signifyin'. See Martha Abreu, 'Outras histórias de Pai João: conflitos raciais, protesto escravo e irreverência sexual na poesia popular, 1880–1950', *Afro-Ásia* 31, 2004.

17 Interview with Liélides José da Silva ('Sidoca'), in *Miracema*, 4 Jan. 2008.

18 Franco, *Homens livres*, p. 35.

19 Alceu Maynard Araújo, *Folclore Nacional*, 2nd edn, São Paulo, 1967, vol. 3, pp. 85–6.

20 *Vassouras, a Brazilian Coffee County, 1850–1900: the Roles of Planter and Slave in a Plantation Society*, 3rd edn, Princeton, 1985, p. 163.

21 Interview with Manoel Seabra, Teresinha de Jesus and Joao Batista Azedias, in São José da Serra (Valença), 17 March 2007.

22 Araújo, *Folclore Nacional*, vol. 3, p. 88.

23 Interview with Jorge Fernandes and Manoel Seabra, in São José, 1 April 2007.

24 Franco, *Homens livres*, p. 39.

25 Interview with José Inácio Coutinho da Silva, Santa Isabel (Valença), 9 Sept. 2007.

26 Interview with Jorge Fernandes and Manoel Seabra, São José, 1 April 2007.

27 Araújo, *Folclore Nacional*, vol. 1, p. 193; vol. 2, p. 51.

28 Interview with Jorge Fernandes and Manoel Seabra, São José, 1 April 2007.

29 In São Paulo, Alceu Maynard Araújo saw *calango* accompanied by a guitar (*viola*): *Folclore Nacional*, vol. 3, p. 91.

30 Luís da Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário do folclore brasileiro*, Rio de Janeiro, 1954, entry 'Calango', p. 146.

31 Francisco Pereira da Silva, *O desafio calangueado. Monografia folclórica*, São José dos Campos, São Paulo (Conselho Estadual de Artes e Ciências Humanas), 1976, p. 22.

32 Jorge Fernandes, Interview with Jorge Fernandes and Manoel Seabra, São José, 1 April 2007.

33 Interview with Jorge Fernandes and Manoel Seabra, São José, 1 April 2007. There are many other similar testimonies.

34 *Macumba* is the Afro-Brazilian religion that developed in Rio de Janeiro; *umbanda* evolved from *macumba* incorporating European Spiritualism.

35 Wilson Penteado Júnior convincingly argues that this is a strategic option: *Jongueiros do Tamararé: Devoção, memória e identidade social no ritual do jongo em Guaratinguetá, SP*, São Paulo, 2010, pp. 198–201.

36 Maria de Lourdes Borges Ribeiro distinguishes three types: *jongo de roda*, *jongo de corte* or *carrioca*, and *jongo paulista*. See *O jongo, Cadernos de Folclore* 34, Rio de Janeiro, 1984, p. 58. For further descriptions of various types, see Araújo, *Folclore Nacional* 2, pp. 219–21, 227–9. Important variations also exist regarding the musical instruments and other aspects. In some areas the overall denomination is *caxambu*, not *jongo*. This has led some folklorists to distinguish between these two forms.

37 Ribeiro, *O jongo*, p. 16.

38 References to women challenging men can be found in Ribeiro, *O jongo*, p. 48, and to their exclusion from drumming, p. 20. Robert Slenes asserts that 'Jongueiro women, today a significant minority, were rare during the middle of the twentieth century, and probably extremely rare during the nineteenth century': Slenes, "'Eu venho de muito longe, eu venho cavando": jongueiros cumba na senzala centro-africana', in *Memória do Jongo: as gravações históricas de Stanley J. Stein, Vassouras*, ed. Sílvia Humold Lara and Gustavo Pacheco (Rio de Janeiro, 1949), Campinas, 2007, p. 109, note 2.

39 Camilla Agostini studied the murder of a slave after a *jongo*. The homicide probably arose from a 'dispute in words' that took place during a *caxambu* outside and continued in the slave barrack, where twenty workers slept: 'Africanos no cativo e a construção de identidades no além-mar', MA dissertation, History, UNICAMP, 2002, p. 90. Hebe Mattos also briefly examines a homicide during a *jongo*: see *Das cores do silêncio. Os significados da liberdade no sudeste escravista, Brasil, século XIX*, Rio de Janeiro, 1988, p. 346.

40 Reily refers to the musical mode of ritual orchestration in *folias* as 'enchantment' promoting intense emotional experiences: *Voices of the Magi*, p. 3.

41 See Cásia Frade, *Folclore brasileiro. Rio de Janeiro*, p. 43, for the rules of conduct of a Kings' Folly.

42 While the exclusion of women from the core costumed group was quite systematic in former times, today *folias* usually include women. See Andrade, *Dicionário musical*, entry 'Folia', p. 229; Frade, *Guia*, p. 104; and the survey by Antonio Soares de Almeida, 'Pesquisa

da manifestação cultural do Rio de Janeiro' (Angra do Reis, Araruama, Mangaratiba, Parati e Saquarema), Relatório Final, Rio de Janeiro, 1979. (Final Report of an official survey jointly published by Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro and the Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Cultural/Divisão de Pesquisa da Manifestação cultural.)

43 There is considerable variation in the musical instruments of *folias*. See Araújo, *Folclore Nacional*, vol. 1, p. 135, Ribeiro, *O jongo*, pp. 19–21.

44 'The folly preaches the birth of Christ, and theoretically, aims for Bethlehem, to pay homage to the Child, but the soldiers of Herod – the clowns – try to divert them from the road marked out for them by the Star of the East': Zaide Maciel de Castro and Aracy do Prado Couto, 'Folia de Reis', *Cadernos de Folclore* (nova série) 16, 1977, p. 3.

45 This information was provided by active clowns and elderly former clowns in the town of Miracema, in November 2007 and January 2008. For more details on clowns, see also Castro e Couto, 'Folia de reis', pp. 3, 15.

46 Andrade, *Dicionário musical*, entry 'Folia-de-reis', p. 230.

47 For an analysis of the clown in terms of Turnerian liminality, see Daniel Bitter, *A bandeira e a máscara. A circulação de objetos rituais nas folias de reis*, Rio de Janeiro, 2010. The association with the devil has also led to the identification of the clown with the Afro-Brazilian trickster Exú.

48 For an analysis of the historiography of *jongo* and its ascription as a 'black' art form, see Hebe Mattos and Martha Abreu, 'Jongos, registro de uma história', in *Memória do Jongo: as gravações históricas de Stanley J. Stein, Vassouras*, ed. Sílvia Humold Lara and Gustavo Pacheco (1949), Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

49 For example Gustavo Pereira Côrtes, *Dança, Brasil! : festas de danças populares*, Belo Horizonte, 2000.

50 Luis da Câmara Cascudo avoids this kind of classification in his *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro*, 3rd edn, Rio de Janeiro, 1972, entry 'Calango', pp. 228–9.

51 Martinho da Vila, 'Calango longo', on his *Martinho ao vivo 3.0 turbinado*, Columbia CD, 1998. *Caboclo* denotes an acculturated descendent of Indians as well as a mestizo, and has acquired a range of further meanings, most of which overlap with the idea of hybridity.

52 It seems to me that *calango* can take on board these magical aspects especially in communities who no longer have the *jongo*. This again reinforces the argument for the intense circulation of discrete elements within the cultural forms examined here.

53 The only difference is that the practice of *jongo* is more restricted, to a dozen or so communities of Afro-descendants in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

54 This is the central argument of the documentary film *Jongos, calangos e folias: Música negra, memória e poesia*, directed by Hebe Mattos and Martha Abreu (Rio de Janeiro, 2007). It is available online at <http://ufftube.uff.br/video/9RBAHO806474/Jongos-Calangos-e-Folias-M%C3%BAsica-Negra-Mem%C3%B3ria-e-Poesia>.

55 Since 1988, there has been an interesting reversal in the use of racial ascriptions. The *jongo* used to be the most despised of the three. But black communities that preserved the *jongo* can now capitalize on this patrimony to claim the status of 'maroon community' (*quilombo*) and with that claim rights to the land they occupy. During the last twenty years the *jongo* has greatly increased its visibility.

56 Nova Friburgo is a town in the mountains that divide the coast of Rio de Janeiro state from the Paraíba valley.

57 The origins of both *bumba-meu-boi* and *capoeira* are hotly disputed. See, for example, Kazadi Wa Mukuna, *An Interdisciplinary Study of the Ox and the Slave (Bumba-Meu-Boi), a Satirical Music Drama in Brazil*, Lewistown NY and Lampeter, 2003; Matthias Röhrig Assunção, *Capoeira, the History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*, London, 2005.

58 A good example – already discussed by Bastide – is the Cuban *punto*. The *punto* is based on classical Spanish *décima* verses, developed in medieval Spain mainly by Jewish and *mozarabe* (Muslims living under Catholic rule) poets. Yet precisely because of its Iberian origin, the use of *décimas* in Afro-Cuban *rumba* is usually understated. As Philip Pasmanick explains, '... if the *décima* experts ignore the *rumba* because it is 'too black', I believe the Afro-Cubanists, if I may use the term, ignore the *décima* as too Spanish, too colonial, too white': Philip Pasmanick, 'Décima and Rumba: Iberian Formalism in the Heart of Afro-Cuban Song', *Latin American Music Review* 18: 2, Fall–Winter 1997, p. 260.

59 Ribeiro, *O jongo*, p. 29–30.

60 Cásia Frade (co-ordinator), *Cantos do folclore fluminense*, Rio de Janeiro, 1986, p. 23.

61 Frade, *Cantos*, p. 23. According to Araujo, *jongo* verses used to be longer in the past: *Folclore Nacional*, vol. 2, p. 206.

62 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 26–7.

63 Nei Lopes, *Partido-alto. Samba de bamba*, Rio de Janeiro, 2005, p. 32.

64 Tania Alkmin, ‘Falas e cores: um estudo sobre o português de negros e escravos no Brasil do século XIX’, in *História social da língua nacional*, ed. Ivana Stolze Lima and Laura do Carmo, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p. 259.

65 Stein, *Vassouras*, p. 163.

66 Ribeiro provides a glossary of African terms used in *pontos* such as *angoma*, *cacunda*, *cumbi*, *lambari*, *macota*, *piquira*, *vadelaque*: see *O jongo*, pp. 30–1.

67 For the different types of *pontos*, see Araújo, *Folclore Nacional*, vol. 2, p. 222; Ribeiro, *O jongo*, pp. 23–31; Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN), *Jongo do Sudeste*, 2005, p. 55.

68 Ribeiro, *O jongo*, pp. 24, 41; *Penteado, Jongueiros*, p. 57.

69 Interview with Manoel Seabra, Teresinha de Jesus, João Batista Azedias, in São José, 17 March 2007; Projeto Jongo, *Calangos, Folias, Tape 80*. See also the documentary *Jongos, calangos e folias*.

70 Jongo do Sudeste, IPHAN 2005, p.55. *Macumba* hence means the reunion of *cumbas*. For more on ‘*macumba*, magic and *jongo*’, see Ribeiro, *O jongo*, pp. 49–58.

71 For a more detailed analysis, see Slenes, ‘“Eu venho de muito longe, eu venho cavando”’, in *Memória do Jongo*, ed. Lara and Pacheco.

72 Slenes, ‘“Eu venho . . .”’, p. 138.

73 Câmara Cascudo says very little about the *calango* in his piece on oral literature in Brazil, and gives it only half a page in his dictionary of folklore. Luis da Câmara Cascudo, *Literatura oral no Brasil*, 2nd edn, Rio de Janeiro, 1978; *Dicionário do folclore brasileiro*, 3rd edn, Rio de Janeiro. Mário de Andrade also disregarded the *calango*, since the annotations for his *Dicionário musical brasileiro* only contain one brief reference to it, as a dance with ‘whirls, unhinging and languishing movements, which induced him to classify it as a ‘dance of African origin’. *Dicionário musical brasileiro*, co-ordinated by Oneyda Alvarenga and Flávia Camargo Ton, Belo Horizonte, Brasília, São Paulo, 1989, entry ‘Calango’, p. 82.

74 *Guia do folclore fluminense*, ed. Cásia Frade, Rio de Janeiro, 1985, p. 47.

75 Nei Lopes, *O negro no Rio de Janeiro e sua tradição musical. Partido-Alto, Calango e Chula e outras cantorias*, Rio de Janeiro, 1992, pp. 29–30.

76 Interview with José de Souza (‘José Epifânio’) and Marcos Vinicius Gomes Barbosa (‘Marquinho’), Miracema, 5 Jan. 2008.

77 For more on this style of composition, see Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, pp. 58–72.

78 See, for instance, the *calango* between Fofão and Feijão recorded by the research project *Jongos, Calangos e Folias*. For the use of racial insults in the Northeastern *desafio*, see Cascudo, *Vaqueiros e cantadores*, pp. 158–64. Francisco Pereira da Silva denies the use of derogatory racial terminology, *O desafio calangueado. Monografia folclórica*, São José dos Campos, São Paulo, 1976, p. 69.

79 Interview with Liélides José da Silva (‘Sidoca’), Miracema, 4 Jan. 2008.

80 Interview with Marli Teixeira by Antônio Carlos Gomes, Isabel Castro, and Edmilson Santos, 14 Jan. 2007, Acervo UFF Petrobrás Cultural, LABHOI, Tape 55.

81 Castro e Couto, *Folia de reis*, p. 3. *Folias* in Rio de Janeiro extended their performance to 20 January to pay homage to Saint Sebastian.

82 For *folia* encounters, see Reily, *Voices of the Magi*, pp. 67–77; Bitter, *A Bandeira*, p. 181.

83 Interview with Sebastião Raimundo (‘Teresa’), Miracema, 17 Nov. 2007.

84 See the episode told by one master of a Kings’ Folly from the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro (Baixada): ‘In the Bible there is no answer to this question’, in the documentary *Jongos, calangos e folias*.

85 Interview with Marcos Paulo (Marquinho ‘Cascadura’) and Aristoteles de Souza (Tobim ‘Mamut’), Miracema, 6 Jan. 2008.

86 Castro e Couto, *Folia de Reis*, p. 19.

87 *Martelo* is also a form of poetic challenge in Northeast Brazil. See Cascudo, *Vaqueiros*, p. 206 and throughout.

88 Challenge between Marcos Paulo (Marquinho ‘Cascadura’) and Aristoteles de Souza (Tobim ‘Mamut’), during the encounter of *folias* at the house of Dona Aparecida Ratinho, Miracema, 6 Jan. 2008. This annual event is of an entirely friendly nature and hence very different from spontaneous *folia* encounters of the past. Both clowns improvised the challenge at my request, making it clear that this was for research purposes only and not for real.

89 The great exception here might be the *umbigada* (belly bounce), given or only suggested by both sexes in *jongo/caxambu*. It is possible that belly bouncing formerly contained challenges, as is still the case in belly-bouncing dances of other Brazilian regions. In the *tambor de crioula* from Maranhão, for example, the *umbigada* can be given with such power that it throws a person to the ground.

90 *Malha* is a kind of bowling originally from Portugal, which required dexterity but did not involve direct physical confrontation. Another form of stick play, the *mineiro-pau*, is practised in the north-east of Rio de Janeiro state; its movements follow a set choreography, however, and there is no challenge. Practitioners have no memory of it being used for fights. Moreover it is not widely known in the other parts of the Paraíba valley, and therefore I have decided not to include the *mineiro pau* in the discussion here. In a variety of the *cana verde* danced in the municipality of Vassouras participants also use sticks in their choreography in a very similar way to the *mineiro pau*.

91 Interview with Manoel Seabra, São José da Serra, 21 Sept. 2005. Seu Manoel also told me he stopped teaching her when she became ‘too good’.

92 See, in particular, the contributions by Mestre Bimba and Burlamaqui.

93 Interview with João Batista Azedias, São José da Serra, 1 April 2007.

94 As previous note.

95 Interview with João Batista Azedias, São José da Serra, 1 April 2007.

96 For close analysis of the relationship between honour, masculinity and violence in the Northeast, see Martha S. Santos, *Cleansing Honor with Blood: Masculinity, Violence and Power in the Backlands of Northeast Brazil, 1845–1889*, Stanford, 2012.

97 Interview with Sebastião Raimundo ‘Teresa’, Miracema, 17 Nov. 2007.

98 See Frade, *Guia*, p. 73.

99 Interview with Zé Epifânio, Miracema, 17 Nov. 2008.

100 A recent study found that they were given as motive for 52% of homicides and 43% of physical assaults. Marcelo de Souza Silva, ‘Homicídios e justiça na comarca de Uberaba, 1872–1892’, PhD, History, Universidade do Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p. 104.

101 Drunkenness was the most common excuse given in court for fights. For statistics, see for example Edna Maria Resende, *Entre a solidariedade e a violência. Valores, comportamentos e a lei em São João Del-Rei, 1840–1860*, São Paulo, 2008, p. 114.

102 Interview with Manoel Seabra and Jorge Fernandes, 1 April 2007.

103 Interview with João Azedias Batista, 1 April 2007.

104 Interview with Manoel Seabra and Jorge Fernandes, 1 April 2007.

105 Interview with João Azedias Batista, 1 April 2007.

106 Interview with Sebastião ‘Teresa’, Miracema, 17 Nov. 2007.

107 Interview with Manoel Seabra and Jorge Fernandes, 1 April 2007.

108 Silva, ‘Homicídios’, table p. 157. The same is suggested by the material analysed by Ivan de Andrade Vellasco, ‘A cultura da violência: os crimes na Comarca do Rio das Mortes – Minas Gerais Século XIX’, *Tempo* 9: 18, Jan. 2005.

109 Interview with Manoel Seabra and Jorge Fernandes, 1 April 2007.

110 Criminal records certainly make fascinating material for the historian of male violence, however. Regarding stick fighting, I have attempted to reconstruct the early history of this art from such sources in Central-Western Venezuela in ‘Juegos de Palo in Lara. Elementos para la historia social de un arte marcial venezolano’, *Revista de Indias* 59: 215, 1999.

111 Interview with João Azedias Batista, 1 April 2007.

112 See lyrics of song ‘Kid Cavaquinho’, João Bosco, *Caça a Raposa*, LP, 1975.

113 ‘Ethics in the Sung Duels of North-Eastern Brazil: Collective Memory and Contemporary Practice’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9: 1, 2000, p. 91.

114 See, for example, Thomas W. Gallant, ‘Honor, Masculinity, and Ritual Knife Fighting in nineteenth-century Greece’, *American Historical Review* 105: 2, April 2000. For honour in pre-colonial Central African societies, see John Iliffe, *Honour in African History*, Cambridge, 2005, chap. 6.

115 Michael Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village*, Princeton, 1985.

116 See Carolyn Conley, 'The Agreeable Recreation of Fighting', *Journal of Social History* 33: 1, 1999.

117 See William J. Baker, 'Traditional Sports, Africa', in *Encyclopaedia of World Sport: From Ancient Times to the Present*, ed. David Levinson and Karen Christensen, Santa Barbara, 1996, pp. 1,062–7, and *Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History*, ed. William J. Baker and James A. Mangan, New York and London, 1987. There is a vast literature on duelling in Europe. See for example Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*, New York, 1993.

118 Mike LaVacque-Manty, 'Duelling for Equality: Masculine Honor and the Modern Politics of Dignity', *Political Theory* 34: 6, Dec. 2006.

119 For the case of the *folia*, see Jadir de Morais Pessoa, 'Mestres de caixa e viola', *Cadernos Cedes (Campinas)*, 27: 71, Jan.–April 2007.

120 Muniz Sodré, 'Cordel, um jogo de formas', in *A verdade seduzida. Por um conceito de cultura no Brasil*, 2nd edn, Rio de Janeiro, 1988.

121 <http://www2.cultura.gov.br/site/2010/02/01/um-novo-patrimonio-cultural/>.