

## Ethnography In-Sight: Diasporic Imaginings

*Ethnography In-Sight* is a new article format of *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*. It is conceived as a multiauthored exploration of relationships between vision—seeing, the visible, visualities, envisioning—and ethnography in all possible senses, such as method, fieldwork, analysis, approach, and representation.<sup>1</sup> The concept of *Ethnography In-Sight* suggests, among other possibilities, both the multiple modes of seeing we deploy in the field, as well as the ways in which our ethnographic sights/sites shift, go in-and-out of focus, and reveal new strata once we leave, but still engage, the field. This multi-layered image from my article (see Wesolowski, *this issue*) on capoeira and diasporic imaginings in Brazil and Angola, captures this in-sightedness. It is a still frame taken from a video created by Angolan performance artist, Cabuenha (Júlio Janquinda Moniz), *Planeta Africa Cabuenha Poesia no Imbondeiro* ([https://youtu.be/L2Lj\\_dCacAw](https://youtu.be/L2Lj_dCacAw)). This



*Credit: By permission of Cabuenha, from Planeta Africa Cabuenha Poesia Imbondeiro.*

still and the multi-media form of art from which it is taken, as just about all self-representations, fall under our anthropological conceptions of auto-ethnography and visual ethnography.

I first met Cabuenha in Brazil during my research on identity, community and power among capoeira groups in Rio de Janeiro. I later reconnected with him in Angola as I extended my research by following transatlantic flows and transcultural exchanges. Cabuenha teaches capoeira and creates multimedia performance art in Luanda and Lisbon, as modes through which to explore his identity as an Angolan capoeirista. My early relationship with Cabuenha was as a fellow-capoeirista (training and playing together) and interviewee. More recently we have become collaborators. When we reconnected in Luanda in 2019, Cabuenha had become a researcher in his own right, travelling around Angola to document possible origins of capoeira among regional dances and combat games. Motivated by the sentiment and popular saying among practitioners—that capoeira was “conceived in Angola and birthed in Brazil”—he uses his research, teaching and performance art to represent his own diasporic becoming and being, in a similar yet different manner to my own ethnographic tracings of the transatlantic and transcultural flows of capoeira. We travelled together to M’Banza Kongo, capital of the ancient Kongo Kingdom, that for Angolans interested in pre-colonial history, and many capoeiristas, is a sort of a spiritual and ancestral mecca. Returning from the field, I immersed myself in Cabuenha’s abundant digital archive of artistic production to find a visual representation of our collaborative work, to understand the diasporic pull and imaginings of an embodied practice with a deep past.

This still photograph, like the whole video from which it is taken, is a palimpsest crafted as an analogical movement of capoeira that circles around the elements of its own contexts to bring these into itself and the artist’s own understanding of his identity. The very act of viewing or seeing the image compels the eye to read the multi-layered imaging in a counterclockwise movement. Our gaze meets Cabuenha’s as we enter the image through his right eye and traverse his face, tattooed by the bark of the *imbondeiro*, or baobab tree, that ghosts behind him. The translucent trunks lead us into the image’s background: the stone walls of the 16th century Massangano Fort built by the Portuguese to subjugate and enslave the people of Angola. In this palimpsest, histories of slavery and the violence of colonialism cannot be erased, and form the disjunctive foundations of the artist’s being. We continue our counterclockwise circle into the middle ground, where the artist appears again, as a capoeirista. His back to the fort with arms outstretched in a diagonal line invoking a swirling flight into air, while rooting down through the legs, Cabuenha is in the position of a *chamada* or “call.” In a capoeira game the *chamada* momentarily conjoins players in a wary embrace. Here Cabuenha’s *chamada* calls his partner-opponent to his back; thus, though facing forward, he

is calling, as if to his ancestors, from the past. The calling arms of the *chamada* return our eyes to the foreground, once again to the face of the artist marked with his Angolan identity by the baobab, an indigenous African tree of remarkable strength and endurance. We graphically enter into his vision (and envisioning) of himself when we meet his eyes and begin the visual-experiential trajectory of moving from the corporal markings of his roots, to the dialogical movement of his calling and hailing of the past—that is, histories of struggle, partner-opponents, and us, the viewers of his imagining-playing—such that we become his present interlocutors; finally back to the groundedness of the emblematic tree of identity. His is a performance of identity in which the montage, and Cabuenha through it, envisions and visualizes his and its own ethnographic understandings of the artist-capoeirista and his historical becoming. The trajectory of this montage takes us, and him, on a journey, which we assert is ethnographic in substance, that links and interweaves body and consciousness, becoming and being, self and other, as a momentary, now timeless, expression of identity that is both individualized and yet collective. When we see and read the image, we perform it in a dance between author and reader in search of meaning. The image is itself the performance of a visual dialogue between places of belonging—here and there, past and present, identity and experience—as well as between these belongings and being at once diasporic and rooted in presence. The image is the culmination of the video which as a whole, constitutes another level of dialogue: the interplay of the languages of the body, vision, and spoken word that manifests in the articulation of moving image and the voice over:

Sou africano, sou curista sonhador, sou angolano. Invisível por fora, visível por dentro, mas sou africano. Africano no coração e na cabeça. Africano e não preciso da vossa bênção. Africano consequência do colonialismo, nas macas de todos os dias. África ensinou-me a tornar as minhas tristezas em alegria, e mesmo não me tendo ensinado uma língua, África foi a melhor mãe que poderia ter tido. África, o regresso é um desejo, não um castigo. Sou africano com orgulho, não me escondo na sombra de muitos que são africanos porque curtem quizomba. Africano humilde, condenado a ser marginalizado pela cor, que gosta de coisas simples e desfaz-se em lágrimas quando em África vê o sol se pôr. África fez de mim um exímio sonhador. Despertou em mim o espírito de lutador. Por ela eu vou enfrentar seja o que for, buscando confiança nos tambores.

I am African, I am a dreaming curator, I am Angolan. Invisible on the outside, visible on the inside, but I am African. African in heart and head. African and I do not need your blessing. African consequence of colonialism, on the stretchers of every day. Africa taught me to make my sorrows happy, and even though she did not teach me a language, Africa was the best mother I could have had. Africa, return is a

wish, not a punishment. I am African with pride; I do not hide in the shade of many who are Africans because they enjoy *quizomba*.<sup>2</sup> Humble African, condemned to be marginalized by color, who likes simple things and breaks down in tears when in Africa he sees the sun go down. Africa made me an eminent dreamer. The fighting spirit awoke in me. For her I will face whatever it is, seeking confidence in the drums.<sup>3</sup>

This image represents, in its particularity, the exploration of Black diasporic expressive culture, which requires attentiveness to aesthetics, embodied knowledge and communication; layers of meaning, ephemeral entwinements of past and present, and to the ever-revolving movement of diasporic identities and peoples. More broadly, the montage itself moves according to a rhythm of the drums between objective materiality of the past to subjective experientiality of the present. The performativity of the video is that of capoeira that presents the integration of “heart and head” in the artist’s rhythm of being. The image and the video are, in part and in whole, auto-ethnography. In turn, we take the dynamic interplay—or the rhythm of the dialogues—between the visible, the oral, the written, the corporal, the experiential, and the performative as integral, foundational, to any ethnographic process. More pointedly, we suggest, this interplay to be a most crucial goal and means of doing visual ethnography.


## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Ethnography In-Sight* was originally conceived as a type of “frontispiece” to explore the visual expression and dynamics of ethnographic understandings as well as the inherent visual nature of ethnography. This was inaugurated in volume 25(2) with a critical commentary of an image that both documents and expresses the middle grounds of Amazonian environmental politics. Beginning with this article in this issue, we inaugurate *Ethnography In-Sight* as an independent article type of *The Journal*. For more details, see pp. 10–11 of <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jlca.12421>.

<sup>2</sup> Quizomba is a popular dance rhythm of Angola.

<sup>3</sup> Adaption by Cabuenha of the spoken word poetry of Angolan rapper, Ikonoklasta (Luaty Beirão). Transcription and translation of Portuguese by Gustavo Costa.

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