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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

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The Legacy of Vanalombo

Exploring links between Vanalombo and Jako Malabar from the perspective of a Makonde musician and dancer

A project and minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for an MMus in African Music Performance.

I declare that this work has not previously been submitted in whole or in part for the award of any degree; that it is my own work and that any contributions to and quotations in the dissertation have been cited and referenced.

Signed:

Signed by candidate

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VINTANI NAFASSI (centre)

Supervisor- Richard M Deja, PhD

Abstract

For this project and dissertation, I examine the performance traditions of *Jako* musician-dancers from Réunion Island and *Vanalombo* performers from the Mueda Plateau in Mozambique from a personal perspective as a Makonde musician and dancer versed in these styles. In the process, I explore possible connections between these two performance traditions that can be explained as the result of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean and its impact on the customs and culture of the inhabitants of the Bourbon Islands.

The study culminates in the production of a documentary in which *Vanalombo* masters of initiation rites and Makonde drum players and dancers participated in demonstrations, recordings, and interviews in Makonde settlements around Maputo City in Mozambique. This fieldwork footage is presented in a documentary that, along with the written component of the dissertation, traces my practice-oriented research journey and its culmination in a community presentation of *Jako* and *Vanalombo* styles.

The dissertation overviews secondary sources on the subject in the fields of ethnomusicology, musicology, and anthropology, as well as archival and museum documentation from Réunion Island, and assembles interviews and conversations with musicians, dancers and elders still actively involved in *Jako* and *Vanalombo* performances. As initiated insider and practitioner of *Mapiko* dance, I have been able to rely on insights drawing on personal experience as a performer and have made auto-ethnographic reflection a central tenet of my approach.

From a personal point of view, researching these connections stemmed from an ambition to better understand the historical events that have shaped and are shaping Makonde society in urban contexts and to seek out ways to respond to the challenges of cultural continuity in a fast-changing world.

Keywords- Vanalombo, Jako Malbar, Makonde, Bourbon Island, Réunion Island, Makonde Plateau, Mozambique.

Content of the Project:

1. Explanatory primary documentary
2. Interview-based secondary documentary
3. Minor dissertation

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INTRODUCTION

1. Preliminaries

1.1. Motivation for the study

In 2013 I participated with a team of Makonde representatives in a series of cultural workshops in Saint-Denis on Réunion Island (KUGEL, 2013).

During the workshops, I demonstrated Mozambican Makonde *Mapiko* and *Vanalombo* songs and dances, and many people started to talk excitedly, sharing that “they too had this dance in the past” and, as an example, started to sing Réunion Maloya¹ songs in a similar style. During a subsequent visit to the Historical Museum of Villèle, I was struck by information provided on the Réunion *Jako* dance, alluding to a ‘mythical’ character from Hindu belief, and evidence of similarities between the *Jako Malbar* and *Vanalombo* dance traditions I know, that, in parallel to *Jako Malbar*, are also associated with a ‘mythical’ spiritual mediator presiding over Makonde initiation rites. This was an intriguing Mozambican- Makonde/Réunion Island correlation. I was also thrilled to find a publication on the life of one of the last Réunion slaves freed in 1845, known as Dominique Macondé (MUSÉE-HISTORIQUE-DE-VILLÈLE, 2007).

These encounters highlighted the similarities between the musical artistries of the two countries and raised several questions in my mind - about the ambit of what we designate as a specific musical culture, about the origins of *Jako Malbar* and its creation, and about the ways in which cultural practices transform under the pressure of changing circumstances. Dominique Makonde’s experience may be only a small part of a much larger picture, I mused, but I kept wondering how much impact people like him and the Makonde people taken to the Réunion Island had on the cultural traits of *Jako*.

I therefore decided to explore the many similarities and correlations between Makonde music and dance and Réunion Island music and dance more specifically with reference to the Makonde *Vanalombo* tradition and the extent of its impact on *Jako Malbar*.

Since both are at risk of being lost as cultural practices in their respective geographical contexts, I wanted to make this study practical and community relevant. With an overall aim of keeping these practices alive through artistic performance and ensuring that new generations (and the wider public) know about and value them, I decided to present this research in the form of a documentary that explains Makonde *Vanalombo* and *Jako Malbar* traditions in visual documentation to be presented as part of a community performance event at the heart of the Makonde enclave in Maputo City (capital of Mozambique). The currently written dissertation provides background to this practical project.

1.2. My personal background

As a Makonde dancer, composer, choreographer, and performer of *Mapiko* and other Makonde styles, I have been continually preoccupied with the question of how to make Makonde music and dance more accessible to urban and international audiences and stages, without losing its originality and without exposing *shipiŕ*² or *midimu*³.

¹ Maloya is a form of expression sung on the island of Réunion and is essentially community music (VELLAYOUDOM, 2006): It uses the Réunion Créole as language. In its so-called traditional form, it responds to very precise rules of interpretation for call and response. The origins of maloya are uncertain, however the term is probably of Malagasy origin expressing melancholy, sadness and means “I am sad” in Malagasy.

² A secret that can never be revealed to anyone who is not initiated.

³ Teachings in the form of a song that is only done in initiation rites.

My artistic output has to a large extent been shaped over the last decade by the opportunity to work and be part of the Mozambican National Dance and Song Company, the Zimbabwe College of Music, Fredrikstad Østfold Kulturskolen K60 (Norway), and the MusicDance project in Cape Town. My musical and dance experience was shaped by these institutions. I was immersed in practical experiences and encounters that gradually led to a deep admiration for the styles of my traditional heritage, including the *Vanalombo* masters' dance style. As a result, I have always been concerned with the issue of preserving older and endangered styles in contemporary performance settings. This current research project is a natural outflow of these concerns.

2. Methodological Considerations

2.1. Brief outline of the research process

My initial plan was to do field research on the Makonde Plateau in the north of Mozambique as well as in Réunion Island. Sadly, war in the north of Mozambique escalated considerably and made this part of the country unsafe for fieldwork. Additionally, most of my studies took place during the covid-19 pandemic surges, which made further travelling to Réunion beyond my first visit in 2013 impossible.

Confronted with this situation, I decided to focus my research around the Makonde communities located in the province of Maputo, which in the end enabled me to contribute in perhaps a deeper and much more meaningful way by engaging more practically with my community in ways that can validate the continuation of the practices of *Nalombo* initiation masters and *Shinalombo* dance that are so important for the continuation of Makonde culture.

I therefore hinged the research in encounters with *Nalombo* practitioners active in the southern regions of Mozambique. Specifically, I focused fieldwork in i) Paulo Samuel Khamkomba (PSK) rural area in the Maputo Province Municipality of Boane (between November and April of 2021 and then again in November 2022) and ii) Military Zone, an urban area at the heart of Maputo City, in the same periods. I chose these zones because they are places where veterans of the Mozambican liberation struggle war, a majority of which were Makonde, have settled. Makonde traditions were therefore maintained in these places.

In the first phase of research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with key culture bearers and then returned to the same interviewees to deepen the conversation. Interviews carried out in Portuguese and Makonde languages were aimed at understanding the cultural practices, and spiritual and sociocultural values of *Nalombo* initiation rites masters and of the *shinalombo* dancers that are part of this tradition. The Makonde people keep their secrets about their traditions. Therefore, some questions during the research caused discomfort to the respondents, because of the *shipii* and *midimu* issues mentioned, and I have, for ethical reasons, removed privileged content from this dissertation and project.

I interviewed masters of Makonde initiation rites, Makonde sculptors and some friends who understand the ceremonies of initiation rites. Interviewees included my aunt Josefina Cosme, who is a female *Nalombo*, Dade Issa Ali Mpama who is a male *Nalombo akukumula likumbi*⁴, Atanásio Nhussi (choreographer and researcher), Geraldo Mwacha and Valério Mwale (both Makonde drum players) and Frank Ntaluma (a Makonde sculptor and cultural expert, very knowledgeable of Makonde culture, currently living in Lisbon). They were the primary sources for my information.

⁴ Master of initiation rites who takes care and is responsible about everything good and bad which might happen in the initiation rites.

For historical context regarding the slave legacy and the practice of *Jako Malbar*, I reviewed varied publications including articles, theses, monographs, magazines, newspapers, exhibition collections and website materials. Many of the authors of this information had been trying to define and seek out roots, common descent, origins and similarities in the Indian Ocean world, but only a few focused on the intriguing possibility of a direct *Jako-Nalombo* connection. As will be seen, the rapprochement I wish to make between these two practices will remain open-ended and speculative. The research component (presented in Part 1) sets the parameters for the study's project component (presented in Part 2) and, methodologically speaking, the dissertation and project fall in the hybrid field of performance research.

2.2. Structure of this dissertation

Part 1 of this dissertation provides background to *Nalombo* and *Jako* traditions. This includes a brief summary of Réunion Island settler- and Makonde people histories, as well as descriptions of *Jako Malbar* and *Vanalombo* performance practices and traditions and the wider implications of such a comparative analysis of practices. This section is preparatory for Part 2, where the focus falls on correlating and comparing the two traditions in audio-visual format.

Part 2 is designed as a companion to the documentaries presented as part of this thesis. The main documentary, entitled *The Legacy of Nalombo Masters*, sets out the 'ground idea' of this research (i.e., that the connection between *Jako Malbar* traditions and *Nalombo* practices merits deeper investigation). It is in this documentary that the *Nalombo-Jako Malbar* connection is explored in greater detail. Also included in this documentary are edited footage and a general description of a community event I organized in Maputo City as an opportunity to air the gist of these ideas with members of the Makonde community. A second shorter documentary, entitled *Interviews with Nalombo master's* presents translated excerpts (mainly from the Makonde language) of conversations with *Nalombo* practitioners. These have been included to provide a living context for the *Nalombo* masters' art and to place emphasis on the other important issue broached through this project – that older cultural practices face uncertain futures in urban contexts.

A final section draws the threads of the argument of the dissertation together and articulates open-ended final thoughts.

PART 1

3. Background

3.1. Réunion Island People

Réunion Island, formerly known as Île Bourbon, was uninhabited until nearly 1528 when Portuguese navigators discovered the island and named it Santa Apollonia. In 1466, Réunion Island became France's overseas department (currently, *département d'outre-mer de la Réunion* or DOM) and in 1974 became a region of France. As an island belonging to the Mascarene Islands, it forms part of an archipelago in the Indian Ocean located 680km east of Madagascar, 180 km south-west of Mauritius and 10000km from the capital Paris. The Réunion Island population was formed by plantation owners, former slave masters, slaves, as well as French civil servants from the administration.



Figure 1 - Map of the Indian Ocean (Source: CHAKRABORTY; VAN ROSSUM, 2020)

In 1687 France embarked its first cargo of slaves on the Île Bourbon when the French East India

Company established a halfway point for ships on their way to India. Louis XIII, king of France, legalized the slave trade in 1642 and his successor, Louis XIV, after taking office, also encouraged the slave trade. In 1672 Louis XIV started to subsidize landowners for each slave introduced into the colonies to work on large plantations where only coffee or sugar was grown.

Slaves brought to the island originated from West Africa, India, Madagascar and East African Coast. They were mostly from Mozambique and later also from Lindi, Quilwa and Zanzibar (DESPOIT, s.d.). According to Barbier (2013) on the eve of the French Revolution, the island had 46,000 inhabitants, including 35,000 slaves. In 1815, during the sugarcane era, and despite

the prohibition on slave trade, France continued to import slaves and workers from Africa and India into the island.

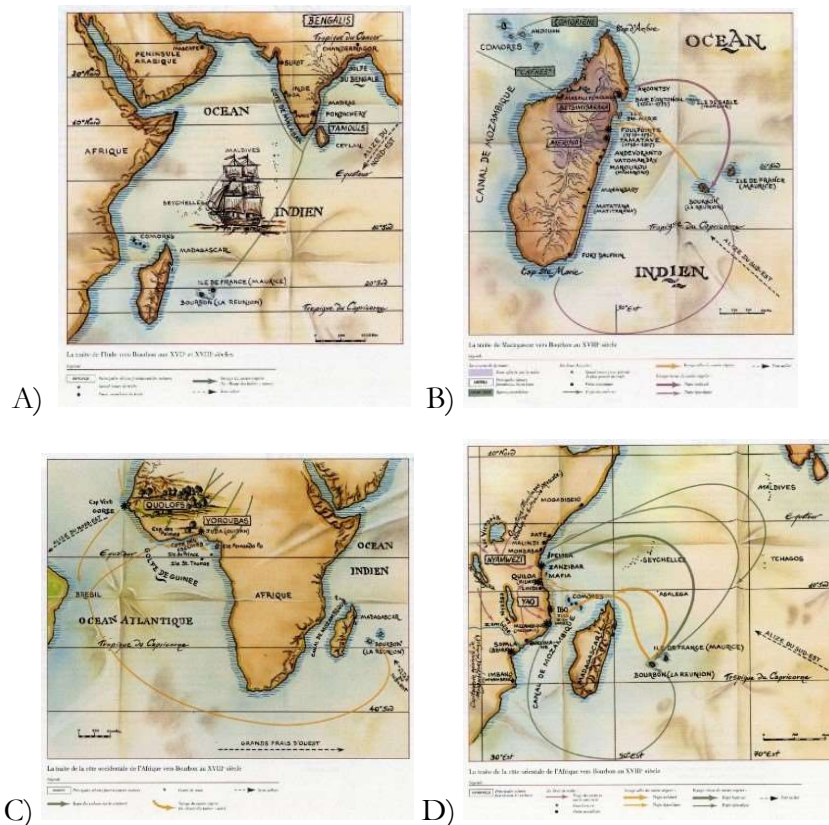


Figure 2 - Maps showing slavery trade (Source: DESPORT, s.d.): A- slavery trade from India to Madagascar, B- slavery trade from Madagascar to Réunion Island, C- slavery trade from West Coast to Réunion Island, D- slavery trade from Mozambique to Réunion Island

On Réunion Island, slavery was abolished on December 20, 1848 (a date celebrated annually in Réunion). With the abolition of slavery, indentured workers from Asia (mainly Indians, Malays, Chinese and Malbar Indians) and East Africa were brought to the Réunion Island. This option was shaped by the memory of slave trade and imports from these same areas (DESPORT, s.d.).

More than 62000 slaves were freed and became French citizens. The other populations who were sporadically transported to the island from various coasts of the Indian Ocean as a cheap workforce to Réunion Island allowed the colonial economy to survive and prosper in the new circumstances. With the mix of peoples brought to Réunion Island, new biological, cultural and religious exchanges contributed to the emergence of Créole on Réunion Island.

Saint-Denis is the administrative capital of Réunion Island. Currently, the languages are French (official), Réunion Créole and Tamil. The Réunion people, called Réunionese, are composed of different ethnic groups which are French, African, Malagasy, Chinese, Pakistani and Indian. There are four different religions on the Island: Roman Catholic, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist.



Figure 3 - Map of Réunion Island (Source: RÉUNION, 2021)

3.2. Makonde People

Through various historical sources Paolo Israel (2014) traces the origins of Mozambican Yao, Matambwe and Makonde the Maravi tributary empire of Congolese origin. In the 17th and 18th century, Makonde settled on two plateaus separated by the Rovuma River on the border between Tanzania and Mozambique, with the Tanzanian Makonde on the Newalla Plateau on one side, and the Mozambican Makonde on the Makonde Plateau on the other. The Makonde Plateau in Cabo Delgado province includes the districts of Mueda, Muidumbe, Mocimboa da Praia and Nangade, and is considered by all Mozambican Makonde as the centre of their culture.

In resistance and response to the encroaching bane of the slave trade Mozambican Makonde had forged a separate identity by the early nineteenth century. Reputed to be “irascible”, “fierce and inhospitable,” and “washenzi kabisa” (complete savages) by their northerly neighbours, they were described as “hospitable” and “generous” by British consul Henry O’Neill who visited them in 1882.

He attributed their reclusiveness to the impact of the illicit slave trade and reported that they lived in fortified enclosures, barricaded with “a thorny underbust, every crevice in which appeared to be filled up so carefully that it became an utter impossibility for man, or beast of any size, to penetrate it” to discourage foreign intrusion.

According to Roseiro (2013), staying on the plains was neither easy nor peaceful due to the frequent wars fought with the Maviti and Angóni, also of Bantu ethnolinguistic origin. The weather on the plateau is challenging, droughts are frequent and intense and could last for several years, causing rivers to completely dry up, the land to produce insufficiently and the wildlife to leave the territory. Despite this, it was safer to remain on the plateau. With reference to affluence Jorge and Margot Dias(1969)point the dial in a different direction:

“Makonde took refuge mainly in the large sandy plateaus, with a mild climate where water is lacking but arboreal vegetation with many thick shrubs is found. It is a serene place, there are

no tsetse flies, mosquitoes are rare, and there are abundant plants and vines, here in this impressive plateau . In addition to the plants that serve as food, there are numerous herds of antelopes, buffaloes, windboard, zebras, including various types of birds.”

In the 20th century missionary activity and a stronger Portuguese military⁵ presence impacted the Makonde Plateau with the onset of colonial efforts to protect the northern Mozambican border from German invasions in the 1920s.



Figure 4 - Maps of the Makonde Plateau (source: ISRAEL, 2014)

The Makonde culture is best known for its exquisite wood carvings, its body tattoos, body piercing and teeth sharpening, and its song and dance traditions, including the *Mapiko* masked dance. Paolo Israel has shown the *Mapiko* dance tradition to be a dynamic cultural phenomenon that has undergone and continues to undergo many transformations, first under the impact of colonial rule, and then as the result of policy and ideology shifts accompanying Mozambican freedom liberation struggles, the post-colonial civil war and modernization.

It is not in the ambit of this dissertation to detail these developments, for as will be seen, my study is focussed on making a comparison of two specific current practices with reference to their contemporary context.

4. An outline of two Practices

4.1. Jako Malbar

Jako is a mystical popular character in Réunion Island art and storytelling. Myths and performances featuring this character go back for generations in Réunion Island. According to Maison (2021) the *Jako Malbar* or *Zako* dancer is a character responsible for warding off evil spirits and bringing good luck. After observing a period of lent and prayers, the *Jako* takes on the appearance of the Monkey God *Hanuman* and brings his blessing by dancing to the beat of the drums. *Jako* represents *Hanuman*, the leader of the ape army. A *Jako* dancer is a person who has made a promise to dance for the deity or who has the gift of dancing. To prepare for his performance, a *Jako* must observe a period of Lent.

⁵ In 1497, after Vasco da Gama circumnavigated Africa, Portugal became the first European nation to open a sea trade route to India. Portuguese trading posts and garrisons were established on the eastern coast of Africa and the most extended area of settlement, eventually called Mozambique, was under Portuguese control from 1498 to 1975.

Currently, *Jako* appears mostly at the Tamil New Year⁶ celebrations where he performs his traditional dance to bring good luck (this day is signified as a new beginning and inhabitants celebrate this day as the day that would bring them a new start with new opportunities), and in *Hanuman*⁷ celebrations, a Hindu festival that celebrates the birth of this Hindu deity.

Traditionally, on the day of the performance, the *Jako* dancer wears a *langouti*⁸. He covers his body with multicoloured paints, and he has a chain and a braided cloth tail attached to his waist to get closer to the image of Hanuman, the Monkey God. He then hides his hair under a piece of red cloth. After putting on these clothes for the occasion, the *Jako* dancer gathers in front of a *padon*⁹ and proceeds to a ceremony in front of the *Kodimaram* (flagpole) of Nargoulan. He speaks a few words of prayer and conducts ceremonial benedictions before starting to sketch out some dance steps to the sound of traditional *Jako Malbar* drums.

The *Jako Malbar* is an offshoot of a folkloric dance of Tamil Nadu provenance. Originally, the dancer disguised himself as a tiger in the manner of a traditional spectacle found across the South of India under different names—*Puliyattam* in Tamil Nadu, *Pulikali* in Kerala, *Hulivesha* in Karnataka, and is performed even up to Orissa, where it is called *Baagh Naach*. This prototype of *Jako Malbar* is likely to have arrived with the first indentured Tamil labourers. Over time, this tiger dance fell prey to a certain Hinduising tendency amongst the descendants of the indentured and transformed into a monkey after the fashion of the simian deity, *Hanuman*. According to Céline Ramsamy (2018), this transformation would have occurred around the 1930's.

But why the name *Jako*? This isn't a particularly Indian-sounding name. And in fact, to call it the *Jako Malbar* (the term used in the Mascarene Islands for indentured labourers from the South of India) suggests the prior existence of another kind of *Jako*. Some sources claim that a certain African *Jako Mayako* existed before the arrival of the indentured labourers from South India. This figure, that commemorates a slave imported from Mozambique, would have arrived first in Madagascar and subsequently in Réunion. Therefore, the 'Puli' would have taken the name of *Jako Malbar* - a trickster figure reminiscent of the Caribbean *Djab Djab* who prances about in a procession, alternately a threat and a buffoon.

Ramsamy conjectures that these créolised figures perform that which is often difficult to speak about - displacement, deracination, collaboration, adaptation, purification after creolization. Thus, even if the *Jako Malbar* was 'purified' by Hindu revivalists to become the monkey god *Hanuman*, the deeper structure of the carnivalesque figure of the subaltern tradition remains to perpetuate and activate through ritual the memory of indenture, its ruptures, and also its new beginnings.

⁶ *Puthandu*, the Tamil new year, also celebrated in Réunion, is celebrated on the 14th April in concordance with the first month of the lunisolar cycle of the Hindu calendar.

⁷ *Hanuman* is the Monkey God of Hinduism. He is a warrior known for helping Lord Rama find and free his wife, Princess Sita, kidnapped by the king of demons: *Ravana*. He is known for his strength, courage, humility, honesty and dedication. *Hanuman* is loved and revered throughout India.

⁸ clothes of Indian origin made up of a fabric tied to his waist.

⁹ picture of *Hanuman*.



Figure 5 - Figure 5- A - Male and Female Jako, Bras Fusil District - Saint-Benoît, source: (KUGEL, 2013), B - Jako squirming and taking an object in his mouth source: (MAISON, 2021), C - Jako performing, source (MAISON, 2021), D - The Monkey God of Hinduism (MAISON,2021).

As the *Jako* dancer passes, the faithful usually deposit coins on a betel leaf. The *Jako* performer must not take money by hand. Instead, he turns the offering over, tilts his head back and retrieves it with his mouth.

Once he is at the end of his journey, a glass of rum is also placed on a betel leaf. There too, the *Jako* dancer must retrieve it in the same way and drink it in his inverted position. According to tradition, by drinking this small glass of rum, he turns away bad luck. This tradition, very popular in the past, remains anchored in the memory of many Réunionese, although, according to Louaisel (2011) today there is only one person left on the island to keep the *Jako Malbar* tradition alive.



Figure 6 - Malbar drum in Saint-Paul in 2014. Photo: source: (FOLIO-PARAVÉMAN, 2020)

4.2. Shinalombo

Makonde people place great value on aesthetic concerns, i.e., in doing things carefully and beautifully. This is extended to the way Makonde create their songs and melodies. Music is very important in this society because it is used in religion, healing, politics, education, and all celebrations.

For example, in healing, music is combined with religious verses, herbs, and spiritual practices that help in curing physical and psychosomatic ailments through the power of musical sound. Furthermore, in Makonde society music has always played an important educative role by inculcating commonly accepted social, moral values and norms. From wedding celebrations, funeral ceremonies, the birth of babies to celebrations of good harvest seasons, and initiation rites (before, during, and after), music has always played a fundamental role among the

Makonde. By extension, music assumes a key function in the religious ceremonies introduced by Islam or Christianity into Makonde society. In summary, it all comes down to music for the Makonde, no matter what mood they are in.

Each of these Makonde traditional ceremonies has its own master, elder or ancient who is in charge to guide and ensure that nothing goes wrong, and that all that needs to take place does. The *Nalombo* (plural *Vanalombo*) is the master of initiation rites. The initiation rites are called *Likumbi* for boys and *Ing'oma* for girls. It is the most important ceremony of any Makonde's life; it is a puberty ceremony of transitioning from youth to adult in Makonde society. Although male and female *Nalombo* respectively preside over masculine (*Likumbi*) and feminine (*Ing'oma*) initiation rites, in this dissertation I will only focus on the male *Nalombo*, since no males are allowed in the *Ing'oma* ceremonies.

Nalombo is a Makonde initiation rites master who is chosen by his family for his capacity to manage initiation rites. He is someone who can see what others cannot see, a magician who has deep spiritual knowledge and knows spells. To have the status of *Nalombo*, the chosen one is subjected to a test before being approved as a *Nalombo* to see if they will succeed, because a *Nalombo* cannot desecrate or break the rules of *Nalombo*. One of the things that signify the status of a *Nalombo* is a special wildebeest tail staff he wields. It is cut at the base to create a pocket that holds medicines and herbal remedies.

There are two types of *Nalombo*:

- 1) *Mwene Nalombo* or *Nalombo akukumula likumbi*, who is a knowledgeable master responsible for and the head of the entire ceremony of the puberty rite. He can dance, paint the body and appear to the public, but he also knows traditional medicines, medicinal plants and understands witchcraft and spells. Only the chosen ones can be this type of *Nalombo*, not just anyone. Most of all, the person must come from a *Nalombo* family because the heritage of *Nalombo* is left to the descendant who best understands the transmitted remedies and spells. The title of *Mwene Nalombo* usually passes from elder to son, nephew, or grandson. The *Mwene Nalombo* uses *mabululu*¹⁰ and *litapwata*¹¹, *nchila*¹², *inumba*¹³.

Vanalombo akukumula likumbi have a very important task at initiation rites. During initiation rites he never approaches or enters at the place where the initiation rites are happening. Rather, he only goes there if there is a critical situation like witchcraft problems, chronic disease, or serious injuries among the kids.

The *Nalombo akukumula likumbi* also demarcates the place (named *kukuwa likumbi*) where the initiation must take place, ensuring that there is no danger to the children, whether by spells or ill will, attacks by ferocious animals, infra-structural problems or by unwanted bystanders. He is also responsible for the circumcisions. At the end of the initiation rites,

Shwashwashwa, not just one. They help the main *Nalombo akukumula likumbi* and do not need to understand anything about the medicines. They paint the entire body, wear

¹⁰ Type of hat or crown usually covered with bird feathers.

¹¹ A black cloth that only a *Nalombo* should wear, covering him from the waist to the knees.

¹² *Palapal* tail, used because a strand of hair from this tail is a great medicine which great healers and *Nalombo* use to cure their patients.

¹³ Pan or bag used by the *Nalombo* to store very important medicines that will be used to treat and protect the place where the initiation rites take place.

fabric materials, dance and do acrobatic movements. The paints used are selected according to the area of the *Nalombo* must clean and close the place where the initiation rites took place and preside over a final anointing ceremony called *Kutaa maúta*.

- 2) The *Nalombo Shwashwashwa* or *Nalombo akunung'unula* is responsible for the entertainment. They are often several *Nalombo* Makonde Plateau the tribe he is coming from or belongs to. The design of the painting identifies the category of the *Nalombo akunung'unula*, i.e., whether he is a young learner or an elder master performance. In this dance, the main drum used to play the *Vanalombo* dance (i.e., *Shinalombo*) is the *Likuti* (plural: *Makuti*). The *Likuti* drum, which has the shape of a chopped garlic, has an animal skin membrane on one side, while the drum body is closed on the other side. The big and medium types of *Makuti* are the ones used in *Shinalombo*. *Makuti* drums are played with a stick. During the *Shinalombo*, the *Makuti* drums are played together with the *ligoma*¹⁴ or *ntoji*¹⁵ drums to enrich the sound.



Figure 7 - Photos of the *Vanalombo*, from left to right: A - *Nalombo* dancing (Source: Vintani Nafassi), B - *Nalombo* (Source: ISRAEL, 2014), C - standing in between two *vanalombo* (Source: Vintani Nafassi), D - *Nalombo* dancing (Source: Vintani Nafassi), E - *Nalombo* with *ntchila* (Source: Vintani Nafassi)

As mentioned, of the two types of *Nalombo*, only the *Nalombo akunung'unula* dances and puts on a performance. In this dance, the main drum used to play the *Vanalombo* dance (i.e. *Shinalombo*) is the *Likuti* (plural: *Makuti*). The *Likuti* drum, which has the shape of a chopped garlic, has an animal skin membrane on one side, while the drum body is closed on the other side. The big and medium types of *Makuti* are the ones used in *Shinalombo*. *Makuti* drums are played with a stick. During the *Shinalombo*, the *Makuti* drums are played together with the *ligoma*¹⁴ or *ntoji*¹⁵ drums to enrich the sound.

¹⁴ Circular drum, bigger than the *likuti*, with goat skin on one side and open on the other side. Played with the hands. It has a *upula*, a rubber membrane that strengthens and shapes the sound, placed under the skin.

¹⁵ Circular drum, same diameter but longer than the *ligoma*, open on one side, animal skin on the other and rubber on the top of the skin (while on the *ligoma* it is under the skin).



Figure 8 - Drums used by the Nalombo, from left to right: A – Makuti and Chinganga (Source: Vintani Nafassi); B – Valério Mwale playing Likuti. (Source: Vintani Nafassi) C- Makuti a big Likuti and a medium Likuti (Source: Vintani Nafassi)

For the ceremonies to go well, the parents of the children who will be submitted to the initiation rites always gather in the *lipanda* area. At the beginning of the initiation rites season, once the *lipanda* is defined and it is clear where the initiation rites will take place, the *Vanalombo a kunung'unula*, together with the *Nalombo akukumula likumbi* gather at the *lipanda* to start the ceremony. They choose two free-range chickens (male and female) as a sacrifice. When the chickens die, their legs must stand straight together. If this happens, the ceremony may proceed. If the chickens die with separated or crossed legs, the *lipanda* families have issues that need to be solved or someone else has issues with the selection of the *lipanda* location. In this case, this ceremony is repeated until everything is clean, and the initiation rites begin.

Once they begin, the *Vanalombo akunung'unula* start preparing. First, they find lime, chalk or ash to paint their bodies and prepare it. They assemble and fold fabric (named *capulana* in Mozambique) in a specific way and place it around their waist. Small bells are placed on top of the *capulana*. The *Nalombo* may dress according to a character he may choose. Often, these characters are women (the center of the community in the matriarchal Makonde people) or elders (representing the transmission of living knowledge, wisdom and respect). Finally, their bodies are painted with the prepared chalk/lime.

A *chivandja* or *palugwa*, the place where the dance will be performed, is then identified and prepared. Here a fire is made to tune the drums. As soon as tuning is done, the performance starts. *Vanalombo* enter the *chivandja* running circularly around it, one *Nalombo* at a time. Once they all are in the *chivandja*, they begin to dance. Sometimes the *Nalombo* can start doing acrobatic moves as part of the performance, if there is a duet that coordinates for the acrobatic moves. When they finish their dance, they leave the *chivandja* running or dancing.

The *shinalombo* (*Vanalombo* dance) is divided in two phases:

- the *kushamalela*, meaning the call. Here each *Nalombo* dances a solo where he may present himself (name, where he comes from, etc.).
- the *kuvina chikuo* or *kutambula shikuo*. Here all *Vanalombo* dance together the same coordinated steps at the same time.

The *Vanalombo* dance is for the whole community and the *chivandja* is not forbidden - anyone can see it. During the performance, people from the community may offer money to one

Nalombo dancer (placing the money in their head or hand) or to the whole group of *Vanalombo* (placing the money in the ground in front of them).

While this dance takes place, the *Nalombo akukumula likumbi*, away in the *lipanda*, prepares the initiates, who have their heads shaved and are given *lipanda*¹⁶ to eat. Once the *Vanalombo* end dancing, the *Nalombo akukumula likumbi* and the initiates run to the *likumbi* place, where the initiation rites will be held for one to three months, and from which the initiates will not leave until the end of the rites.

In an extensive study called "Initiation Rites and their social transformations in the Plateau of Mueda between 1924-1994" Ngole (1996) shows that historically speaking, male initiation rites were preserved as an institutional fundamental among Makonde despite colonial and postcolonial educational influences. He also points out that initiation rites represent a positive practice for the stability and maintenance of social order in Makonde communities. This is a perspective I endorse from personal experience and that will be brought into poignant current reflection as part of this dissertation.

5. The Vanalombo-Jako continuum

From a personal perspective the information gathered during research and supported by interactions with performers from Mozambique and (during workshops in 2013) Réunion Island, brought new insights on possible links between Mozambican and Réunion cultures at many levels (not only in music but also in other cultural expressions such as gastronomy). The *Jako* and *Vanalombo* parallels were the most intriguing aspect of this connection.

While the practices of *Vanalombo* may have arrived at Réunion Island with slaves captured from Mozambique and taken to the island in the era of or before Dominique Macondé, there are no written records of this. And yet, even though *Jako Malbar* contains many elements that are clearly Tamil in origin and is often cited as an example of Afro-Asian syncretism, the African part of the equation has, to date at least, not been clearly defined and the possibility of *Jako Malbar*'s specifically Makonde roots, for instance, remain underexplored. Several authors who have scrutinized archival records dealing with the Mascarene slave trade bring the point home that the sources of slaves to Madagascar and Réunion were astoundingly numerous and that individuals came from regions as far as Judah (Benin), Gorée (Senegal), Pondichery (South-East Asia), Chandernagor (Bengal), Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, Zanzibar on the East Coast of Africa, and through systematic treatises in Mozambican territories, from both Northern and Southern Mozambique including interior regions such as the Lake Malawi areas and Cabo Delgado (ALPERS 2013, ALLEN 2008, DESPORT 2022). Richard Allen, for instance, refers to an 1817 Mauritian register lists entries of persons from Bisa, Ekoti, Kamanga, Lomwe, Makonde, Makua, Maravi, Mrima, Yao, Ngindo, Nyambane, Nyamwezi, Sagara and Sena, as well as a number of other unidentified ethnicities. Though Makonde is regularly featured in such listings, it must be emphasized that they are always included in groupings of people hailing from various places.

However, exacerbating the accuracy of the picture is the fact that before and after embarkation at the ports such as Quelimane, Angoshe and Ilha de Mozambique they simply came to be designated as *Mozambique*, as *makuas* (a generic name given to all peoples of northern

¹⁶ Liponda is a mix of all the food that the initiates will eat during the whole duration of the rites (pumpkin, banana, rice, maize, vegetables, some meat), all at the same time.

Mozambique) or as *inhambanes* (those who left through the port of Inhambane in southern Mozambique). They therefore often lost their specific identities (MEDEIROS, 2009). After much searching, I, therefore, concluded that, with the means at my disposal, I could do no more than establish that Makonde slaves were a presence on the Mascarene islands. Establishing a more concrete ancestral link between individuals from Cabo Delgado and people like Dominique Macondé is still an ambition of mine, but one that I will have to let rest for now.

Nevertheless, though difficult to prove, from a Makonde perspective, the *Jako/Nalombo* connection is interestingly specific. Beyond what is generally remarked, i.e. that *Jako* alludes to a mythical character in Hinduism and that *Nalombo* is associated with a mythical spiritual mediator presiding over Makonde initiation rites, there are many other similarities between what *Jako* and *Nalombo* practitioners do: 1) both paint their bodies very similarly; 2) both execute dance forms with comparable performative traits (e.g. in the style of the dance, the type of acrobatics, some of the dance movements, the offering of money, etc.); 3) both observe a period of sexual abstinence or fasting before any important celebration or ceremony; 4) both only come out on special occasions linked to renewal and re-birth into a new phase; 5) and in both cases not everyone can be a *Jako* or *Nalombo*, for they must be chosen or have a divine gift.

It could be argued that some of these links are too general and generic to be taken as proof; the weight of the argument is perhaps in cumulative. Even an archetypal phenomenon such as a 'trickster figure' cannot appear in a region without the confluence and interplay of precise local circumstances and individuals of specific origin – and to route *Jako Malbar* back to specific antecedent practices and people remains an intriguing possibility.

For me, though, the insights gained from comparing *Jako* and *Nalombo* went beyond conjecturing or concretizing a link between the two practices - after reflection, it became a prism for an understanding of how cultures transform and what that may mean for us in the 21st century. This is what this dissertation and project is mainly about.

6. The Fragility of Cultural Practices

When I started this study project, I had only intended to research the link between *Jako* and *Nalombo*. As the project progressed and I faced unexpected circumstances of fieldwork the emphasis shifted. For example, when Manupa, a Maputo-based *Nalombo* died unexpectedly, I became more aware of the fragility of the *Nalombo* tradition and its prospects for continuation. In the aftermath of his death, and to perpetuate his legacy and make sure that the all-important initiation rites could continue, we as an urban-based Makonde community, had to organize transport, money and accommodation to bring a rural-based *Nalombo* from Makonde Plateau in the far north to Maputo and could only secure the services of a suitable *Nalombo* with great difficulty. The message is clear: the thread of culture is fragile and easily lost, and it is for this reason that I decided that it was important to work towards a presentation of the *Nalombo-Jako* story in a format that could be presented at the community level and as a catalyst for community introspection. What remains when traditional practices yield to the pressures of new social circumstances? How is a legacy shaped by new factors? Reflections on these questions became the core of my musings.

The practice of *Nalombo* is hereditary and is passed only between members of the same family or clan. *Nalombo* elders are dying from old age, war or disease and many have not been able to pass their legacy on to their successors - which means that the practice of initiation rites (a keystone of the Makonde culture) is at risk.

During the fieldwork phase of my research, my community had the misfortune of losing our *Nalombo*, Jaime Manupa. He was the first elder and *Nalombo* I contacted for interviews, but when I arrived in Maputo from Cape Town, he was already sick. So, I kept on interviewing other elders hoping that he would recover, but unfortunately, he never did. I participated in almost all stages of the death ceremonies and funerals.

In many African societies, death is a rite of passage to a life that is believed to continue after death. The death of a *Nalombo* is generally treated as a sacred event and the whole process of burial is very complex:

- The family is not allowed to cry when the *Nalombo* dies.
- A *Nalombo* must only be buried by other *Nalombo*.
- The funeral must happen at a *Nalombo's* house.
- The *Nalombo's* body can only be taken out of the house through the back door for the funeral.
- When being buried, the head of the *Nalombo* must be on the side where the sun sets.
- The *Nalombo* must be buried in the afternoon.
- When dying, the *Nalombo* is wrapped in a white cloth from head to toe.

Manupa was a *Nalombo a ku kumula likumbi* who professed the catholic religion. When he died both traditional and religious community members wanted to bury him according to their distinct beliefs. In the end, there was an agreement and understanding that both belief systems were valid and should be respected. It was argued that ultimately, traditional ceremonies were more important, because he inherited this gift from a young age, while, in terms of religion, he converted to Catholicism only as an adult.

When a *Nalombo* dies another member of the family must be chosen to replace him. In Maputo, the *Vanalombo* that we had were Koy, Mwalemwa, Matuelo, and Manupa. I grew up in Maputo, living the Makonde traditions intensely, and it was my responsibility to teach Makonde songs and dances to female and male initiates. In those years the *Vanalombo* listed above are the ones I saw operate - all these *Vanalombo* are now dead, and among them, only Manupa and Matuelo managed to give their gift to a family member:

- Matuelo gave his *Nalombo* gift to his nephew Dade who is now operating in Boane.
- Similarly, when Manupa became sick, he gave his gift to his sister first, but she refused it because she is already married and is too old to perform such work. Manupa then gave it to his nephew, who was brought from the Makonde Plateau to be given Manupa's gift. Like Matuelo, Manupa's nephew is not a child, he is already a young man who had to go to the cemetery on the day of the burial of Manupa to do a ritual to become a *Nalombo*.

With the death of Manupa, Maputo lost its last *Nalombo*. Today, if we want initiation rites to happen in Maputo, we must book and bring one all the way from Makonde Plateau. Manupa's nephew lives on Makonde Plateau, so next December, the season of initiation rites, we must encourage him to come to Maputo. When we spoke (me and Manupa's nephew), he told me that he was supposed to stay in Maputo, but couldn't because there had been no time for him to learn from Manupa how to find the plants for medicine and healing a *Nalombo* needs in the Maputo area, which doesn't have enough bush and wasteland for picking herbs, and, in any case, with most of it privatized and therefore inaccessible. Among the younger generations, both those who live in the village or in a big city do not want to follow the tradition anymore and it is becoming difficult to find a family who wants their child to be a *Nalombo*.

I am detailing these complex facts to emphasize how fragile traditional knowledge can become. This kind of fragility is common in the context of cultural disruptions such as the ones that historically happened during the times of slavery. Whichever way one looks at it with regards to provenance, the *Jako Malbar* tradition of Réunion Island is a poignant example of how customs and practices can be elided and transformed under the pressure of new norms. In our times, cultural and social practices tend to be increasingly viewed as mere performance practices, without consideration for the underlying intent and seriousness of their origin. Makonde *Mapiko* dances and initiation rituals used to be inextricably linked to educative practices, but in an urban context, where traditional Makonde musical and dance performances increasingly fall under the shadow of touristic commerce, the *Nalombo's* catalytic role as a promoter and preserver of community cohesion is subtly and at times deliberately marginalised.

It is my contention (albeit hard to prove beyond doubt) that *Jako Malbar* could be an offspring of or at least be historically linked to *Nalombo* practices. In that case, its existence and afterlife would be an illustration in point, for it would show what happens when a cultural practice has to reinvent itself under the constellation of hybrid influences - and can perhaps do so to the extent that the link between an older culture (such as *Nalombo*) and a newer culture (such as *Jako*) can be practically forgotten.

PART 2

7. The Legacy of Vanalombo – An audio-visual Presentation

7.1. Background to the Project Documentaries and Community Event

Establishing the connection between *Nalombo* and *Jako Malbar* practices set the scene for the practical component of my project, which consisted of a presentation where the link between the two traditions was presented visually and verbally within my community and discussed for its implications. Part 2 presents this part of the project through documentary material. These presentations do not only aim to make the *Nalombo/Jako Malbar* case by means of visual illustration but also to open a debate regarding the relevance of such practices and traditions in a contemporary urban context. This section includes a description of a community event I organized in my attempts to bring these findings to the community for whom comparisons of *Nalombo* and *Jako Malbar* possibly matter the most (i.e., urban Makonde living in Maputo City).

The similarities and connections between the two traditions are not generally known in Mozambican Makonde circles and I felt that presenting documentary material on *Nalombo* and *Jako* at the community level in comparison would be an ideal way to stimulate conversation around issues of continuity in urban environments where shifting values impact customs and practices. I presented such a documentary as a keynote at a community event in Maputo City on the 23rd of November 2022. After the event, I edited it by adding footage of the community event itself, and by splitting the presentation of material into two separate documentaries. One, entitled *The Legacy of Vanalombo* focuses on the *Nalombo-Jako* theme, and the other, called *Interviews with Nalombo master's* presents material from preparatory fieldwork interviews that focus on the *Nalombo's* understanding of his art and role.

7.2. Outline of Documentary 1 - The Legacy of Vanalombo

This documentary was conceived as a compact presentation of information gained through fieldwork and research but also incorporates footage of the community event I organized.

What follows is a description of its structure and sequence:

- Introduction
This consists of a brief introductory *shinalombo* dance demonstration taken in 2004 in Northern Mozambique.
- What is a *Nalombo*?
A definition of the term *Nalombo* is presented by academic Valério Mwale.
- *Nalombo* preparation
This segment captures the costume and body paint preparation processes for the *Shinalombo* dance.
- *Shinalombo* dance
2004 Makonde Plateau fieldwork footage briefly demonstrates the two phases of the *Nalombo* dance: *Kushamalela* and *Kutambula shikuwo*.

- What is *Jako Malbar*?
Definition of *Jako Malbar* by Jean Virama, President of the Kaz Maron Association, Réunion Island.
- *Jako* preparation
Body painting preparation for *Jako Malbar*.
- *Jako Malbar* dance
Excerpts from 2013 *Jako Malbar* performances in Réunion.
- At the heart of a Makonde community
Photographs presenting the venue of important Makonde community events in Zona Militar, Maputo City.
- A community event organized on 23rd November 2022 - visual excerpts:
- Preparation for the event
A brief photographic essay.
- *Vanalombo* and *Jako Malbar* costume and body painting:
The first segment shows how the *Nalombo* is prepared. Firstly, *litapwata* or *inguvo* material has to be folded to make *ngonda*, arranged in a fan-shaped pattern and tied to the waist with a rope with *dinjuga* bells¹⁷. Normally chalk is used to decorate the body to highlight the *Nalombo* figure. These patterns differentiate the *Nalombo* from other dancers. In this documentary, ash is used instead of chalk.

In contrast, the second segment shows the process of ‘painting’ the *Jako Malbar*. The body decoration is much brighter than that of the *Shinalombo* dancers, with (most often) a green colouring at the base that is associated with the god *Hanuman*. The striped patterns superimposed hail back to older Tamil customs when the dancer personified a tiger rather than a monkey god.
- The rehearsal
The first segment presents a demonstration of *chikuo* dance steps that are essential *nalombo* fare. The *namakwakwa* (lead drummer) Valério Mwale plays a *likuti* drum call for the *Nalombo* dancer Moises Bilal to present himself. Each *Nalombo* has a totem name that represents him, and the lead drummer calls out his name as he prods him through his steps. The drummer shouts out the dancer’s name and then signals with his drum rhythm that it is time to do ‘his’ *kushamalela* (call-step). Drummer and dancer interconnect (through long rehearsals) and interact intuitively in a dance-drum art of great subtlety in which neither the drummer nor the dancer leads – they work together. Moises completes his demonstration with more narrative and symbolic *chikuo* steps that, in contrast with the first steps, are normally executed by more than one dancer at a time.

¹⁷ Dinjuga bells are important because they produce rhythmic accompaniment when a dancer moves.

- Introducing the event
This is a brief segment in which I contextualize the proceedings.
- Demonstration of Vanalombo and Jako Malbar
Here, comparative *shinalombo* and *Jako* dance demonstrations are performed, with Mauricio Nangonga and Moises Bilali as *Vanalombo* and Carlos Ebu as *Jako*. Accompaniment parts on drums are by Valério Mwale, Remigio Napatima and myself.
- Round-fire discussion
The round-fire discussion, of which only an excerpt is shown here, is discussed in more detail below.
- The *Nalombo* and *Jako Malbar* continuum - a comparison:
This section of the documentary functions as a visual summary of findings. It juxtaposes *Nalombo* and *Jako* by alternately contrasting a specific characteristic of one and then the other tradition. The examples, as per the subcategories below, speak for themselves:
 - ❖❖ Body painting
 - ❖❖ Dance
 - Body touching
 - Walking
 - Acrobatics
 - Tuning the drums.
- Transmitting the legacy
This final interview with *Nalombo* Dade Mpama and his apprenticed nephew, Mussa Mpama, touches on the important issues of legacy and transmission.
- Credits

7.3. Outline of Documentary 2 - Interviews with Nalombo Masters

A second shorter documentary shifts the lens to what *Nalombo* masters themselves say about their traditions. The four *Vanalombo* selected for interviewing came from different regions. They were:

1-Tobias Nkunda, an assistant *Nalombo* who worked with recently deceased Maputo City *Nalombo* master Jaime Manupa.

2-Dade Mpama, who operates in a village called Paulo Samuel Kankomba (PSK) in the Boane District of Maputo Province.

3-Josefina Cosme, also from PSK, is included as a representative of female initiation rites.

4-Lucas Njasi Nanelo, a *Nalombo* from the Muidumbe district in Cabo-Delgado province.

It will be noticed that the information presented by the *Vanalombo* is often deliberately sketchy and incomplete, as *Vanalombo* are traditionally bound not to make the details of their practice

public.¹⁸ All translations from Shimakonde in this documentary are my own. This was a major challenge in creating the documentary: unlike translations from Portuguese or French into English, which are relatively easy to effect, translations from the Makonde language pose the challenge of finding ways to render Shimakonde expressions that sometimes include words for which spot-on English equivalents are difficult to find.¹⁹

7.4. The Community Presentation

The community presentation, parts of which were incorporated in the first documentary, follows the sequence of the program outlined below.

The Legacy of Vanalombo



General program

Place: Capela Militar, Sommerschild, Maputo

Date: 23rd November 2022

1. 15h00 – Arrival of guests and participants
2. 15h20 – Program presentation and welcome - Master of ceremonies: Alamisse Ruben
3. 15h50 – Musical moment for opening (Vintani Nafassi)
4. 15h55 – Introduction to *Nalombo* and *Jako*
5. 16h20 – Round-fire discussion and debate - Valerio Mwale, Atanasio Nhussi, Maurício Nangonga and Jose Graminho - moderator Alamisse Ruben
6. 17h20 – Presentation of a documentary about *Nalombo*
7. 18h00 -Performance of *Vanalombo* and *Jako*
8. 19h30 - End of the program.

¹⁸ Refer back to the concepts of *shipii* and *midimu*.

¹⁹ Such issues of language-specific expression and the distortion of concepts in translation are rarely addressed in academic studies. In the case of studies on Makonde culture, we have the notable exception of Paolo Israel's work.

7.5. Explanation of the phases of the program

Phase 1- The warehouse used to accommodate the initiation rite, was the place chosen by me to present the event. It is situated in the centre of the military zone at the heart of the Makonde community in Maputo City. It is a holy place for the Makonde people, so I had to ask for permission from the elders, as it was one week before the initiation rites were due to start. Friends, family and neighbours helped me clean, and fix the electricity, settling the wood for the round-fire area where the performances and discussions would take place.

Phase 2- The master of ceremonies welcomed everyone and presented the program. I chose my cousin and neighbour Alamise Ruben as a master of ceremonies because of his background, firstly as a Makonde man and secondly as an anthropologist. He started the event by calling the audience to occupy their places - some were sitting down chairs or on the ground, while others were standing. Then he presented the program to the audience by introducing the theme and phases of the event.

Phase 3- Following Alamise's introduction I performed two solos for *mbira* and guitar. Both songs were in the Makonde language. The first song on *mbira*, called *Anakulo*, talks about the importance of the elders in a community and how we, the young generation, should keep respecting our elders. The second song, *Kwetu*, is about rebuilding our homeland Cabo-Delgado in the aftermath of current harrowing political conflicts.

Phase 4- Here Alamise explained to the audience about the two mythical characters, *Nalombo* and *Jako*, before inviting the audience and participants to a round-fire discussion.

Phase 5- During the round-fire, we focused on a discussion and explanation of *Vanalombo*. This was an open discussion that included much audience participation.

Phase 6- During this phase a pre-prepared documentary was shown.

For the event, I created a 20-minute introductory presentation and reflection on *Nalombo* by elders of the community. To realize this short audio-visual, several consultations and permission requests had to be made to the chiefs and elders of the places where I collected data.

The interviews and conversations in the presentation included discussions with *Nalombo* (both female and male) and with some elders who play *Vanalombo* drums.

Phase 7- This phase consisted of demonstrations of dance movements of both *Vanalombo* and *Jako* as performed by Mauricio Nangonga, Moises Bilali and Carlos Ebu.

7.6. People involved in the round-fire discussion

All the people involved in the community program have played or still play important roles as Makonde culture-bearers and expert singers, choreographers, dance teachers and dancers of Makonde culture.

-Valerio Mwale is a great Makonde percussionist and singer and for many years directed the Maputo-based *Massacre de Mueda* dance group.

-Atanasio Nhussi (who unexpectedly passed away on the 28th of November, shortly after this recorded event) was one of the best Mapiko dancers in Mozambique, who represented Mozambique on many occasions as a member of the *Mozambican National Dance Company*. His constant mentorship and guidance influenced this study greatly.

-Mauricio Nangonga, the youngest member of the round-fire discussion, is a *Nalombo* drum maker with deep insight into the tradition. He has been a constant source of information and was an invaluable assistant as a translator of the Makonde language material presented for this study.

-The moderator Alamise Rubens is my neighbour and a graduate of anthropology at the University Eduardo Mondlane in Maputo.

-Other participants were Carlos Bernardo Ebu, Moises Bilali, Nelson Maique, Zito Ferrão, Beto Buchili and Remigio Napatima.

8. Concluding Thoughts

The study proved to be a complex exercise because it was neither a 'pure' creative project nor a 'pure' research dissertation. It started as an investigation into cultural correlations and overlaps between two distinct performance traditions; it ended up as an applied practical response to current Makonde social issues.

I see myself as part of a generation that struggles to keep the *Vanalombo* tradition alive. The war in Cabo Delgado (since 2017, with early conflicts from 2014 onwards) is a major problem; it has made many people run from their villages looking for better and safer places and has resulted in genocides that included the burning down of entire villages completely to the ground. There is an enormously unsatisfied youth, as a result of unemployment, false promises, militarization and, above all extreme poverty in the region, - an encroaching debilitation in the wake of elite capture of the very rich natural resources of the territory in a situation fueled by external geopolitics (i.e., international interest in these resources). All this instability and confusion severely challenge the maintenance of a space for young people to learn about their traditions and for old people to transmit their knowledge.

There is another more silent risk: the subjugation of the Makonde culture and values to the quick modernization, fragmentation and cultural miscegenation that results from an undervaluation of Makonde culture in the context of migration to urban regions and 'better life conditions.

The practice of *Nalombo* is hereditary and is passed only between members of the same family or clan. *Nalombo* elders are dying from old age, war or disease and many have not been able to pass their legacy on to their successors - which means that the practice of initiation rites (a keystone of the Makonde culture) is at risk.

If there is any ambition to be born out of this study, it is to ensure that the art of the *Nalombo* masters remains valued and regains acknowledgement as one of the keystones on which the edifice of Makonde culture rests.

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