The Historical Overview of the Practice of Mbira in Maputo (Mozambique) in the 21st Century

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Abstract
This article provides an overview of mbira practice in Mozambique, particularly in Maputo, with the aim of improving our understanding of African musical arts in modern and contemporary times. Using oral history as a methodological approach allowed for an immersion in mbira practice and, consequently, an acknowledgement of the people, organizations, institutions, experiences and situations that characterize this practice. From a Historical Musicology perspective, the research found that official institutions such as the Institute of Socio-Cultural Research, the School of Communication and Arts at Eduardo Mondlane University, the National School of Music, the Music Crossroad Academy, and the Xikhitsi Project have encouraged the mbira practice in Maputo. New musical performance groups such as the Licoloma, Likuti, and Moticoma bands, as well as non-profit civil organizations such as Mukhambira, Xitata Luteria Africana, Waka Mbira, Modern Mbira, and Festa de Mbira, have also contributed to this practice.

Keywords: historical overview; mbira practice; maputo; contemporary.

Introduction

The mbira (Fig. 1) has become increasingly prevalent in Maputo, Mozambique, particularly since the beginning of the twenty-first century. One might ask which institutions, musical groups, organizations, and individuals have contributed to this change. How have they contributed?

One common response is that there is a lack of formal documentation enabling thorough scientific and academic assessments of this musical practice across its different domains. From this perspective, this article aims to provide a historical overview of mbira practice in Mozambique, especially in Maputo, to promote a better understanding of African musical arts in modern and contemporary contexts.

“Original African epistemological rationalizations present the musical arts as a soft science that conceptually integrates the sonic, choreographic, dramatic, gestural and material expressions, from creativity to public action and experiencing” (Nzewi, 2019, p. 77). Musical arts “demonstrates the marriage of the expressive art forms in performances that express culturally significant moments. Incorporating sound (vocal and otherwise), text (verbal and non-verbal),

costume (including masks), décor, body moment, drama and related theatrical displays and material artefacts (including music instruments), this cultural expression cannot be simply called music because of its multidimensional nature" (Akuno, 2019, p. 2). Thus, to understand mbira as a combination of expressive art forms, one must take an integrated perspective of all aspects involved in musical practice, including those unrelated to sound.

Figure 1 – A nyunganyunga mbira embedded in a paper sound box (source: author's personal archive)

This article was guided by the methodological approach of oral history, which is a scientific method that enables one to "[...] take a political look at the past, seeking to specify and relate subjects, facts, meanings, and perspectives on the past, present and future [...]" (Almeida; Koury, 2014, p. 200). In this research, oral history was conceived as detailed interviews about the spatial and temporal experiences of vachayi va timbira, who are generally excluded or marginalized in conventional historical accounts but who strive daily to define who they are and who they want to be. 'Muchayi wa mbira' is a term used to refer to a person who plays the mbira, with 'vachayi va timbira' being the plural form. These terms are found in two variants of the tsonga language: xidronga and xichangana. The former is common in the Maputo province, and the latter in the Gaza province.

Portelli (1997, p. 31) argues that "oral sources tell us not only what people did, but also what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they think they did". The experiences and memories provided by the oral histories of the vachayi va timbira thus served as oral documents, helping to establish a detailed narrative and polyphony of voices implicated in the historical panorama of their cultural practices. Based on the knowledge that studying living mbira players leads researchers to view mbira as a living body of knowledge rich in fragmented stories, I advocate the use of oral histories. These histories are important for understanding a part of human history.

Participant observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews and bibliographic research were adopted as methods of collecting and organizing information in order to understand this reality. Participant observation involved paying attention to, and taking note of, what was happening around us, while also living alongside and together with the people who were part of the musical phenomenon (Ingold, 2014). Field notes served as an extension of reflections on experienced events, facilitating the recording of daily observations and all events related to the vachayi va timbira. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed and organized individually to construct the particular perceptions of each

participant regarding their understanding of mbira practice in Maputo. In the textual description, the real names of the people surveyed were used with their permission. Bibliographic research was conducted throughout the study, providing access to scientific documents discussing music, particularly mbira music.

This methodological approach was theoretically guided by the framework of musicology, the study of music in all societies. Musicology encompasses the study of music in all its manifestations and contexts, including the physical, acoustic, digital, multimedia, social, sociological, cultural, historical, geographical, ethnological, psychological, medical, pedagogical, and therapeutic aspects of music (Parncutt, 2012, p. 147).

Musicology's establishment as a scientific discipline was influenced by Auguste Comte's (1798-1857) positivism, a doctrine that considered only experience-based knowledge to be scientifically valid and aimed to organize facts and determine the laws that produced them (Castagna, 2008, p. 12-13).

Thus, inspired by this doctrine, musicology began to focus on musical facts and laws, their organization, and how they function. This required creating segments for each type of approach. In 1885, Adler codified the branches of musicology as systematic and historical; the latter is the focus of this article.

According to Castagna (2008, p. 14), historical musicology studies the development of music over time. Similar to ethnomusicology, historical musicology focuses on specific musical manifestations, such as styles, genres, periods, traditions, forms, individual pieces, and musical events (Parncutt, 2012, p. 148). Positivism in historical musicology led to the centralization of historical-musical studies in musician biographies in an attempt to explain musical phenomena by their personalities' characteristics (Castagna, 2008, p. 16). Previous studies have noted that musicological research "consists of establishing the biographies of great musicians, describing the influences they exerted on each other, and tracing the history of forms and genres, generally related to the birth and evolution of the tonal system" (Chiménes, 2007, p. 17).

Figure 2 – The map of Mozambique is shown in red on the map of Africa (source: Dreamstime; available in: https://pt.dreamstime.com/mapa-de-moçambique-áfrica-image112748706; accessed on: May 3, 2023)

Starting in the 1970s, musicology began to adopt more diverse approaches, such as the history of the functions and meanings of works, the social history of music, and the history of listening, among others (Castagna, 2008, p. 16–17). These transformations sparked a new approach to the history of music, shifting the focus away from composers and

masterpieces. This new perspective sought to recreate everyday musical life and gain a broader understanding of the interrelationships between authors, works, styles, functions, employers, entrepreneurs, publishers, institutions, performance venues, and more (Castagna, 2008, p. 17). (Castagna, 2008, p. 17).

Through the expansion of oral and epistemological histories in musicology, this article first explores the organology of the mbira in Mozambique (see fig. 2). Then, it delves into the historical panorama of mbira practice in Maputo Province, the capital of Mozambique.

The Organological Universe of the Mozambican Mbira

Organology is the contemporary scientific study of musical instruments. It includes terminology, classification, constitution, construction, playing techniques, acoustic phenomena, scales, players, sociocultural factors, and beliefs that determine their use (Pinto, 2001, p. 265). How can these elements be approached from the perspective of the mbira?

According to Mukhavele's (2022, p. 133) thesis, the mbira is "acknowledged as a uniquely African invention, […]". This musical instrument consists of metal or bamboo lamellae (keys). From an African perspective, it is a fixed-pitch, plucked, melodic instrument. It is melodic[1] because it produces defined pitches. The mbira is a plucked instrument; the performer plucks the respective keys using two or three fingers as a specific fingering technique. The mbira is characterized by a fixed pitch because it is adjusted according to the owner's preferences during construction and cannot be altered during performance.

The mbira has many different names and versions[2], including mbira nhare, mbira dzavadzimu, mbira dzavandawu, mbira kwanangoma, mbira nhare, mbira dzavadzimu, mbira dzavandawu, nyunganyunga mbira, matepe/madhebhe dza mhondoro/hera, and karimba, which are used in Zimbabwe; ringa, rissange, quisanje, likembe, kisanji, ocisanji, and cisanzi, which are used in Angola; kalimba, ndimba, njari, ndandi, kankobele, and likembe, which are used in Zambia; luliimba, ilimba, marimba madogo, and mbira, which are used in Tanzania; enate, karanyane, taon, and runba, which are used in Botswana; nsantse, nyonganyonga, and likembe, which are used in Malawi; thishanji and kangombyo, which are used in Namibia; likembe, which is used in Congo; kadongo, which is used in Uganda.Timbrh in Cameroon and agidigbo in Nigeria.

According to Duarte (1980), Dias (1986), and Silva (2016), the mbira family was predominantly found in northern and central Mozambique under various names, such as chityatya/chitata in the provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa, and Kansantse in the province of Zambézia. In Manica and Sofala, it is known as mbira. In Manica, there is also

[1] For more information on this classification system, see Nzewi (2007, p. 161).

[2] Described by various researchers such as Blacking (1961); Berliner (1978), Duarte (1980); Dias (1986); Williams (2000); Kubik (2002); Jah (2007); Gumboreshumba, (2009); Van dijk (2010); H. Tracey (1969); Tracey (1961, 1972, 1974, 1989).

the nyonganyonga mbira. These authors also mention nsantse/kalimba in Tete province and marimba in Mabote district (Inhambane province). Mukhavele highlights the mbira ya xindawu in Gaza province in his study.

Despite the existence of these names, Maraire[3] reports that many people call the mbira by European names with derogatory connotations. They were taught to do so by Christian missionaries who sought to glorify their own musical instruments at the expense of African ones. Maraire noted that people from African cultures who supported missionary education regularly referred to the mbira in a Eurocentric way, using terms such as “finger piano”, “thumb piano”, or “hand piano”, and showed little interest in learning its African name (Berliner, 1978, p. 9).

The piano, a musical instrument that is referred to as the mbira, is credited to Italy, a European country. This clearly demonstrates the allure of European culture, which Europeans promoted as a cultural model that was adopted by colonized Africans. Organology researchers who follow this path

> […] exercise their control power, appropriating non-western instruments to western inventions, conventions, and cultures, and thus (by giving them Western names), muting and masking their actual voices, histories, and identities beside their Western counterparts, and in the broader academic/scientific forum. This phenomenon is a form of cultural colonialism, [...] as through the imposition of western names, and concepts, local instruments are disappropriated from their original cultures and appropriated in the West (Mukhavele, 2022, p. 8).

To alleviate this evident cultural colonialism, ethnomusicologists use the term lamellophone to classify the mbira in a generic sense, arguing that it is a neutral term within the family of musical instruments in European languages and avoids semantic confusion (Kubik, 2002, p. 6). The term lamellophone is therefore a supposedly successful attempt to replace the terms “thumb piano”, “hand piano”, and “finger piano”.

Nketia (1974, p. 77) defined lamellophone as referring to a large family of musical instruments widespread in sub-Saharan Africa. These instruments produce sound inside or outside a resonator (e.g., a box, gourd, or tin) by vibrating thin lamellae or tongues made of metal, wood, or other materials that are plucked by the thumbs and/or index fingers.

The term “lamellophone” is constructed from two parts: “lamella” (key) and “phone” (sound). Most dictionaries explain that the term “lamella” comes from the Latin “lamell”, meaning “plate”, “blade”, or “sheet”. The term “sound” also comes from the Latin “sonus”, meaning “sound” or “a vibration caused by the contact of two bodies”. Latin is an ancient language that originated in the region of Latium, which is now part of the city of Rome in Italy.

What happened was/is the silencing (and generalization) of African names by European Latins, that is, the multiple self-designations of African social groups were made unity as a

[3] Paul Berliner’s informant.

strategy of domination. “The colonizers, by replacing the different self-denominations of these peoples, imposing a generalized denomination on us, were trying to break their identities with the aim of reifying/dehumanizing them” (Santos, 2015, p. 27), depriving Africa of full participation in the global critical debate.

Contrary to this view, the term “lamellophone” can be replaced with “mbira” to accommodate African self-designations. This term appears in several versions of the instrument. “In Mozambique and in the Southern African region, in general, people tend to use the name mbira for all types of lamellophones, including the xityatye of the Makonde people from the north of Mozambique and the Kalimba [in central Mozambique and neighboring countries]” (Mukhavele, 2022, p. 113). Thus, Maraire (1991, p. 14) was correct in stating that “Mbira is a name for a family of instruments in the same sense as the term strings encompass guitars, violins, cellos, and many other instruments”.

Once the word mbira has been restored, it will be important to use its prefixes to teach people about its different versions, origins, and cultural connections. After all, the viola and the violin are similar in structure and playing technique, like the different types of mbira. However, one is a viola and the other is a violin. Both belong to the string family, or chordophones, in the European classification system of Sachs and Hornbostel. Therefore, Europeans do not limit themselves to saying that they are chordophones; they also mention the specific name of their instrument. Based on this concept, we must also adopt the term mbira to encompass its various types.

The origin of this family of African musical instruments is agreed upon in two ways. According to Kubik (1998, p. 24), “the mbira appears to have been invented twice in Africa: a wood or bamboo-tined instrument appeared on the west coast of Africa about 3,000 years ago, and metal-tined lamellophones appeared in the Zambezi River valley around 1,300 years ago”, as seen in Fig. 3.

Figure 3 – Dissemination of African musical instruments with keys: a) Mbira with bamboo keys; b) Mbira with metal keys (source: Kubik, 1998)

As can be seen, the mbira with metal tines flourished in the African countries that occupy the territory between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers. “The area comprises most of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), central Mozambique, and southern and eastern Zambia, and parts of southern Malawi, southern Mozambique, and northern Transvaal, South Africa” (Tracey, 1972, p. 85). However, most of the literature on this musical instrument comes from research conducted in Zimbabwe, while other countries, such as Mozambique, play a secondary role.

One of the main reasons was that the British colonization system in Zimbabwe, although also devastating, did not strictly interfere with the practice and research of local traditions, whereas “the Portuguese did not welcome the arrival of other foreigners and hindered any attempt at serious research in the African territories under their control [as in the case of Mozambique], whether in social, economic, and anthropological matters [or in the arts]” (Mondlane, 1969, p. 16).

Thus, the research and practice of the mbira in Mozambique were hindered by the colonial system, which resulted in the adoption of Portuguese identity and culture. The oppression of the Mozambican people began at the end of the 15th century when the famous Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama arrived on the island of Mozambique in early March of 1498 (Mondlane, 1969, p. 25). This oppression weakened the production of literary works with local content because such works were seen as a form of struggle for state sovereignty.

Despite everything, some people in privileged positions described the remnants of African cultural artifacts. One of the earliest ethnographic books to mention the mbira is Etiópia Oriental by the Portuguese missionary Fr. João dos Santos (c. 1560–1622). After completing his theological studies in Portugal, dos Santos joined a group of missionaries in April 1586. They set out for the East and arrived in Mozambique in late 1586 to evangelize. While traveling through the Zambezi Valley, the missionary visited the regions of Tete and Sena, as well as the Quirimbas Islands. He remained in the Sofala region until 1595, when he set sail for Goa. Dos Santos returned to Portugal in 1600 and remained there until 1606. During his time in Lisbon, he compiled the notes he had gathered while traveling through Africa, publishing them in 1609[4]. In Eastern Ethiopia, the friar reports that

> Another musical instrument of the **Kaffirs** [...], but with iron keys, is the one they also call an **ambira**, [...] which has flat, slender iron bars, each about a palm’s length long, tempered in the fire in such a way that each has its own distinct tone. There are nine of these bars, all fixed in succession and close to one another, nailed by their tips to a stick, as with a guitar bridge, and from there they curve over a hollow space formed by the same stick in the manner of a shallow wooden bowl, upon which the other ends rest in the air. This [bowl] vibrates [when] the **cafres** touch so lightly these distinct tips suspended in the air with the nails of their thumbs, [...]. In this way, the metal pieces are shaken, striking the rim of the bowl in the manner of a berimbau, generating together a gentle harmony and soft music of all the voices in concert. This instrument is much more musical than the other one made of gourds, but it does not sound as

[4] Cf. (Carvalho, 2013, p. 1-2).

> loud, and it is usually played in the house where the King is, because it is softer and produces very little noise[5] (Dos Santos, 1609, pp. 16–17, my emphasis).

In this description, the missionary provides a physical description of the mbira, highlighting its structure, sound texture and timbre. He also describes how the nine metal keys are tempered over a fire to produce different tones and explains the unique sound-producing techniques that enlivened the social atmosphere of the Sofala kingdom.

However, it is noted that the friar describes the mbira as belonging to the 'Cafri', which obscures its precise relationship with African culture. The word 'Cafre', 'Cafreal', 'Cafri' or 'Kaffir', derived from Arabic, is an offensive term used in the English language — specifically by Eurocentric hegemony — to designate a Black person in South Africa and other African countries. Using this term for Black Africans disregards their diverse self-designations and reveals a relationship of subordination, implying that these people have no names and are merely objects.

It should also be noted that Friar uses the term 'ambira' as an adaptation of the original term 'mbira' into Portuguese. When writing his book, the author had no access to references for the spelling and pronunciation of African Bantu languages[6]. He relied strictly on his hearing to transcribe words, basing his spelling on his own language or that of his collaborators (Mukhavele, 2022, p. 122). A similar example of this adaptation would be if someone were to say, 'The mbira is an African musical instrument'; in the xichangana language, it would be said as follows: '*A mbira i xichayu xa Africa'*, thereby confusing the "*A*", which is semantically neutral but functions as a vowel stabilizer in the sentence[7].

The second notable text on mbira practice in Mozambique, *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent*, appeared in the early 20th century. It was written by American ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis Burlin (1920) and based on the experiences of Mozambican mundau[8] Kamba Simango. In this work, the mbira is described and labeled as the "Mbi'la", instrument of the natives" or the "ZaTza"[9], as it is commonly known (Fig. 4).

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[5] "Outro inftrumento mufico tem eftes cafres, [...], mas he todo de ferro, a que tambe chamão ambira, [...] tem húas vergas de ferro, efpalmadas, & delgadas, de comprimento de hum palmo, temperadas no fogo de tal maneira, que cadahúa tem fua vo diferente. Eftas vergás faó noue fomente, & todas eftão poftas em carreira, & chegadas húas âs outras, pregadas com as pontas em humpao, como é caualete de viola, & dali fe vão dobrando fobre hú vão que tem u mefmo pao ao modo de hú efcudella, fobre o qual ficão as outras pontas no ar. Efte tangem os cafres tocandolhe neftas pontas que té no ar com as vnhas dos dedos pollegares, que pera iffo trazé crecidas, & comprias, & tão ligeiramente as tocão, [...]. De modo que facudindole os ferros, & dando as pancadas em vão fobre a boca da efcudella, ao modo de berimbao, fazem todos juntos húa harmonia de branda, & fuaue mufca de todas as vozes concertadas. Efte instrumento he muito mais mufco que o outro dos cabaços mas não foa tanto, & tangefe ordinariamente na cafa onde eftà o Rey, porq he mais brando, & faz mui pouco eftrondo" (Santos, 1609, p. 16-17).

[6] The African Reference Alphabet was first proposed at a conference organized by UNESCO in Niger in 1978, following several conferences held in previous years.

[7] Inspired by Mukhavele (2022).

[8] This refers to a person of the ndawu ethnic group, which is predominant in central Mozambique.

[9] Just like nsantse!

The “mbila” analyzed in this context

> The mbi’la was made of a block of wood about a foot long and some three inches thick, the lower end of which was partially hollowed out to give resonance, […]. Attached to the flat surface were thin tongues of metal, one end fastened to the instrument, the other free to vibrate when snapped downward and outward by the thumbs and fingers. At the lower end of the mbi’la were pinned thin disks of tin, two on each pin, which vibrated when the metal tongues were played upon. The silvery, tinkling tones accompanied by the constant jingling buzz of the vibrating disks sounded like a brook purling over stones amid rustling reeds. It was a most poetic and sylvan music, evoked by the little mbi’la which seemed the very voice of nature (Curtis, 1920, p. 8).

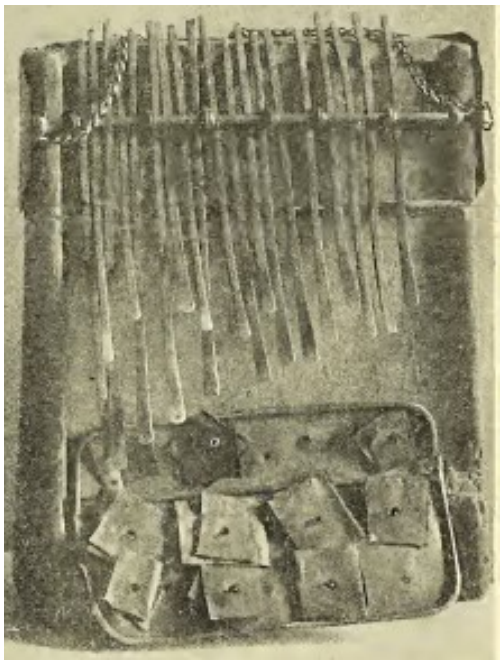

Figure 4 – The mbira (mbila) of the Kamba Simango
(source: Curtis, 1920, p. 3)

Curtis’s book recounts how Kamba Simango secured a scholarship to study at Hampton Institute in Virginia, USA, after numerous struggles against slavery and colonization in the province of Sofala (Beira) in central Mozambique. When he wasn’t studying, however, he would sit quietly alone, playing his “mbi’la”, inspiring the above description and revealing the organological aspects of the instrument’s physical construction, sound-producing mechanisms, timbre, and sonic smoothness. The mbi’la became Kamba Simango’s constant companion, embodying his love of music and his need for self-expression, and representing the resurgence of the African people (Fig. 5).

Based on this information, it is clear that both texts were inspired by the mbira practice of Mozambicans. However, they were written by a European in Portugal and an American in Virginia, respectively, and these works remain largely unavailable in Mozambique.

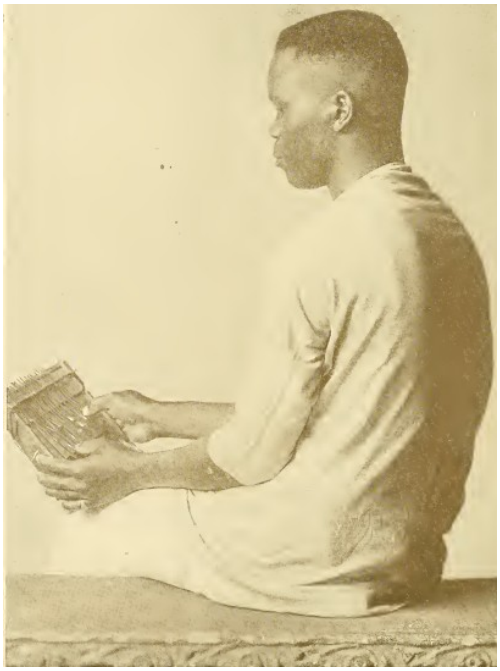

Figure 5: – Kamba Simango and his Mbi’la
(source: Curtis, 1920, p. 8)

Meanwhile, mbira practice in Zimbabwe has continued to be integrated into rituals for naming local chiefs following the death of their predecessor, rainmaking ceremonies, thanking ancestors for protection and a good harvest, traditional drinking festivals to quench ancestors' thirst, initiations, spiritual possession, healing, welcoming spirits of the dead after an elder dies, and other everyday practices[10] (Gumboreshumba, 2009, p. 31; Matiure, 2009, p. 29).

These mbira performance contexts were significant for the revival of local traditions in Mozambique. This was inevitable since the two countries share political, border-related, cultural, social, regional, and economic interests.

Many Zimbabwean musicians drew inspiration from these traditions for their musical output, which was listened to in Mozambique primarily through Radio Mozambique. Notable Zimbabwean musicians include Stella Chiweshe, Chiwoniso Maraire, Dumisani Maraire, Thomas Mafumo, Oliver Muthukuzi, Ephat Mujuru, Sekuru Gora, Sekuru Gweshe, Garikai Tirikoti, Chris Mhlanga, Tute Chigamba, Chartwell Dutiro, and the Bhundu Boys, among others.

Hugh Tracey founded the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in South Africa in 1954 to record, analyze, and archive the music of sub-Saharan Africa[11], including the musical traditions of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. ILAM is the world's largest repository of African music and has contributed to Mozambique's cultural revival.

Following Mozambique's independence on June 25, 1975, and the cultural rebirth sparked by the 1977 National Culture Conference, the 1980 National Festival of Traditional Song and Music and the 1981 Seminar on the Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage were created. These events have led to a proliferation of literary works on culture, particularly the mbira.

In this regard, Duarte (1980) classifies, describes the construction of, and explains the playing techniques and contextual framework of the mbira and other musical instruments played in Mozambique. Dias (1986) expands upon these aspects, including learning methods, symbolism, philosophical aspects, and the way of life of the peoples who play the mbira and other musical instruments. Silva (2016) briefly discusses the mbira's origins, construction, playing technique, and geographical distribution. Silambo (2018) offers reflective insights on learning, meanings, uses, and social functions of mbira music in an academic setting inspired by the mbira's cultural community[12]. Later, Macoo (2021) discusses the nyunganyunga mbira, an innovative instrument. He addresses the preparation of the soundboard, keys, and electroacoustic pickup systems. He also discusses methods of maintenance and validates the

[10] These ceremonies are held in every month except November. According to the Zezuru, a subgroup of the Shona, it is taboo to perform rituals during this month because it is dedicated to resting the ancestral spirits after they have worked all year (Matiure, 2009, p. 28).

[11] Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of Africa located south of the Sahara Desert. It includes the central, eastern, southern, and western regions of the continent.

[12] For more on academic and cultural communities, see Stuart Hall's (2003) work.

instrument's use on contemporary stages with modern technological equipment. Mukhavele (2022) proposes innovative approaches, methods, and techniques as experimental solutions that challenge the potential of traditional musical instruments and promote their revitalization for producing music suited to contemporary local and global contexts. Lastly, Silambo (2023) explores the practices and strategies employed in reinventing and maintaining the vachayi va timbira in Maputo, Mozambique, and their relationship with integrated musical arts.

Figure 6 – Nyunganyunga mbira from Xitata (source: Silambo, 2021)

According to studies by Mukhavele (2022) and Silambo (2023), the mbira nyunganyunga (Fig. 6) is the most widely used and popular mbira in Maputo. It was originally known in Mozambique as the karimba. Jege A. Tapera later brought it from Mozambique to Zimbabwe. Tapera was born around 1905 in the Murehwa district of what was then Southern Rhodesia (Tracey, 1961). At around 25 years of age, Tapera traveled from his district to northeastern Tete Province in central Mozambique.

In that part of Africa, he heard the nsantse, also known as the karimba, played by the vasena and vanyungwé during the 1930s. Influenced by this experience, Andrey Tracey (1961) recounts how Tapera learned two local songs, *Chikunda* 1 and *Chikunda* 2, which he played on the Mozambican karimba. Like those who came before him, Tapera acquired a karimba and a repertoire through this involvement, which he later took to Zimbabwe.

Around the 1960s, the mbira player, known as the Muridzi wembira in the Shona language, brought the thirteen-tongue karimba (Fig. 7) of the vaNyungwé of Tete to his country and named it nyungwé nyungwé mbira. According to Matiure (2008, p. 85), "Jege Tapera coined this term to signify that he obtained and learned this instrument from Nyungwe musicians in Mozambique" However, Maraire later adapted this label to nyunganyunga mbira.

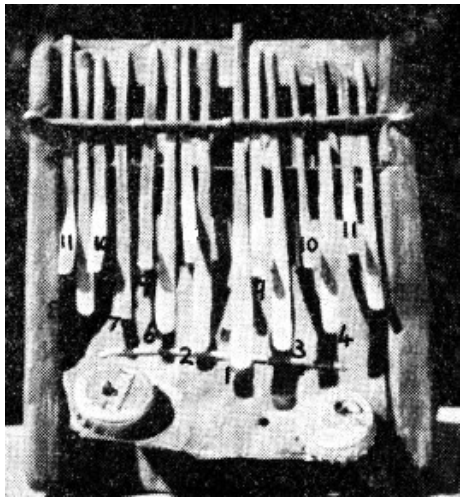

Figure 7 – Thirteen-key kalimba (source: Tracey, 1961, p. 46)

Based on this research and these observations, Jege Tapera and Andrew Tracey added two keys to

the kalimba. They also slightly adjusted the tuning of the tines on a soundboard made of more durable wood (Matiure, 2008, p. 85).

These transformations and modifications during the 1960s resulted in the nyunganyunga mbira having fifteen keys, thus adapting to the music of the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Since the introduction of the Mukhambira in 2005, the instrument has returned to Mozambique, particularly Maputo. It has acquired new physical and acoustic characteristics, including an increased number of tines, new tine-fastening techniques, innovations in wood selection, new timbres, and new musical styles and contexts of use and production.

Inspired by this evolution, Macoo (2019) and Dos Marquile (2022) state that the basic parts of the contemporary mbira are a wooden base or soundboard, a bridge, a crossbar or bar, clamps or hooks, and tines or keys (Fig. 8).

Figure 8 – Parts of
the Nyunganyunga Mbira:
1. Soundboard/Xitlhata;
2. Pressure bar/Xigaku;
3. Bridge/Nhlana;
4. Nail/Xipíkiri;
5. Tightening ire/Hook/Nsenga woboha;
6. Key/Rito la mbira
(source: author's personal archive)

The mbira's primary resonator is the soundboard, known as xitlhata[13] in the xichangana language. It resonates in sympathy with the sound of the keys (marito ya mbira) when the player plucks them. The crossbar (xiqaku) holds the keys in place, and the bridge supports the keys and transmits their vibrations to the soundboard. The bridge (nhlana) is held, on the one hand, by nails (xipíkiri) and on the other by the pressure of the keys themselves placed on the soundboard through the ends, generally not flattened. The nyunganyunga mbira has two registers. The register consisting of long tines (lower series) produces low-pitched sounds (LR), while the register composed of shorter keys (upper series) produces higher-pitched sounds (HR) when plucked.

In African philosophy, the keys of the mbira, such as the mbira nyungangunga, are associated with family structures.

> Dumisani Maraire called the lowest pitch on the instrument the "father [F]"; the pitch an octave above that, the "mother [M]"; and the pitch an octave above that one, the "child [C]." According to this conceptualization, the rest of the keys comprised four similar "families" of keys, each with a "mother [M1, 2, 3, and 4]" and "child [C1, 2, 3, and 4]" or "twin children" (two keys with the same pitch). There was one key on the

[13] See also Mukhavele (2022).

instrument that did not belong to any of these “families”: that one Maraire called the “black sheep” or “independent note” (Berliner, 1978, p. 1–2, see Fig. 9).

According to this philosophy of organizing sounds, music reveals how most African families and social groups function through the mbira: the father is the keystone, the mother is the second pillar, and the children adapt flexibly to this organizational reality. Of course, this structure does not imply exercising authority over others. After all, all the keys are considered members of a family or families (various sound frequencies of the mbira) that interweave rhythmically and melodically to collectively form a family unit (a piece of music) that intervenes in various community situations (Silambo, 2020).

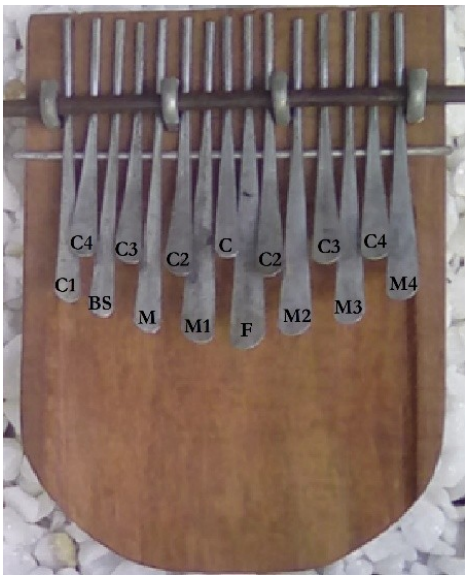

Figure 9 – Family Relationship Chart
(source: author’s personal archive)

Each key on the mbira has a unique sound, which gives the instrument and the music it produces a unique identity. The impact of each key on the music depends on its relationship with the other keys of the instrument, or members of the community. “This performative philosophy of humanity is rooted in the philosophy of African cultural life, in which the individual is never more important than the community or group” (Freire; Graeff, 2020, p. 124).

This philosophical perspective is described in various African cultures. Meki Nzewi (2007) and Meki Nzewi and Odyke Nzewi (2009) found it in the Igbo tradition of Nigeria. Moya Aliya Malamusi (1999), on the other hand, located it in the ngorombe music (“pan flutes”) of Master Sakha Bulaundi, a Mozambican who sought refuge in Malawi in 1990.

Drawing a rough comparison between the sonic identity of the mbira and the colonially modeled system yields a hexatonic F major scale (Fig. 10). This scale consists of six degrees, which are typically organized to allow for finger articulation when performing *modes*. These *modes* are characterized by rhythmic-melodic phrases or plucked movements (fingerings) that are characteristic of the mbira tradition (Silambo, 2023, p. 92).

Figure 10 – Comparison of the mbira’s tonal identities with the modeled system
(source: author’s personal archive)

According to the notes shown in Fig. 10, the score in Fig. 11 demonstrates approximation. Odd numbers represent lower notes, and even numbers represent higher notes.

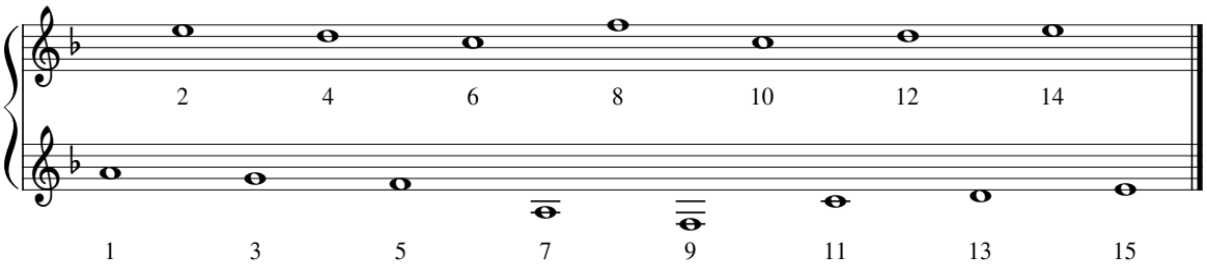

Figure 11 – Approximation of the tonal identities of the mbira in nyunganyunga in the score (source: prepared by the author

Table 1 shows how notes in the low and high registers are related to each other.

Keys	Approximated Note	Relativity
9, 5, 8	Fá (F)	Octaves
7 e 1	Lá (A)	Octaves
1 e 10	Dó (C)	Octaves
3 e 12	Ré (D)	Octaves
5 e 14	Mi (E)	Octaves
6 e 10	Dó (C)	The same pitch
4 e 12	Ré (D)	The same pitch
2 e 14	Mi (E)	The same pitch
3	Sol (G)	No matching pitch or octave relationship

Table 1 – Relative positioning of notes in the low and high registers (source: Maraire, 1991, p. 18)

By arranging the approximate notes of the Nyunganyunga Mbira according to a diatonic scale, a hexatonic scale is formed (Fig. 12). In other words, it is a diatonic scale without the fourth degree (which, in this case, would be B♭). This note is typically performed by singing or playing alongside another instrument (Silambo, 2018), reflecting the belief that no musical instrument is more important than the community of instruments as a whole.

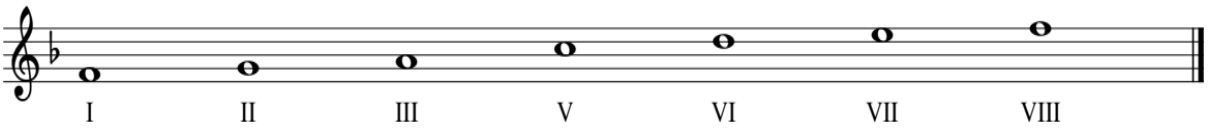

Figure 12 – The approximate scale of the Nyunganyunga mbira (souce: prepared by the author)

Currently, when playing the mbira nyunganyunga, the keys are scratched from top to bottom using two thumbs (right thumb – RT and left thumb – LT), which deconstructs the traditional

mbira nyunganyunga manuals' advocacy of using the right index finger (IF) for the eight, ten, twelve and fourteen keys. This technique was observed in mbira practice in Maputo among Vachayi Va Timbira, Maneto Tefula, Beauty Sitoe, Ivan Mucavel, May Mbira, Zande Mudolas and others. Mukhavele (2022, p. 267) also observed that "most nyunganyunga players [in Maputo] use only two thumbs".

Vachayi va timbira who use this technique, distribute their fingers as follows: the left thumb scratches keys one to eight, and the right thumb scratches keys eight to fifteen (Fig 13). Therefore, depending on the movement (musical passage) they want to play in a given song, the vachayi va timbira scratch key eight with either the right or left thumb.

After presenting this brief organological analysis of the mbira, the historical overview of the instrument's insertion in Maputo will follow.

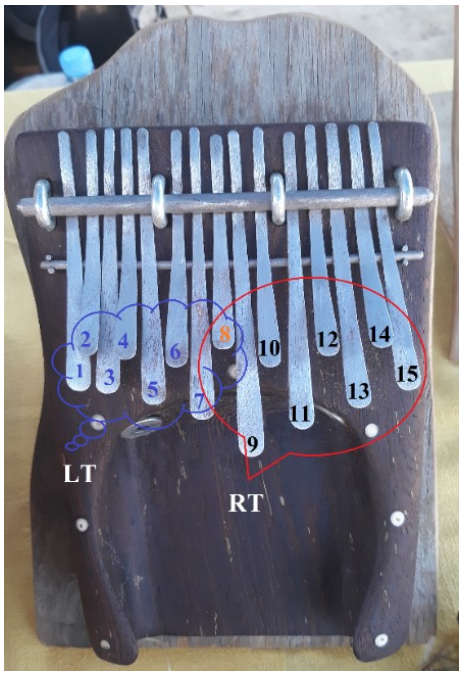

Figure 13: Nyunganyunga mbira performance techniques (source: Silambo, 2021; photograph taken by the author at the Xitata Luteria African exhibition during the 5th edition of the Festa de Mbira)

Historical Overview of Mbira Practice in Maputo, Mozambique

In Africa, particularly in Mozambique, the colonial system suppressed musical arts, including songs, dances, musical instruments, and attire, as well as other cultural expressions. However, during the early years of independence, the idea of a strong and united Africa was widely promoted (Mondlane, 1969).

Starting in the 1950s, African independence movements enabled the revitalization of African culture, the expansion of radio and television networks, the establishment of music education institutions that incorporated African musical arts, and the "controlled" exchange among people from different countries.

In this context, Kwanongoma College of Music was founded in Zimbabwe in 1947 and inaugurated its Ethnomusicology program in 1989. The college promotes the performance of traditional and popular African music and dance within their cultural contexts.

Based on literature and field notes of my research, the prominence and popularization of the nyunganyunga mbira can be seen as largely shaped by this institution during the 1960s, particularly through the work of Jege Tapera, Hugh Tracey, Andrew Tracey, and Dumisani Maraire.

As early as 1954, British ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey established the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in South Africa. ILAM is the world's largest repository of African

music. Dedicated to the study of music, including mbira, and African oral arts, the institution preserves thousands of historical recordings made since approximately 1929.

ILAM's research has documented, analyzed, and archived Sub-Saharan African music, particularly mbira, with the aim of developing a theory of musical practice in Africa and assessing its social, cultural, and artistic values. Many of these studies have been published in the institution's journal, African Music[14].

Drawing from the materials archived in this library and the texts published in its associated journal, one can explore audio and visual documents illustrating the practice of various types of mbira in Mozambique and other African countries. These documents contribute to theories on Sub-Saharan African music.

Researching these "rare" documentary sounds can reveal the systems, methods, concepts, and philosophies that composers, musicians, and African communities use in creating, rehearsing, and practicing music.

The Institute for Socio-Cultural Research (ARPAC) was established in Mozambique and is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture. According to its brochure, ARPAC was founded in 1983 to ensure the preservation of materials collected during the National Campaign for the Preservation and Promotion of Culture, which took place from 1978 to 1982 in the former People's Republic of Mozambique. ARPAC has also promoted training initiatives for Mozambicans, equipping them with historical, anthropological, and sociological research techniques.

Through Decree 26/93 of November 16, 1993, ARPAC ceased functioning as a project and became a legally recognized, autonomous public institution integrated into the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports. This strengthened its mission of researching, archiving, and systematically and scientifically disseminating Mozambican culture.

In terms of research, ARPAC established an ethnomusicology department in 1992 that focuses on studying, collecting, archiving, and disseminating local Mozambican music. While these activities formally began in 1993, the majority of materials collected by the institution have not received adequate preservation or valorization.

In 1992, the Mozambican ethnomusicologist Luka Mukhavele joined ARPAC under a contract that lasted until 1998. This was within the context of the institution's work. During his time at the institution, he researched the country's traditional music and became acquainted with the mbira (nsantse) in Tete through the musician João Brás. The renowned mbira (kalimba, nsantse) master Lázaro Vinho (1925–2004) was born in this province, in the Changara district[15].

[14] https://www.ru.ac.za/ilam/

[15] There is limited information available about Brás and Vinho, including in the archives of ARPAC.

During his time at ARPAC, Mukhavele continued to further his education. In 1994, ARPAC awarded him a scholarship, and he studied at the Zimbabwe College of Music from 1995 to 1996. In 1997, he began an undergraduate degree in ethnomusicology and music education at the University of Zimbabwe. His formal and informal training in Zimbabwe subsequently influenced the initiatives he introduced in Mozambique, which contributed to the revitalization of mbira practice in Maputo.

Other Mozambicans who received scholarships from the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports at the time include Pedro Júlio Sitoe and Maria Ezelina Chau, who were working at the National School of Music at the time.

These studies outlined what Dos Marquile (2022) describes as the embryonic phase of the recovery and relocation of the mbira in Mozambique, carried out by the teachers Luka and Sitoe after their return from studies in Zimbabwe. Thus, as previously noted, the nyunganyunga mbira – taken in the last century from the province of Tete (central Mozambique) to Zimbabwe – returned to the country and became the most widely produced and disseminated type in Maputo Province, particularly after the creation of Mukhambira as “an epicenter for the performance, construction, and recovery of the instrument”, as stated by Dos Marquile (2022).

In 2005, Mukhavele founded Mukhambira[16], a research project dedicated to African musical instruments – including the mbira – which introduced new approaches, methods, techniques, and technologies for this and other musical instruments.

Therefore, with the founding of Mukhambira, the first phase of the historical relocation of the mbira in Mozambique in the twenty-first century began to take shape, consisting of the “[...] handing over [of the mbira] to its disseminators, Ivan Tsotsi and later Nharira [...]. They were the ones who took the first steps in the city of Maputo” (Dos Marquile, 2022), aligning themselves with musical performance groups (bands).

The band Licoloma – which in Gitonga[17] means “lanho”, that is, a still green coconut – according to Master Mucavel (2019), “was the first group in Mozambique to use the mbira as its principal instrument.” In this regard, Master Zande Mudolas (Lisenga) notes that:

> The first person I saw was Ivan Tsotsi; I first saw him on television. I also saw him performing in the band Licoloma with Hoigo Jasse [around 1997–1999]. They [the band members] were the ones creating that fusion [with conventional Western instruments], but later they disappeared. Afterwards, we emerged with the band Moticoma when I [referring to Lisenga] introduced the mbira, using it as the band’s main instrument. From that point on, other people began to appear. At that time we were very few [mbira players], and it was also very difficult to acquire a good mbira (Lisenga, 2022).

[16] This project is currently based in the district of Marracuene, in Maputo Province.

[17] This is one of the languages commonly spoken in Inhambane Province, in southern Mozambique.

This testimony shows that African musical instruments such as the mbira, although scarce in Maputo at the end of the twentieth century, began to gain visibility in television spaces, which contributed to reducing stereotypes of inferiority associated with this musical instrument and encouraged the emergence of new performers.

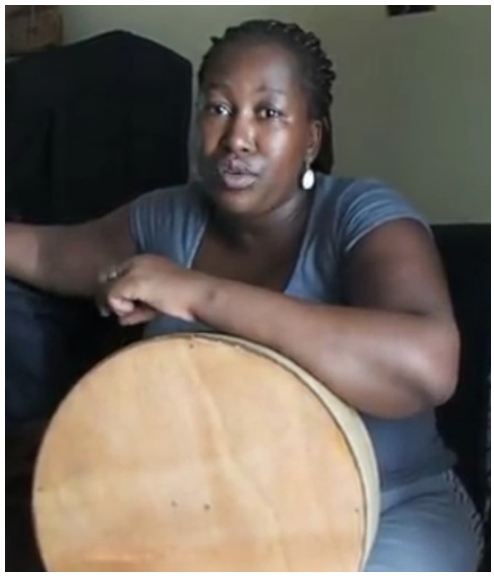

Figure 14 – Lídia Mati holding a mbira in the gourd (source: https://youtu.be/Hp98xnpddJM?si=kYOyGJQyOQcLoMTO)

There are also accounts that this first phase was further reconfigured with the emergence of the female band Licuti, created in Maputo under the influence and inspiration of Mozambican musical arts grounded in percussion-based traditions. “Licuti was a female band led by the late Lídia [Fig. 14], who was a remarkable mbira performer and the first woman to perform the nyunganyunga mbira in Mozambique [...] in the contemporary context” (Dos Marquile, 2022).

Clementina Ernesto Zimba Uamusse (2022), “Likuti is the name of a drum from Cabo Delgado[18] that accompanies the famous [Mapiko] dance”. Tinoca Zimba, as Clementina is more commonly known, recounts that:

> The protagonist who created the Likuti group was the late Lídia Mati. She always thought it would be good for us to form a women’s group focused on traditional music. I have always appreciated [local music]. So, when she mentioned this to me, I became interested. We then began to recruit other colleagues, namely Nguilozi, Alexa [...] and Neusa Naiana (Uamusse, 2022).

For this initiative, Uamusse (2022) remembers Mate as “a strong-willed woman with vigor — that sense of saying, ‘We women are capable; we should not remain dependent’”. However, these women developed their style in collaboration with others and through shared experiences. According to Uamusse (2022), Atanásio Nyusi[19] “is like a library to me and is part of Likut’s history. He provided us with rhythms and singing during rehearsals”. Specifically, Lídia Mate “also played percussion, the mbira, and the hudo in addition to singing and dancing — she was a dancer in the Orquestra Marrabenta” (Uamusse, 2022).

These women’s musical performances concretely demonstrated the African epistemological rationalizations of musical arts as a science that integrates sound, choreography, gestures, and creativity in the public performance of African musical instruments. According to

[18] It is a province in the northern region of Mozambique.

[19] This interview was conducted during the week he passed away.

other oral sources from the research, “the Licuti band sparked awareness among people regarding mbira practice” (Dos Marquile, 2022).

According to Dos Marquile (2022), the activism of Mukhambira, Licoloma, Likutini, and Moticoma was highly influential in disseminating the mbira in the contemporary context. “After Moticoma came this generation [...] in which I [Dos Marquile] am included – a generation of deconstruction and vigorous promotion of the mbira nyunganyunga in Maputo – which includes me, Beríncia, Jojo Mbalango, Muhamgos, the Wakambira project, and others” (Dos Marquile, 2022).

The experimental research of Mukhambira was later followed by Xitata Luteria Africana (2008), Waka Mbira (2013), and Modern Mbira (2015), among other projects. According to its founder, Clélio Vilanculos[20], Xitata Luteria Africana was founded in 2008 in the Laulane neighborhood of the Kamavota Municipal District[21] with support from several masters, including Ivan Mucavel, May Mbira, Paulo Mbalango, and Ndzondza Tivane. Vilanculos (2021) states that his goal was to adapt these instruments to the needs of contemporary performers using innovative construction techniques[22]. As an observer, I have noted that the project has experimented with different types of wood and finishing processes for mbira construction to remain competitive in national and international markets.

Xitata Luteria Africana promotes traditional Mozambican musical instruments, particularly the mbira, and strengthens the construction and repair sector. According to its founder, Xitata has influenced the development of a mbira-making movement in Mozambique through nationwide training initiatives, particularly in the provinces of Nampula, Tete, Manica, and Inhambane, as well as in the city and province of Maputo.

The Waka Mbira project was established at the Mozambican Musicians Association at the beginning of 2013. It means “those of the mbira”, “the youth of the mbira”, and “the rastafarians of the mbira”. According to Master Auro Meireles dos Marquile (2022), also known as May Mbira, the project’s founding leaders are May Mbira and Ndzondza Tivane. The co-founders include Ivan Tsotsi, Careca, Jojo Mbalango, Leo Dzidzi, and the late Nharira.

Waka Mbira is a collective organization without a hierarchy. Its goals are to: i) Revitalize and popularize the mbira and all associated practices; ii) Pass the mbira on to new generations; iii) Integrate the mbira into public primary education in Mozambique as a tool for cultural development; And iv) Ensure the sustainability of master performers through the construction and performance of the instrument.

Another project dedicated to these objectives is Modern Mbira. Its founder, Ozias Américo Macoo, recounts that he started the project around 2012 in his home in the Choupal

[20] It is commonly known as Xitaro.

[21] Maputo City.

[22] These instruments were used as decorative objects or gifts for tourists (Vilanculos, 2019).

neighborhood of Maputo. It began as an extension of the Mukhambira project and became established in the mbira construction industry in 2015. The project involves collaboration with experts such as Raimundo Lisenga (mbira practice instructor), Alcídio Matavel (instrument marketing), and Micas Silambo.

The Modern Mbira Project focuses on innovating the mbira by experimenting with integrated electroacoustic pickup systems[23]. These systems enhance the mbira's performance on stage and with modern acoustic equipment. They also enable convenient audio recording. The project is dedicated to the following: (i) developing methods to preserve the mbira against climatic variations and extreme temperatures, (ii) experimenting with native and exotic woods to explore new timbres, and (iii) investigating musical scales and tessituras that allow for transposition and performance of diverse musical systems beyond traditional Mozambican practices (Macoo, 2022).

Master Macoo has shared his instruments with musicians, music therapists, and other mbira players in Mozambique, South Africa, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Finland, Norway, Brazil, Argentina, the United States, and other countries. Regarding these instruments, Master Macoo states that they are used in "countless audio recordings, film soundtracks, electronic music, European classical music, music education in schools, and music therapy activities" (Macoo, 2022). As noted in various musical groups, it can be concluded that mbira performance has transcended traditional African styles and incorporates the music of other cultures. This places the mbira within global and contemporary debates.

These studies and projects all played a significant role in creating the *Festa de Mbira*. According to Master Amisse (2021), *Festa de Mbira* was established in March 2017 in Maputo through Ndzondza Tivane's initiative[24]. The initiative was driven by the need for a day dedicated to the exchange of experiences among mbira artists.

The first edition took place at Café Gil Vicente, and the second, third, sixth, and seventh editions took place at the Association of Mozambican Musicians (AMM). The fourth and fifth editions took place at the Mafalala Museum. During the second edition in 2018, Ndzondza Tivane invited Estevão Carlos dos Santos Amisse (NBC Prestação de Serviços) and Clélio Vilanculos (Xitata Luteria Africana) to lead the Mbira Festival. Amisse served as general director, Tivane as artistic director, and Vilanculos in a multifaceted role. Other masters, such as Ivan Mukhavele, also played an important role in implementing and consolidating this project.

The *Festa de Mbira*, held annually in Maputo, has relied on the support of volunteers, friends, and various organizations, including Waka Mbira, Mukhambira, Modern Mbira, Xitata Luteria Africana, and others, over the course of its seven editions. Vilanculos (2021) notes

[23] They have Bluetooth receiver and transmitter systems that allow them to connect with smartphones, as well as wireless radio frequency systems.
[24] Head of *Ndzondza Produções*.

that, despite the challenges, the artists have been the main partners in organizing the festival in every edition, along with institutions such as Gil Vicente, AMM, and the Mafalala Museum, as well as individuals who contribute spontaneously.

The *Festa de Mbira*, held in Maputo, is attended by vachayi va timbira from various Mozambican provinces. They bring a "diverse range of mbira sounds and playing styles from the north, center, and south of Mozambique, as well as a fusion of rhythms" (Amisse, 2021), including chiwere, kateko, kwaxala, machewona, mafuwe, makhwayi, makotlo, mandowa, mapaza, mapiko, marrabenta, mutute, mucongoyo[25], ndjole, niketche, nganda, nghalángha, nhambaro, n'tokodo, nyanga, nyawu, utsi, timbila, and xigubu. These include Zimbabwean chimurenga and South African ximanjhemanjhe and ximatsatsa, as well as blues, fusion, jazz, reggae, pop, rock, rumba, and rap. The mbira's ability to interpret different musical styles and genres has led to an increase in the number of players, both nationally and internationally – though not yet to a satisfactory extent – and has helped raise the instrument's profile.

Therefore, the *Festa de Mbira* was created as a platform, as Master Amisse (2021) explains, "[...] to showcase the mbira, demonstrate how to play it, and raise awareness of this long-overlooked instrument". Master Amisse (2021) notes that "the mbira is gaining significant recognition and that there is a lot of curiosity about it, as well as interest in purchasing it. This means that the festival is having an effect, and we are introducing the mbira to children in some neighborhoods, but the idea is to bring it to elementary schools" (Amisse, 2021). At the fourth and fifth editions of the *Festa de Mbira*, I witnessed a gathering of children from the Mafalala neighborhood. Masters Ivan Mucavel and NBC Gas Butano instructed them in mbira-playing techniques and socially acceptable forms of behavior within their community (Fig. 15).

Figure 15 – Master Gas Butano sharing his knowledge on the next generation of mbira players at the Mafalala Museum (source: Mbira Festival, 2020)

This trend intensified in the Matutuine district (Ponta de Ouro), where part of the sixth edition of the festival took place. There, in addition to mbira experiments, masters Ivan Mucavel, May

[25] Pronounced mutxongoio

Figure 16 – Other musical instruments made at the Festa de Mbira;
from left to right: a) xigoviya; b) goxa; c) nyanga (source: author's personal archive)

Mbira, and Maneto Tefula guided children in building musical instruments such as the xigoviya, goxa, and nyanga (Fig. 16). This allowed children from the local community to interact with musical instruments and foster partnerships with social and educational projects, such as Txina Ponta, Community Radio, and Lwandi Surf, that work with children. Unfortunately, the *Festa de Mbira* relies on volunteers because it has not received funding. Of the seven editions, only the sixth received funding from the European Union. This has made it difficult to produce audiovisual archives that could serve as study materials for future generations.

Regarding the central role of the Mbira Festival, Delta Acácio Cumbane explains that

> the mbira has been here for many, many years, but [...] I believe there are people who think the mbira comes from abroad, because it hasn't been widely developed, [for example] here in our country, in Mozambique. [...] just look –now we have the Mbira Festival and people are already playing and getting to know the mbira (Cumbane, 2021).

Based on this overview, I would like to point out that mbira playing in Mozambique predominantly occurs within communities and nonprofit organizations, as well as in other social settings. However, there are also official institutions that have adopted this mission, including the National School of Music (ENM) and the School of Communication and Arts (ECA) at Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM).

According to Pedro Júlio Sitoe, a professor of ethnomusicology at ECA, the mbira was introduced "as part of the UMOJA Project around 2003/2004. The UMOJA Project was a cultural partnership between Norway, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique that involved the exchange of students and teachers among the different signatory countries or project members".

Figure 17 – Mbila (source: Nhanombe, 2022)

According to Sitoe (2022), ENM aimed to maximize the use of African musical instruments at the school since mbila, ngoma, and traditional singing were already being practiced there. Tadzo Moyo, a Zimbabwean Master mbira player who graduated from Kwanongoma College of Music in Harare, was the first teacher to achieve this goal. Moyo trained several Mozambicans in mbira playing, including: Paulino Pedro Sitoe, Edson Massangaie, Otis Selimane, Álvaro Félix Biché, Arsénio Pedro Sitoe, Júlio Jorge Manhique, Keluna Sitoe, Jéssica Anvarite, and Dikson Uthui, among others. After Moyo came Charlotte Meda, who continued the project. Finally, the current master is Simão Nhacule, as explained by Sitoe (2022).

The mbira displayed on the shelf has been at ECA since around 2011 and was provided by Mukhambira. In 2016, Pedro Júlio Sitoe began offering group mbira lessons at ECA to promote the use of African instruments. Sitoe supports this initiative by providing his own instruments and training musicians such as Raja Ali, Virgínia Uamusse, and Eugénio Tsenane. Both Sitoe and Tadzo Moyo received mbira training in Zimbabwe, which underscores the importance of that country to Mozambican institutions and people.

The introduction of the mbira to ENM and ECA has diversified musical instrument teaching and learning, firmly integrating it into performances within and outside the academic sphere. Outside of these institutions, the Music Crossroads Academy and the Xikhitsi Project have revitalized mbira practice in Mozambique.

The mbira is also featured in the N'wanateatro project's community engagement activities (Fig. 18). This initiative aims to celebrate local stories, culture, and traditions by providing a

Figure 18 – Micas Silambo teaching teenagers how to play the mbira (source: Chirindza, 2023)

relaxed environment in which children can develop their knowledge of literature, music, theater, dance, visual arts, film, and more.

Therefore, in contemporary Mozambique, we see a variety of activities inspired by past local traditions' approaches, methods, techniques, and technologies. These activities aim to shape an epistemological, methodological, and theoretical future informed by local African contextual practices.

Final considerations

Oral history is a significant methodological approach for appreciating and reconstructing the distinctive characteristics that comprise the historical landscape of various musical practices. Through this approach, we were able to immerse ourselves in the mbira practice, shedding light on the people, organizations, institutions, experiences, and situations that characterize its historical landscape in modern and contemporary Mozambique.

Through the lens of historical musicology – conceived in this work as a way of viewing and perceiving everyday musical life, as well as a way of understanding the broader interrelationships between people, musical styles, musical functions, and organizations involved in musical transmission – the historical panorama of mbira practice in 21st-century Mozambique, particularly in Maputo, was presented.

Because the mbira has received little attention in academic and scientific debates, it was necessary to present elements of organology to describe mbira terminology, classification, construction, playing techniques, scales, function, and prominent players in a given time and place. Research indicates that in Mozambique, the mbira is known by various names, including chityatya, chitata, kansantse, mbira, nyonganyonga mbira, nsantse, kalimba, marimba, mbira ya xindawu, and nyunganyunga mbira. This family of instruments is classified as fixed-pitch, plucked, melodic instruments and typically consists of a soundboard (xitlhata), a bridge (nhlana), a crossbar (xiqaku), hooks (tinsenga toboha), and keys (marito ya mbira). The mbira is tuned to a scale that approximates the F major hexatonic scale. Leading performers in Maputo include Luka Mukhavele, Ivan Mucavel, Xitaro, May Mbira, Maneto Tefula, Xakada, Nharira, Simão Nhacule, Beauty Sitoye, Cheny Wa Gune, Júlio Marquel, Pivi Marquel, Alcides Pires, Delta Cumbane, Virgínia Uamusse, NBC Gás Butano, Roland Lamussene, Oziya Macoo, Jojo Mbalango, Zé Maria, Dércio Gomate (Muhamago), Vintani Nafasse, Sumalgy Nuro, Hilário Manhiça, among others.

Within the existing body of literature, Ethiopia Oriental by Fr. João dos Santos, published in 1609, is an ethnographic text whose narrative suggests that the mbira was played in Mozambique long before its publication in the 17th century. Over time, the Portuguese system of cultural colonization suppressed this musical practice, preventing the voices, stories, identities, and local Mozambican practices from being heard. However, the struggle was

serious and determined. After becoming free from colonial shackles in 1975, Mozambique began its process of cultural rebirth with the help of other countries, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe. These countries made their institutions and cultural heritage available for the educational process, particularly regarding mbira practice.

The synergies established through this interaction spurred the creation of several nonprofit organizations, which sought to explore the approaches, methods, techniques, and technologies inherent in musical practices such as the mbira. Thus, Mukhambira was created, followed by Luthier Africana, Waka Mbira, Modern Mbira, and Festa de Mbira as epicenters of research, performance, and the revival of local musical practices linked to the mbira. Most of the founders of these organizations have roots in Mukhambira, which means that it serves as a reference point in contemporary debates about the Mozambican mbira.

Meanwhile, musical performance groups incorporated this instrument into various artistic contexts, challenging age-old stereotypes about African culture. Notable among these are the bands Licoloma, Likuti, Moticoma, and other emerging Maputo-based groups.

Nonprofit organizations and musical groups have contributed to the research, performance, and promotion of mbira playing, as have official national institutions, notably the Institute for Socio-Cultural Research, the School of Communication and Arts at Eduardo Mondlane University, the National School of Music, the Music Crossroads Academy, and the Xikhitsi Project. Equally important is Television of Mozambique (TVM), which has produced several programs to promote the practice of the mbira both within and outside Mozambique. At the institutional level, outside Mozambique, the contributions of Kwanongoma College of Music (Zimbabwe), the University of Zimbabwe, and the International Library of African Music must also be highlighted.

This preliminary set of information highlights the involvement of individuals, organizations, and institutions in the practice of the mbira. However, further research is needed in other provinces to complement our understanding of the history of mbira practice in Mozambique. This text is an excerpt from doctoral research that requires more contributors in this field, as the practice of the mbira offers a particularly rich subject for investigation. Its mediators – namely the musical instruments and the players – as well as its modes of dissemination and revitalization (articles, books, records, audio, video, radio, television, listening, observation, experimentation, imitation, error, success, repetition, and exposure to the social experience of performance) still warrant more in-depth research and inquiry. Another topic that cannot be ignored by 21st-century music specialists is the role of recording in the dissemination and reception of the mbira in Mozambique, especially in Maputo, where the mbira has been gaining more prominence in record production.

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