



ETHNIC TOURISM AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN MOZAMBIQUE IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE BASED ON VALIMBA DO PAI LEÃO DO DONDO

TURISMO ÉTNICO E CULTURA TRADICIONAL EM MOÇAMBIQUE NO PÓS-INDEPENDÊNCIA: UM OLHAR INTERDISCIPLINAR A PARTIR DA VALIMBA DO PAI LEÃO DO DONDO

TURISMO ÉTNICO Y CULTURA TRADICIONAL EN MOZAMBIQUE EN EL PERÍODO POST-INDEPENDENCIA: UNA MIRADA INTERDISCIPLINAR DESDE LA VALIMBA DE PAI LEÃO DO DONDO



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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of postdoctoral research that adopts a critical theoretical perspective opposed to the coloniality of power and an interdisciplinary approach to explore the socioeconomic, historical, political, and cultural aspects of Mozambique in the post-independence period. In particular, it focuses on the potential of small-scale, non-mass ethnic tourism, initially academic in nature, in the central region of the country, with an emphasis on the district of Dondo, Sofala Province. Taking the valimba, a traditional Bantu musical instrument, and the experiences and practices of Mestre Pai Leão as a starting point, the study seeks to understand the existing challenges and possibilities for the development of ethnic tourism and for the preservation of Mozambican cultural heritage. Furthermore, it examines the relevance of incorporating local knowledge into education as an essential tool for the conservation of local intangible heritage.

Keywords: Valimba. Ethnic Tourism. Traditional Knowledge. Cultural Heritage.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa pós-doutoral que adota uma perspectiva teórica crítica à colonialidade do poder e uma abordagem interdisciplinar para explorar aspectos socioeconômicos, históricos, políticos e culturais de Moçambique no período pós-independência. Em particular, enfoca-se o potencial de um turismo étnico de pequena escala, não massificado, de caráter inicialmente acadêmico, na região central do país, com ênfase no distrito do Dondo, província de Sofala. Tomando como ponto de partida a valimba, instrumento musical tradicional bantu, e as vivências e práticas do Mestre Pai Leão, busca-se compreender os desafios e as possibilidades existentes para o desenvolvimento do turismo étnico e para a preservação do patrimônio cultural

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moçambicano. Além disso, investiga-se a relevância da inserção dos saberes locais na educação como instrumento essencial para a conservação do patrimônio imaterial local.

Palavras-chave: Valimba. Turismo Étnico. Saberes Tradicionais. Patrimônio Cultural.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación postdoctoral que adopta una perspectiva teórica crítica sobre la colonialidad del poder y un enfoque interdisciplinario para explorar los aspectos socioeconómicos, históricos, políticos y culturales de Mozambique en el período posterior a la independencia. En particular, se centra en el potencial del turismo étnico a pequeña escala y no masivo, inicialmente de carácter académico, en la región central del país, con énfasis en el distrito de Dondo, provincia de Sofala. Tomando como punto de partida la valimba, un instrumento musical tradicional bantú, y las experiencias y prácticas del Mestre Pai Leão, el artículo busca comprender los desafíos y las posibilidades para el desarrollo del turismo étnico y la preservación del patrimonio cultural mozambiqueño. Además, investiga la relevancia de incorporar el conocimiento local en la educación como herramienta esencial para la conservación del patrimonio inmaterial local.

Palabras clave: Valimba. Turismo Étnico. Conocimientos Tradicionales. Patrimonio Cultural.

1 INTRODUCTION

After independence in 1975, Mozambique faced numerous challenges, including a protracted civil war, profound socioeconomic transformations, and attempts at cultural and identity reconstruction. In this context, ICOMOS, the World Heritage Committee for the implementation and management of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, launched the Cultural Tourism Charter in 1976, recognizing the importance of this segment for the maintenance and protection of cultural heritage (Iphan, 2025). This document, a pioneer in the enhancement of the ethical, economic and multifaceted aspects of cultural tourism, was signed by a large number of institutions and followed, in later years, by developed or developing countries, such as Mozambique, which began to perceive this activity as a means to safeguard and guarantee the conservation and appreciation of monuments and historical sites (ICOMOS, 2025; Saraiva, 2018).

In response to the ICOMOS initiative, and in order to take advantage of the development opportunities generated by cultural tourism, Mozambique included in Resolution 12/97 of 10 June "cultural expressions, folklore, landscapes and natural parks, monuments and museums, costumes, cuisine and traditional rituals as important elements for successful tourism" (Saraiva, 2018, p. 58). However, as stated by Saraiva (2018, p. 58), "the promotion of cultural tourism in the country is still weak, its visibility is confined to events such as cultural festivals".

Mozambique is a nation that is home to a diversity of regions, not only in geographical terms, but also in relation to the multiplicity of peoples who have distinct cultural manifestations. These manifestations encompass a wide variety of expressions, including philosophy of life, art, science, dance, music, language, religious rituals, and various traditional knowledge.

And this vast culture may be driven by cultural tourism, and, more specifically, by ethnic tourism, a sub-segment of this category, which constitutes one of the most complex and dynamic expressions of the contemporary tourism phenomenon. Through this practice, cultural, historical and symbolic elements of the communities are transformed into attractions for visitors who seek diversity.

Historically, this type of tourism has been characterized by the exploration of aspects considered authentic or unique, often subjecting local cultures to processes of commodification and decharacterization. However, in recent decades, there has been a growing movement aimed at using ethnic tourism as an instrument of local development and cultural revitalization. Particularly in peripheral territories, this activity can become a means



of cultural resistance in the face of the forces of globalization, offering a platform for the self-affirmation of communities.

The perception of ethnic tourism as a possibility for the district of Dondo, Mozambique, stems from the strong Bantu ethnic heritage present in this locality, translated into forms of expression not yet patrimonialized, but endowed with high potential to constitute differentials in this segment, such as valimba and utse dance. The focus of this work falls on the valimba, although the cultural relevance of the utse, a traditional dance of the Sena people, is recognized. Usually practiced by women in death rituals, utse has currently become a cultural reference in Dondo, being present in various types of events, whether cultural, political or social.

The valimba, however, emerges as the central theme of this study, standing out not only for its cultural relevance parallel to that of the utse, but also for its remarkable ability to attract a significant audience and to mobilize resources and people in favor of its dissemination and preservation.

Currently, in Mozambique, and more specifically in its central region, in the province of Sofala, a group of researchers, anthropologists, professors from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Licungo, based in the city of Beira, politicians, managers of public and non-governmental organizations, allied with traditional masters from the Dondo district, has been betting on ethnic tourism, Initially of an academic nature, as a possible way of preserving Valimba, an important cultural reference of the latter locality. This mobilization on the part of various social segments, including the academic community, committed to strengthening, disseminating, preserving and disseminating this traditional knowledge, reflects a vital community engagement for the perpetuation of cultural practices and for their appreciation in the context of intangible heritage.

It is evident that the development of tourism in a territory is influenced by a multiplicity of factors, ranging from the interest and organization of local communities, climatic conditions, the supply of tourist services and equipment, the qualification of the workforce and political stability, to the access infrastructure and the objectives of tour operators, travel agencies, public managers and hotel investors. Additionally, one should consider the availability of credit for entrepreneurs and global market trends. However, this study focuses especially on small-scale, resident-driven tourism activity that is geared towards low-density ethnic tourism. This segment, in addition to attracting researchers, students and professors, may mobilize others interested in the rich African culture, particularly in cultural manifestations of Bantu origin, such as those observed in the locality of Dondo.

This article presents the results of a postdoctoral research carried out at the University of Licungo, which adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective and against the coloniality of power to explore socioeconomic, historical, political and cultural aspects of Mozambique in the post-independence period. With a specific focus on the central region of the country, in the Dondo District, the research highlights the potential for development of ethnic tourism, having as its central axis the analysis of the valimba, a musical instrument of Bantu origin, and the work of Mestre Pai Leão, a renowned traditional artist in the province of Sofala.

It is considered essential to understand the socio-historical dynamics associated with the valimba instrument, covering the techniques and processes of manufacture and tuning, as well as the performance of the public authorities and civil society organizations with regard to the preservation, valorization and promotion of this form of cultural expression in the District of Dondo. In addition, the importance of inserting this local knowledge in the educational context is highlighted. These elements are considered fundamental for the preservation of traditions and, consequently, for the encouragement and development of ethnic tourism activity in the region.

It was decided to structure this work based on central topics, each dedicated to a specific dimension related to valimba and ethnic tourism. After this introductory topic, the following one addresses the procedures and theoretical-methodological references of the research. Next, the dynamics of tourism, Mozambican identity and cultural policy in Mozambique are examined, contextualizing the valimba in this scenario. The subsequent topic focuses on the valimba, describing the territory of Dondo, the artisanal processes of making the instrument and the rich technical and cultural knowledge it represents, also addressing the institutional initiatives aimed at preserving this form of expression as cultural heritage. Finally, the analysis is dedicated to the insertion of this local knowledge in education, followed by the final considerations of the study.

2 THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL PATH

The methodology used in the study that gave rise to this article is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach, integrating knowledge from different fields of knowledge. The research combines the survey and analysis of bibliographic information with qualitative techniques, including primary research, in-depth interviews and the constitution of focus groups. With regard to primary information, this work is the result of direct and in-depth research, carried out between October 2024 and July 2025, which is based on oral historiography and the ethnographic method. This method, essential for the interpretation of



the behavior, feelings and reports of Pai Leão, a profound connoisseur of the valimba, is not exclusive to Anthropology, but constitutes its exercise par excellence. Clifford Geertz (1978) highlights Anthropology as an interpretive science that seeks the meaning behind cultural actions and discourses. The use of this method allowed a richer and more contextualized understanding of the valimba and its role in the Dondo community, contributing to the preservation and promotion of its cultural importance and tourist potential.

Clifford Geertz (1978) may have been, among contemporary authors, the one who most problematized the exercise of ethnographic practice. Inspired by Max Weber, who conceives of man as an animal linked to webs of meanings woven by himself, Geertz interprets culture as these intricate networks of meaning that human beings create to give meaning to their existence and to the world around them. This symbolic "web" guides the actions, thoughts, and emotions of individuals within a society, configuring their interactions and social relationships.

Ethnographic practice, as a form of anthropological knowledge, involves a series of methodological activities, such as establishing relationships with the community, selecting key informants, transcribing texts, surveying genealogies, mapping social fields, keeping a field diary, and carrying out what Geertz calls "dense description". However, Geertz (1978) argues that it is not these specific techniques and processes that essentially define the ethnographic enterprise, but rather the type of intellectual endeavor it represents. For Geertz, ethnography is more than the application of methods; It is a way of thinking, a process of interpretation that seeks to understand culture from within, capturing the complexity and subtlety of the symbolic systems that structure social life.

The importance of the voice of the protagonists — and, consequently, oral historiography — in a work of ethnographic description and interpretation, is proven by Rosana Guber (2001). The author emphasizes that oral historiography makes it possible to capture cultural experience and memory, giving the members of the culture studied an active role in the construction of anthropological knowledge. This is particularly relevant for a "dense description," according to Geertz, which aims at a rich and detailed interpretation of cultural specificities, including the internal perspectives of the community, as exemplified by the role of the valimba and Mestre Pai Leão in the Dondo District. The methodology of this research is therefore in line with these principles, emphasizing the direct participation of community members and the integration of their voices in the process of cultural inquiry and analysis.

The choice of Pai Leão as the primary interlocutor in this study is justified by his comprehensive mastery in all aspects related to valimba. His knowledge extends from the selection of the raw material and the making of the instrument to the melodic and lyrical

composition of the songs, in addition to encompassing the organization of the musical ensemble, the administration and the propagation of the art. Mainly, Pai Leão allows, through his art, to conduct an interdisciplinary study, which made it possible to analyze in an interconnected way the economy, culture, cultural tourism, education and gender issues. Given the limited length of this article, the last aspect mentioned will not be addressed in this text, which contemplates, with regard to the professionals of the valimba — musicians and dancers — exclusively the testimonies of Pai Leão.

In order to carry out the study that gave rise to this article, it was necessary to have a broad relationship with Pai Leão, whose mother tongue is Seine, although he is also fluent in Portuguese. Their testimonies were recorded and later transcribed in four long interviews held at their home, in addition to field notes in the other moments of interaction. These included the presence of the researcher in meetings of Mestre Pai Leão's musical group, the band Batche Manhecida; the participation in a healing session guided by the Mestre, who is also a healer; in an academic seminar; in meetings at the Vereação do Dondo; in meetings in the city of Beira, among other opportunities.

Within the scope of primary information, in-depth interviews were conducted with two dancers — Teresa Fernando Correia and Felizarda Armindo Charles — and a former dancer, Puhala Tauabo, as well as three musicians from the group Batche Manhecida. These meetings took place in Mestre Pai Leão's residence, in an arbor built in the external area, a space that he reserves for his moments of contact with his musical instrument. The language was not an impediment to the dialogues, although the interview with Puhala and with the rhythmist Tomás Magá requested, respectively, the help of Teresa and the simultaneous translation of drummer Jorge Laice. Given the centrality of the valimba for this research, we sought to interview the master Nhamazi Félix, who, like Pai Leão, lives in the district of Dondo, in the province of Sofala. These are the only valimba masters residing in Dondo with such expertise. However, there are indications of the presence of other masters holding this traditional knowledge in different villages in the province of Sofala, especially in Inhaminga, Marromeu, Chemba and Caia.

Also with regard to the primary information, semi-structured interviews were conducted with professors Tiago Tendai Chingore and José Bartolomeu Jocene Marra, from the University of Licungo; with Dr. Camilo Luis, radio broadcaster and first vice-president of the Municipal Assembly of Dondo; with the founding members of the Makolokoto Association; with Messrs. Chacanza Mavunguire Chungano and Dede Faustino João, respectively, Provincial Director and Secretary General of SOTEMAZA; in addition to teachers and managers of four schools located in the vicinity of the Master's residence, where focus groups



were also held with students. The establishments, indicated by Pai Leão, were: for Secondary Education, the Secondary School of Dondo and the School of Macharote and, for primary education, the schools of Consito-Dondo and 25 de Setembro, in response to the request to include two schools of each level of education.

This interdisciplinary proposal is aligned with a decolonial theoretical perspective, which reinforces the importance of the articulation between education and culture for the preservation of traditional knowledge and practices and for the formulation of community development proposals focused on ethnic tourism. The decolonial approach understands the coloniality of power as a global, modern/colonial and Eurocentric capitalist system, which was structured based on the idea of race — a category biologically imagined to naturalize the inferiority of the colonized in relation to the colonizers, according to the analysis of Quijano (2005).

Quijano (2005) reminds us that, as the center of world capitalism, Europe not only controlled the global market, but also imposed its colonial domination over all regions and populations of the world. This domain included the control of all forms of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and knowledge production. As a result, there was the hegemony of an educational formation and a cultural vision that are dissociated from traditional knowledge, practices, knowledge and practices, a reality that manifests itself in regions outside Europe, including the Americas and Africa. The decolonial perspective seeks to challenge this hegemony, valuing and integrating local knowledge in the educational process and community development, as is the case of the valimba in the context of the Dondo District.

The perspective of questioning the hegemony of a Eurocentric culture also found resonance in the countercolonial point of view. This term was coined by the Brazilian quilombola, poet and writer Antônio Bispo dos Santos, Nego Bispo, author of the book "Colonization, quilombos: modes and significations". Nego Bispo argues that both decoloniality and countercoloniality play important roles and that one concept does not invalidate the other.

For Nego Bispo (2015), countercoloniality is conceptualized as more than a theory; a point of view rooted in practice and daily experience, which unites indigenous peoples and quilombolas. It represents an active resistance to the loss of traditional territories, symbols, meanings and ways of life. In his perspective, orality occupies a central place, as it brings to the academic environment questions and knowledge that have not yet been incorporated into books and formal education structures.



Nego Bispo (2015) proposes the adoption of an "Afro-Pindorâmica" vision as an effective way to introduce countercolonial thinking into education. By using the term "Afro-Pindorâmicos" to refer to peoples, he emphasizes the connection between the thoughts and cultures of native and African peoples, rejecting the classification of Afro-Brazilians. He explains: "When I talk about Africa, I talk about a place. When I speak of Pindorama, I am not talking about a people either, I am talking about a place" (Bispo, 2015, p. 15). Pindorama, the name used by native peoples to designate the "land of palm trees", is evoked by Bispo to emphasize the importance of places and cultural roots in the formation of identities resistant to the colonizing process — a perspective that broadly dialogues with this study.

In this work, by analyzing the Sena culture of the central region of Mozambique, we seek to align the perspective against the colonality of power with a new paradigm referenced in the concept of "epistemology of the place", formulated by António Braço. For Braço (2017, p. 2) the practices and narratives of the Sena people must be understood from the "epistemology of the place", a concept that emphasizes the "construction of knowledge within the limits of a specific locality, giving it validity and significance".

Breaking with traditional paradigms predominant in the Academy, this research is dedicated to knowing and contributing to African experiences — especially Mozambican — which, through education and culture, aim to strengthen, visibility, dissemination, and preservation of traditional knowledge and practices. These elements are central resources for the development of ethnic tourism proposals in traditional communities. In this context, the research is part of the initiatives for the valorization and preservation of the valimba promoted by the University of Licungo, in partnership with public agencies, civil society organizations and Mestre Pai Leão, configuring itself as an additional contribution to this collective effort.

3 ETHNIC TOURISM, MOZAMBIKAN IDENTITY, AND CULTURAL POLICY IN MOZAMBIQUE

Ethnic tourism, recognized as a sub-segment of cultural tourism, is characterized, according to Mércia Queiroz (2008), by its emphasis on valuing cultural singularities and on the experience of the "other" as a subject of identity and alterity. The author acknowledges, however, that this interaction presents risks for traditional cultural knowledge and practices, which may become decharacterized due to market demands.

For this type of tourism, the concept of authenticity is considered central, leading authors, such as Nelson Graburn (1976), to highlight that the identities exhibited in tourist contexts can be constructed or revitalized as a form of cultural resistance and insertion in the



global tourist market. On the other hand, the critique of the "invention of traditions", discussed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (2000), points out the ethical and social challenges of creating or adapting cultural practices only for tourist consumption. Thus, ethnic tourism presents itself as a space of tension between authentic cultural preservation and market adaptation.

Despite the challenges involved in this economic activity, ethnic tourism reveals great potential for growth in Africa, a continent notable for its extensive linguistic and cultural diversity. In Mozambique, a country that has been influenced by various historical migrations and commercial interactions with Asian and European peoples, cultural richness is particularly marked by the traditions of the Bantu populations, which constitute the basis of Mozambican cultural identity.

Historically, Mozambique faced colonial domination that sought to suppress local cultural identities through ideological mechanisms, resulting in significant cultural and linguistic losses. Colonial domination, through its various ideological mechanisms—such as the educational system, religious institutions, and the media—triggered a significant process of "alienation of consciousness" among Africans.

Throughout the colonial period, there was a growing contempt for African languages, which were labeled in official discourse as languages of ethnic and regional discrimination and pejoratively called "dialects". In addition, severe punishments were imposed on those who, out of distraction or necessity, dared to pronounce a word in an African language, a clear effort to discourage its use and attempt to suppress it (Ngunga, 2021).

This process, analyzed by Biko and Fanon and cited by Castiano (2010), promoted self-rejection among Africans, by importing a view of cultural and racial inferiority in relation to the "Other-European". By considering Mozambique as a country in which both the colonial state and the independent state would have operated under an ideology of ethnic denial, Michel Cahen even questions the existence of the country as a cohesive nation. Contrary to Cahen's view, Macamo (1998) presents Eduardo Mondlane's thought in defense of the existence of a Mozambican national identity as a result of the "Portuguese invention" triggered by the "common experience of oppression and domination of Africans" (Mondlane, *apud* Macamo, 1998, p. 36).

Mozambican identity was addressed by several authors, including some already mentioned, in a collection of texts directed by Carlos Serra (1998) in the late 1990s. This author, responsible for the preface and the last chapter of the book, begins and ends his reflections by emphasizing that social identity, although often assumed as a fixed individual or collective qualification, actually "refers not to what is identical, but to what is distinct". This

implies the impossibility of dissociating identity and otherness³. Identity can only be built in interaction with the other. And, based on this analysis, it states that it is social identities — resulting from the interaction of various actors — that allow Mozambique, with its territories housing different ethnic groups, customs, languages, knowledge and practices, to present a wide cultural diversity. A diversity that has not always been evidenced, valued or reinforced by the nation's leading political framework (Serra, 1998, p. 9-10; 179).

Mariani (2011) contributes to the discussion on Mozambican cultural identity and diversity by analyzing linguistic oppression and resistance in the country. He points out that, although Portugal had been present in Africa since the fifteenth century, it was only after the Berlin Conferences, in the nineteenth century, that colonial administration intensified. From that moment on, the possession of African territories began to depend on effective occupation, which led Portugal to implement socio-educational measures in the colonized territory, initiating a process of "civilization of African peoples". This process included the imposition of the Portuguese language — one of the main instruments of assimilationist policy — and the promotion of Portuguese customs.

Despite attempts to ban indigenous languages, only a small part of the African population had access to formal education. Consequently, the Portuguese language was consolidated as the language of the elite, used by a higher social class, which occupied prominent positions in the colonial government. Social ascension and obtaining assimilated status required the adoption of Portugal's cultural, social, and linguistic practices (Mariani, 2011).

Mariani (2011, p. 112) argues that the "Portuguese language never became a national language in Mozambique", pointing out that the coexistence of the colonizer's language with the autochthonous languages is permeated by tensions. This is due to the fact that "power relations work contradictorily and contradictions are inscribed in the language" (Mariani, 2011, p. 110). The coexistence between the Portuguese language and local languages reflects the complex dynamics of power and identity in Mozambique, where the Portuguese language, although dominant, coexists with a diverse range of indigenous languages that continue to be vehicles of culture and resistance.

Henrique Litsure (2021) analyzes that during the period of struggle for independence, cultural diversity was recognized and respected, although it did not occupy the center of political priorities. In the post-independence scenario, in line with trends observed in other African nations, there was a systematic attempt to suppress cultural identities, minorities and their traditions. During this period, cultural diversity, as well as political diversity, became the

³ This aspect is pointed out by Queiroz, M. (2008) in his analysis of ethnic tourism, as commented.



object of combat, reflecting a policy of homogenization, which aimed to consolidate national unity (Litsure, 2021).

From post-independence until 1989, Frelimo — initially formed as an anti-colonial movement — implemented policies that outlawed almost all social, cultural, and economic institutions of peasant origin with the aim of eradicating traditional cultural heritage. Holders of traditional knowledge, whose wisdom is intrinsically linked to intangible heritage — such as healers, diviners, herbalists, and ritual experts — have been targeted for devaluation, persecution, and, in some cases, physical elimination, as have traditional community authorities. These actions reflect a systematic effort to dismantle traditional cultural and social structures in favor of a so-called modern and centralized view of the state (Litsure, 2021).

Cultural diversity was progressively perceived as incompatible with the implementation of the Marxist-Leninist orientation. According to Ngunga (2021), who, like Mariani (2011), investigates the linguistic issue in Mozambique, during the period of single-party rule (1975-1990), Frelimo elevated Portuguese to the status of the only official language, while, in the name of national unity, it prohibited the use of Mozambican languages in public spaces.

Michel Cahen, quoted by Lazagna (2006, p. 124), draws attention to the dominant party's desire to put an end to sociocultural diversity, especially ethnicities, which were labeled "obscurantist, divisive, tribalistic". According to Cahen, the eradication of traditional religions and the modernization of these cultural aspects for the production of a homogeneous nation were thus defended. Such a posture reflected the "habitus" of a small bureaucratic-bourgeois elite in the south of the country, which maintained an external relationship with the "real Mozambique", disconnected from the predominant cultural and identity practices.

Corroborating this view, Serra points out that, "with national independence, Mozambicanity was politically constructed as an absolute, irreducible must-be of the citizen". And this should not be "contaminated by the parasitic invasions of the ethnic" (Serra, 1998, p. 11).

Litsure (2021, p. 86) points out that "all local references that had given meaning to the life of the communities should be abandoned, by hook or by force, because they were considered feudal, obscurantist, tribalistic, regionalist, racist, and retrograde". The persecution carried out by Frelimo during the initial post-independence phase, which also encompassed religious institutions, "was not motivated exclusively by the search for modernization, but, mainly, as a strategy to eradicate divergent worldviews" (Litsure, 2021, p. 80).



In summary, between 1975 and 1990, when the State, under the leadership of Frelimo, assumed a centralizing role, seeking to shape Mozambican culture in line with the ideal of the "New Man" — a concept that emerged as a political ideal to create a cohesive national identity, moving away from colonial influences and traditional structures of social organization — Culture was instrumentalized to strengthen national unity and ward off colonial and tribal influences, promoting an innovative vision of Mozambican identity. However, this approach neglected the particularities of local cultures, generating wear and resistance between different ethnic and regional groups (Basílio, 2010).

The Ministry of Education and Culture, created in 1975, was thus born in a context in which traditional, elite, mass culture was not acceptable, only manifestations that valued the "new man" and the new society (Landgraf, 2014, *apud* Bussoti and Gundane). This body, which had as one of its objectives the "control of all cultural activities, with the creation of commissions for the collection and studies of all cultural manifestations in the country, based on the life of the people and cultural habits" now has some institutions under its tutelage, namely: the National Institute of Culture, the National Library Service, the National Educational Radio Service and the National Library of Mozambique. In 1983, the same year in which the culture portfolio ceased to be part of a Ministry and was incorporated into the new Secretary of State for Culture, subordinated to the Council of Ministers, ARPAC – Institute for Sociocultural Research was created, "to ensure the destination of the documents collected during the National Campaign for the Preservation and Enhancement of Culture, that took place between the years 1978 and 1982" (Bussoti and Gundane, 2019, p. 179-180).

At the end of this period, the Assembly of the People's Republic of Mozambique approved Law No. 10/88, of 22 December, which established the basis for the legal protection of the country's tangible and intangible assets. This law aimed to protect and safeguard the "cultural heritage of the Portuguese colonial presence in Mozambique", based on the principles of State responsibility in promoting cultural development, while ensuring the identification, registration, preservation and enhancement of Mozambican cultural assets. In addition, this legal instrument enabled the inclusion of national assets in the category of heritage by Unesco, as Bussotti and Gundane (2019, p. 184) point out.

Despite its relevance, Law No. 10/88 was considered restrictive for the preservation of assets and manifestations of an intangible nature, as expressed in the "Report on the Implementation of the Convention and on the State of the Elements Inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, addressed to UNESCO on April 12, 2023. Only in the new century, under the impetus of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Intangible Heritage, ARPAC

and the Ministry of Culture invested in studies and discussions to formulate and establish new instruments — such as registries and inventories — more appropriate for the survey, identification and protection of cultural assets, especially those considered intangible (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2023).

The 1990s marked the beginning of a new policy of configuration that was more receptive to dialogue on cultural diversity in Mozambique. The promulgation of the First Democratic and Multiparty Constitution in 1990, added to the General Peace Agreement signed in Rome on October 4, 1992, by the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, and the leader of the National Resistance of Mozambique⁴ (Renamo), Afonso Dhlakama, with the mediation of the Community of Sant'Egidio of Italy, was crucial in ending 16 years of civil conflict. These events established a favorable context for the resurgence and appreciation of traditional culture, reviving the debate on cultural diversity and its relationship with power.

As Litsure (2021, p. 83) points out, "ethnicity is considered the chosen place for the construction of development in Africa", being the *locus* of "gestation of endogenous knowledge and repository of cultural identities". However, the historical trajectory of ethnicities is not static, but rather a dynamic synthesis of intergenerational experiences.

After a period of significant devaluation, often associated with archaism and retrograde, ethnicity reemerges as a central axis in the socio-political context of several African countries, including Mozambique. With the transition to multiparty democracy, linguistic research gains greater visibility, and the concept of a prosperous nation begins to incorporate cultural diversity. In this new scenario, the mother tongues of most Mozambicans are introduced into formal education, recognizing the importance of these languages for national identity and development (Ngunga, 2021).

In addition to the linguistic issue, between 1992 and 1996, the Mozambican Government, based on the fundamental principle of the State's responsibility in promoting the development of culture, adopted a set of measures aimed at the "identification, registration, preservation and enhancement of material and immaterial assets, where the memory of the

⁴ Renamo was founded in 1975 after Mozambique's independence as an anti-communist political organization, sponsored by the Central Intelligence Organization of Rhodesia. The formation of the party (still as a right-wing guerrilla group) took place under the auspices of Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith, who sought through Renamo to prevent the Frelimo government from providing refuge to the Zimbabwe African National Union, a militant organization that intended to overthrow the Rhodesian government. According to Maseko, the evidence indicates that some Mozambicans, dissidents and Portuguese, had a co-participation in the founding of Renamo, however, it was, in fact, created by the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization, being initially called, in English, the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR). Quoting Norrie Macqueen, Maseko states that Renamo was created with a dual objective: a) to provide guides and interpreters for Rhodesian military operations against Zimbabwean nationalist guerrilla bases in Mozambique; and b) working for the destabilization of Frelimo (Maseko, 2019).



Mozambican people is inserted", among which the standardization of the following areas: Cultural Heritage, Archaeological Heritage and Museum of Ethnology; training and research — in music, dance, visual arts, singing and in the creation of a regulatory body for libraries; and Cultural market, with rules on audiovisual and the Patronage Law (Landgraf, 2014, p. 17; Bussoti and Gundane, 2019, p. 185-186). Bussoti and Gundane argue, however, that despite the implementation of the norms of economic regulation, there was a lack of better defined cultural policies and strategies (Bussoti and Gundane, 2019, p. 188).

According to Landgraf (2014), the period from 1992 to 1996, in addition to being extremely rich in the regulation and creation of cultural facilities and bodies, was marked by a greater openness to the participation of private and international agents in cultural promotion. However, this transition also revealed weaknesses in cultural infrastructure and the absence of an efficient management and funding system. Lopes (2016) points out that, despite the expansion of opportunities for civil society participation, the lack of a consolidated national plan resulted in the fragmentation of cultural initiatives and inequality in access to resources.

Globalization has significantly impacted this period. With the growing influence of international markets and the development of cultural industries, Mozambique began to experience changes in cultural production. According to Bussotti and Gundane (2019), culture has also come to be seen as an economic asset, exploited by private sectors and international organizations. However, this process has not been accompanied by adequate institutional strengthening, resulting in dependence on external funding and the lack of autonomy of local cultural producers. The economic regulation of the cultural sector proved to be insufficient to meet the country's needs, and cultural agents began to face difficulties in obtaining resources and state support for their initiatives.

For Bussotti and Gundane (2019), who subdivide the process of implementation of cultural policies in Mozambique into three distinct moments — consolidation of identity and preservation of heritage (1975-1990); economic regulation of the cultural sector (1990-1997); and production and dissemination of the cultural sector (1997-2009) —, the phase that began in 1997 with the creation of the Cultural Policy of Mozambique and the Strategy for its Implementation is characterized by the attempt to create more structured strategies for the production and dissemination of Mozambican culture. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has sought to implement policies that reconcile the preservation of local traditions with the country's insertion in the global cultural economy. However, as Lopes (2016) points out, the implementation of these policies faces challenges such as insufficient funding, the lack of an



efficient cultural distribution network, and the concentration of investments in urban areas, leaving rural regions with little access to cultural initiatives.

Another determining factor in this phase is institutional fragmentation and the lack of cooperation between the different levels of government. According to Bussotti and Gundane (2019), the absence of an integrated system makes it difficult to create long-term strategic planning, resulting in isolated initiatives that do not always reach peripheral and rural neighborhoods. In addition, cultural policies have not yet fully responded to the needs of artists and cultural producers, who often encounter bureaucratic and financial barriers to make their projects viable.

Legislation for the promotion of culture, such as the Patronage Law⁵, has proven to be ineffective in practice, making it difficult for cultural agents to obtain funding for their projects. According to Lopes (2016), the dependence on international funding and the lack of incentives for private investment compromise the sustainable development of the Mozambican cultural sector. The absence of continuous support mechanisms for the cultural industries makes many artists depend on specific initiatives and sporadic subsidies, making it difficult to consolidate a strong and self-sufficient cultural market.

Another relevant aspect is the impact of cultural policies on Mozambican identity. Basílio (2010) argues that culture plays a crucial role in the formation of citizenship and in the construction of a sense of belonging. However, the policies implemented have not always been able to fully integrate the country's diverse cultural expressions. The tension between globalization and tradition is reflected in the difficulty of balancing external influences with the appreciation of local cultures. Landgraf (2014) highlights that, for cultural policies to be effective, it is essential that they consider the realities and needs of local communities, ensuring the active participation of cultural agents in the formulation and implementation of these policies.

Against this backdrop, it is essential to formulate inclusive and decentralized cultural policies that ensure equitable access to cultural resources and encourage the active participation of communities — such as those in the district of Dondo — in the preservation and dissemination of their traditions. The State must reassume a strategic role in the protection of cultural heritage, promoting a model that not only considers culture as an economic vector, but that recognizes it as a fundamental right and a structuring element of citizenship and social cohesion. Only through an effective commitment to diversity and the

⁵ Law no. 4/94 of 13 September (Patronage Law), "establishes the basic principles that allow the extension of the *action* of legal persons, natural or *collective*, public or private, that carry out *activities*, or, financially and materially support them, in the field of arts, letters, science, culture and *social action*" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007).



democratization of access to culture will it be possible to consolidate a cultural policy that reflects the complexity and richness of Mozambican identities, as Landgraf (2014) emphasizes.

The lack of more effective support by the State for Mozambique's cultural heritage means that communities and agents responsible for manifestations of intangible heritage – as is the case of Dondo, with the valimba and the utse – see in heritage by UNESCO an almost exclusive alternative for the appreciation, preservation and dissemination of local culture. However, the richness and diversity of the national culture, on the one hand, and the scarcity of financial resources of the Mozambican Government for carrying out and updating inventories and safeguard plans, on the other, postpone these possibilities.

According to the report of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Mozambique (2023), Nyau — Gule Wamkulu, jointly presented by Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia, and Timbila Chopi, both in 2005, were recognized as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by Unesco. The report also mentions the Mapiko Dance (I'Ngoma Ya Mapiko) as "Element inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding" in 2022.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Mozambique reported that, on the occasion of the inscription of the timbila as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, several other artistic and cultural manifestations of the country were indicated that could also be written, namely: the Cave Paintings of Chinhamampere, the Sacred Forest of Xirindzene, the Mapiko Dance, the Rain Request Ritual (Makoto) and the Tufo Dance (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2023).

In a telephone dialogue held with Dr. Célio Tiane (National Director of Cultural Heritage of Mozambique) on February 24, the information previously provided by Dr. Angélica João (Deputy Director General of ARPAC) was ratified that there is no indication by the Central Government for the registration of the valimba as a heritage site by Unesco, especially after the inscription of the timbila. A form of cultural expression practiced by the Chopi people, one of the ethnic groups in the southern region of the country (Wani, 2010), the Timbila Chopi, like the Valimba, comprises the use of the handmade xylophone. The director recognized, however, the distinction between the two cultural and community manifestations, while informing that the xibungo dance, traditionally practiced in the interior regions of the provinces of Gaza and Maputo, is currently in the process of being evaluated.

Overall, the trajectory of cultural policies in Mozambique demonstrates the complexity of managing a sector that is both an instrument of national identity and an economic component. After independence, the country went through different approaches, from a centralizing and ideological model to a system more open to private sector participation and

global dynamics. However, challenges persist such as inequality in access to cultural resources, the lack of an effective national funding structure, and the need for decentralization of cultural management.

Given the diversity and vulnerability of Mozambique's cultural heritage to risks such as deterioration, disappearance and destruction, it is necessary for the State to create other instruments and forms of protection. For cultural policies to become more effective, support for cultural agents is essential; the strengthening of traditional cultures; the implementation of investments in the creation of accessible cultural infrastructures in all regions of the country and the establishment of sustainable financing mechanisms.

In addition, it is essential that the formulation of these policies considers the specificities of the different Mozambican communities, ensuring that culture is not only an instrument of economic development, but also a means of expression and appreciation of local identities. Undoubtedly, cultural heritage is essential for ethnic tourism. Its richness and diversity are fundamental differentials for this type of tourism, but, above all, it is essential for the maintenance of the identity, the sense of belonging and cohesion of the Mozambican people, which justifies and makes its preservation indispensable.

4 THE CULTURE OF VALIMBA: THE TERRITORY, THE INSTRUMENT, EXPERIENCES OF PAI LEÃO AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTERS

The district of Dondo is located in the northeastern region of⁶ Sofala Province⁷, Mozambique, on the left bank of the Púnguè River, whose estuary is located near the city of Beira. Geographically, the district is bordered by the districts of Muanza to the north, Nhamatanda to the west, Búzi to the south, as well as the city of Beira itself, which is the provincial capital, and is bathed to the east by the Indian Ocean.

In terms of territorial administration, the district of Dondo (Map 1) is subdivided into three main administrative posts: the Administrative Post of Dondo, which includes the City of Dondo, the Administrative Post of Mafambisse, encompassing Mafambisse Sede and Matua, and the Administrative Post of Savane, which covers Savane-Sede and Chinamacondo.

⁶ In Mozambique, according to Decree No. 11/2005, of June 10, the province is the largest territorial unit of the political, economic and social organization of the local administration of the State, being made up of districts, which in turn are formed by administrative posts, which are divided into localities, which comprise villages and conglomerates. The Republic of Mozambique is composed of eleven (11) provinces, among which Sofala. (Braço, António Domingos, 2017).

⁷ The districts of Beira, Búzi, Dondo, Chemba, Cheringoma, Chibabava, Gorongosa, Machanga, Maringué, Marromeu, Muanza and Nhamatanda are part of Sofala province (Id., ibidem).

Figure 1

Location of Dondo District in Mozambique



Source: Wikipedia, 2025.

With an estimated population of 243,723 inhabitants in 2024, 50.1% women and 49.9% men, the Dondo District, with an area of 2,306 km², has a population density of 105.69 inhabitants/km². The predominant ethnic group in the territory is the Sena, belonging to the Bhangue group, the result of historical interactions between the Machangas/Matewes and the Phodzoz of the lower Zambezi (Braço, 2017).

Demographically, the population of Dondo is considered young, with approximately 40% of individuals up to 19 years old. An illiteracy rate of 22% is observed, lower than the provincial rate of 35%. The lower schooling among females in primary education is a reflection of the history of educational inequality. Illiteracy affected more than half of the population of Dondo in 2005, affecting mainly women. About 65% of the district's population, aged five and over, have knowledge of the Portuguese language, with Cisena or Xisena being⁸ the predominant mother tongue, followed by Ndau. Mastery of Portuguese is more common among men, which correlates with their greater participation in formal education and in the labor market (Ministry of State Administration, 2005).

In the cultural sphere, the valimba, the utse dances and the marimba stand out as significant cultural expressions of the local ethnic groups, with the identification of 49 dance

⁸ According to António Braço (op. cit., 2017), there is no single interpretation for the origin of the Sena people who speak the Cisena or Xisena language, but two central forms of interpretation. He, however, considers the existence of convergence between these analyses with regard to the fact that this is a group of Bantu origin, which, in migration in search of better lands, reached countries neighboring Mozambique, such as the Republics of Zimbabwe and Malawi, located on the banks of the Zambezi River.

groups in 2004, 312 of which were male and 722 were women⁹. In gastronomy, typical dishes based on *xima*¹⁰ are predominant, such as *xima* with *nsomba* (African catfish; fresh fish), *xima* with dried fish and *xima* with *xincui* (dried meat). Among the local traditions, where the Sena and the Ndau constitute the majority, family ceremonies such as the Recognition of the Dead (*Nsembe*), Post-Birth Ceremonies (*Mazuade*), Post-Death Ceremonies (*Pita-cufa*), Post-Burning Ceremonies (*Pita-moto*), and matrimonial rituals that include *Fungula mulomo* (first official contact with the bride), *Mussa* (Lobolo consultation¹¹), *Semba* (payment of the lobolo) and *Massesseto* (marriage) (Ministry of State Administration, 2005).

Tourism activity in Dondo, although incipient, has an emerging potential. In 2021, the district had 18 hotel establishments, which corresponded to 10% of the tourist offer in Sofala province. The city of Dondo concentrated most of these establishments, with 12 units. Collectively, these hotels offered 216 rooms, showing a significant growth of 93% compared to 2017, when the supply was 112 rooms.

In the study entitled *Profile of the District of Dondo* (Ministry of State Administration, 2005), the authors indicate the absence of significant tourist potential in the region and highlight the limitations of local infrastructures for the promotion of the tourism sector. As for Dondo, although it is not directly mentioned in the plan, it was considered in another document (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2015), part of the localities in Mozambique with cultural potential, but far from becoming a tourism receiving pole, taking advantage of the existing opportunities. In reality, the district does not have a significant tourist hub nearby. However, part of the territory of the Dondo district constituted one of the Buffer Zones of Gorongosa National Park, a prominent attraction for the international segment.

The park alone is not likely to boost tourism in Dondo. Most visitors arrive via Beira International Airport and head directly to Gorongosa, with no stops to explore the local cultural riches. However, it is possible that an inverse movement will occur. The cultural expressions of the district, valued through academic, regional and short-range tourism, can arouse the interest of the park's management for a possible association of its image and brand with the cultural heritage of the territory. Who knows, maybe the valimba can start this process.

⁹ Note that this information includes the valimba groups, considered as a traditional dance in the Promiso report (Nhacalize, Domingos, et. ali., 2005).

¹⁰ Xima (Mozambique), known as nsima/sima (Malawi) or nshima (Zambia) is a dish based on maize flour, in the form of a white puree, originally from Zambia and common throughout East Africa, particularly in Zambia, Malawi and Kenya, where it is the basis of daily food.

¹¹ In short, it comprises the dowry agreed between a future husband, or head of his family, and the head of a future wife's family in gratitude for allowing the husband to marry his daughter.

An emblematic cultural reference of the Sena people, who inhabit central Mozambique, Malawi and the Transvaal¹², the valimba stands out as a traditional musical instrument of great complexity. According to analyses by South African ethnomusicologist Andrew Tracey (2017), the valimba is described by a heptatonic scale¹³, composed of eight notes that are progressively repeated from low to high register.

Pai Leão (ED/2024)¹⁴ defines the valimba (Figure 1) as "a special instrument", classifying it as "the most extraordinary traditional instrument that exists". He explains that the valimba is an independent and complete instrument, capable of integrating broad musical formations, harmonizing with a variety of other instruments, or of being performed alone, as it incorporates in itself the functions of bass, solo and rhythm (harmony, rhythm and melody). This is one of its differences in relation to the timbila, a patrimonialized instrument, which has limitations regarding commercial use without the support of other musical instruments.

Figure 1

Valimba in Presentation at the House of the Lion Father



Source: The authors, 2024.

The valimba occupies a relevant position in the Sena culture, permeating ritual practices, social ceremonies and community celebrations. Its historical and social value stems from the deep connection with local identity and community traditions. This traditional instrument is closely linked to religious and cultural ceremonies, serving as a means of

¹² The Transvaal is the region of South Africa located above the Vaal River in the northeast of the country. The information about the valimba as a cultural reference of the peoples of this region and Malawi is contained in Andrew Tracey's publication, having been endorsed by Father Leão, with regard to the latter country. See Tracey, Andrew, 2017.

¹³ A heptatonic scale is any scale or mode configuring the succession of seven degrees within an octave. The most well-known example is the diatonic scale, which contains, for example, the major scale and the minor scales.

¹⁴ The information obtained in direct interviews will be indicated, from now on, by the name of the interviewee followed by the expression "ED" and the year. The names of the interviewees mentioned in this article, with the respective dates of the interviews, can be found in the references.



symbolic communication between generations and reinforcing the sense of belonging and historical continuity of the Sena community.

In Dondo, the valimba has been preserved and promoted, above all, by the tireless work of Mestre Pai Leão. This traditional master acts not only as a craftsman, but also as an educator and guardian of the cultural values associated with the instrument. His dedication is widely recognized in the community, where he plays a crucial role in maintaining traditional knowledge through public and educational performances.

Born in 1958 in the village of Inhaminga, Cheringoma district, in the province of Sofala, during the colonial period, and registered only in 1960, on April 6, Pai Leão is self-taught in Valimba. The learning took place by watching his older brothers, encouraged by his father, a player of bangwe, a traditional African instrument who, having watched the performance of a musician from Mutarara, ordered him to valimba.

Growing up in the village of Inhaminga, Leão watched his brothers play the valimba and gain recognition and resources with their musical skills. In that context, those who mastered an instrument were highly valued, especially for their ability to attract crowds to commercial events. Local merchants recognized the cultural and economic value of music and organized events, held in the format of fairs, called *magastos*, which constituted spaces for commercialization, but also moments of fraternization and cultural celebration, where the valimba was the main attraction. They set up arenas with food and drink sales, obtained licenses from the colonial government, hired musicians, and charged spectators tickets for access to the space.

During this period, Leão's father faced opposition from local Catholic priests, who saw the valimba as a distraction for students, harming their performance in their studies. The religious even seized the instrument, but, being a community leader and *sapanga*, a term that can indicate an assistant to a regulus, healer or spiritual leader – Leão's father managed to recover it by talking to the public administrator and .

In 1973, the environment of conflict between the Portuguese colonial administration and Frelimo forced Pai Leão to abandon both valimba and school education. His father's accusation of collaboration with the revolutionaries led to a raid and destruction of his home by the fighters, including the destruction of the valimba. Leão's family had to take refuge in the woods, fearing for their lives. This episode narrated by Pai Leão (ED/2024) ratifies Litsure's analysis, already commented, on the persecution of peasant social, cultural, and economic institutions by Frelimo in the period after Mozambique's independence (Litsure, op. cit., 2021).



Pai Leão (ED/2024) confesses that, after the war, when he returned home, he no longer thought about the valimba. He observes that this lack of interest was not only a personal matter, but also the result of a social process underway in the country in the post-independence period: the contempt for African languages, the marginalization of institutions of peasant origin, the promotion of Portuguese customs ¹⁵— such as the way of pronouncing words, the way of dressing, the use of fork and knife in meals and the appreciation and appreciation of Western musical instruments. As Farré (2015, p. 202) states, "the way in which the revolutionary project was defeated contributed to reinforcing the colonial legacies that it intended to erase".

Pai Leão's perception of this scenario is crucial to understanding his temporary withdrawal from the valimba and the broader cultural resistance. The valimba, as a symbol of national culture, was neglected in a context where local traditions were seen as inferior or irrelevant. However, cultural resilience manifests itself in the revitalization of these traditional practices, as exemplified by Pai Leão's own return to valimba and his role in preserving and innovating the instrument.

It was only in 1997, as an adult, married and a family man, with a network of acquaintances, that Pai Leão decided to overcome shame and misperceptions about his culture and began to play valimba with friends. Facing health problems and difficulties in working as a forest ranger¹⁶ at the Ministry of the Environment, Pai Leão sought a spiritual cure. During the treatment, he was recommended to return to playing the valimba and start the work of healers, a practice that had also been his father's.

Pai Leão did not adhere to any institutionalized religion, considering himself a traditional man. This means that he does not belong to any religious group, does not attend temples or participate in masses. He identifies as Ma-Sena, using his ethnicity to reinforce his claim to be a "traditionalist," which includes his approach to faith. The Ma-Sena identity, therefore, is a symbol of fidelity to its culture and traditions.

The statement by Braço (2017, p. 105) illustrates well this unbreakable connection with cultural roots: "no physical-geographical distance separates a Seine from its traditions". This reflects the depth of the connection that Pai Leão maintains with his cultural origins and practices, regardless of his location or the relationships that surround him. His Ma-Sena identity and his traditionalist approach are living manifestations of this indissoluble connection with the Sena cultural heritage, which is expressed both in his musical practice with the

¹⁵ As mentioned by the authors Mariani, Ngunga, Litsure, Cahen and Basílio, cited above.

¹⁶ Leão was a forest policeman, controlled the forest and wildlife. He worked for 42 years in the state apparatus and retired a year ago.



valimba and in his healing activities, both central elements of his existence and his contribution to the preservation of Mozambican culture.

Overcoming the negative influences and confident in the strength of his culture, Pai Leão returned to his instrument with the certainty that "culture needs someone to dig into it to go further; our culture is not something that makes someone ashamed, valimba is not a despicable thing" (Father Leo, ED/2024). In this new phase of his life, he began to count on the support of his personal network, especially friends who worked in radio in Mozambique and who helped to promote his music. This support was the starting point for a new trajectory, which included recordings, video production and hiring for shows.

Pai Leão, due to his prominent position as a master and cultural mediator, became an important agent in the dissemination and promotion of the instrument beyond local borders. He developed key relationships with cultural and academic institutions, facilitating national recognition of the valimba. Through its actions, valimba has gained space in important cultural events, such as the Ngoma Mozambique Festival, contributing to significantly increase its visibility.

Historically, the valimba has accompanied important social and cultural transformations in the region. During the colonial period, the materials for its manufacture were obtained with difficulty, and wood from imported wine barrels was reused, for example, exemplifying cultural adaptability in the face of the scarcity of resources. Today, this adaptability remains alive, as demonstrated by the use of wood sourced from dry trees felled by Cyclone Idai in 2019, illustrating a sustainable use adapted to local environmental and economic circumstances.

Investigating this form of Sena expression also with regard to the artisanal process of making valimba, it is observed that it involves a series of detailed and meticulously executed steps, described by Mestre Pai Leão, a recognized authority in the production of this instrument. The process begins with the rigorous selection of umbila wood, with the female variant being preferred due to its superior acoustic properties. This wood needs to age for approximately five years after cutting, before being used in the manufacture of the keys, ensuring optimal strength and sound.

The search for umbila wood often occurs in distant areas, crossing district boundaries, especially due to deforestation. Pai Leão cites the Muanza region as the main collection site, emphasizing the preference for dry and naturally fallen wood, exemplifying environmentally conscious practices.

The process of cutting and transporting the trees involves the use of chainsaws and vehicles to take the logs to the Master's workshop. Once there, the wood goes through



specific preparation processes, including cutting, electric planer, and sanding. The use of the electric planer represents a recent technological innovation, adopted by Pai Leão to ensure precision and superior finish on the valimba keys.

Each key is carefully crafted, considering its exact thickness and length for the production of the desired notes. The tuning of the instrument, according to Pai Leão, is comparable to that of the viola, occurring by octaves. This process requires specific skills and deep acoustic knowledge, being highlighted by the Master as crucial for the musical quality of the instrument.

The tuning of the valimba also involves the use of gourds, carefully selected for their size and acoustic resonance. Each key has a corresponding gourd, functioning as a sounding board, which amplifies and enriches the sound produced. Pai Leão emphasizes that the empirical knowledge acquired over the years is essential to identify the appropriate gourds, with the largest ones being used for low notes and the smaller ones for high notes.

In addition to traditional techniques, Pai Leão implemented structural adaptations to the instrument to improve its strength and functionality, especially for live performances. It incorporated a metal frame to support additional weights during performances in which dancers climb on the instrument, thus ensuring durability and safety.

Another significant innovation refers to the portability of the instrument. Originally, the valimba was not collapsible, making it difficult to transport, especially when traveling by air. After practical difficulties faced on trips, Pai Leão redesigned the instrument to be collapsible, allowing for more practical and efficient transport. This technical adjustment, however, requires additional hours for assembly and tuning before performances.

This change reflects the Master's ability to respond to contemporary practical challenges while maintaining the cultural and sonic integrity of the instrument. Pai Leão's ability to balance tradition and modernity, ensuring that the valimba can be brought to wider audiences, is a remarkable example of cultural resilience and adaptation, ensuring not only the preservation of the instrument's musical quality, but also its suitability for the contemporary needs of the cultural market.

The valimba was also investigated through the prism of the action of the public authorities in the process of preserving this cultural reference, which was carried out through the analysis of the initiatives promoted by the Municipal Council of Dondo, Radio Mozambique and the University of Licungo. These entities perform distinct but complementary functions in safeguarding this cultural heritage.

The Municipal Council of Dondo assumes a central role in cultural and administrative actions related to the preservation of the valimba. As part of the decentralized strategy of



Mozambican local administration, Dondo was elevated to the category of municipality in 1998, structuring itself into several specialized councils, including Education, Culture, Youth and Sports. This department has been responsible for significant initiatives, reflecting the public commitment to the appreciation of the valimba, considered a priority cultural expression.

In 2019, the Municipal Council entered into a strategic partnership with the Makolokoto Association, promoting relevant cultural activities. One of the first actions of this collaboration was the presentation of the Pai Leão valimba group in the city of Maputo and the organization of the First Festival of Valimba do Dondo. This festival brought together instrumentalists from the Province of Zambézia and other districts of Sofala, also with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the School of Arts, highlighting the regional importance of the event (Júnior, M. C., 2024).

Additionally, the Municipal Council reinforced its support during the period of resumption of activities after the Covid-19 pandemic, offering infrastructure for the construction of the House of Culture, intended to host the Makolokoto Association. In 2024, a joint project between these two bodies and the University of Licungo received municipal support, including accommodation and food for the team responsible for filming the life and work of Mestre Pai Leão (Luis, C., 2024).

Municipal initiatives include events such as City Day and other community gatherings, providing spaces for public presentation that value cultural expression. The main objective of the Municipal Council is to obtain international recognition of the valimba as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, ensuring its preservation and global promotion Luis, C., 2024).

Another key public actor is Radio Mozambique (RM), which since its foundation in 1975, has played an essential role in the dissemination of Mozambican cultural expressions, including valimba. RM contributed significantly to the visibility of the valimba through the frequent inclusion of Mestre Pai Leão's songs in its programming. This dissemination gained momentum after the successful participation of the group Batche Manhécida in the traditional music festival promoted by the Austrian Cooperation, which made it possible to record in the studio with superior technical quality, resulting in the album "Mwandizungulira" (Pai Leão, ED/2024).

This participation also allowed Pai Leão to achieve national recognition, being included in the prestigious Ngoma Mozambique contest in 2019, promoted by Radio Mozambique. The valimba, for the first time in history, competed with light music, gaining significant prominence and elevating Mestre Pai Leão to the title of Figure of the Year. The constant coverage and continuous broadcasting of the group's songs reinforce Radio Mozambique's commitment to the promotion and appreciation of the country's traditional cultures.



Finally, the University of Licungo emerges as a key institution in the academic and educational preservation of the valimba. With the creation of the new Arts course, which includes new disciplines on valimba and other local cultural traditions, the university promotes an innovative approach, integrating traditional and academic knowledge. This commitment was exemplified with the organization of the I Valimba Pai Leão Musical Forum, held in March 2024, which included academic activities, practical workshops and the production of a documentary about the life and work of Mestre Pai Leão (Chingore, T.T. ED/2024).

This academic and artistic event had the logistical and financial support of the Municipal Council of Beira and Dondo, demonstrating an effective inter-institutional articulation in the promotion of valimba. The institutional partnership proved to be essential not only for the success of the event, but also to boost the insertion of the valimba in the academic and cultural environment, standing out as a cultural reference of strategic importance for the region (Chingore, T.T. ED/2024).

In short, the coordinated actions between the Municipal Council of Dondo, Radio Mozambique and the University of Licungo reflect a broad and effective strategy for valuing and promoting valimba, contributing decisively to the cultural preservation and sustainable development of the region.

In addition to these public bodies, civil society organizations have also played a key role in the preservation, enhancement and promotion of the valimba in the district of Dondo. Entities such as the Makolokoto Culture Association and the Sotemaza Group emerge as strategic actors in the preservation of this intangible cultural heritage, strengthening community identity and contributing to local sustainable development.

The Makolokoto Association was founded in a challenging context, after Cyclone Idai, demonstrating resilience and capacity for social mobilization in critical periods. Its initial objective was to support the emotional and cultural recovery of the local population, promoting cultural actions that emphasized the value of local traditions, especially the valimba. The association quickly consolidated itself as an influential entity in cultural and tourist appreciation, holding several events and workshops that promote the visibility of the instrument (Luis, C., ED/2024).

Among the activities highlighted is the promotion of cultural and educational meetings that directly involve the young people of the community. These actions have as their main objective not only the preservation of traditional cultural practices, but also the intergenerational transmission of knowledge related to the valimba. Makolokoto also works in partnership with other local and regional entities, contributing to an environment of cooperation that maximizes the impact of its actions (Luis, C., ED/2024).



The Sotemaza Group, in turn, has also played a crucial role in the dissemination and preservation of the valimba. This cultural group, today with its activities reduced, has historically supported public and educational presentations that have served as a platform for the appreciation of Sena culture (Chungano, C. M., ED/2024). Through these actions, the group contributed to strengthening community perception of the importance of cultural preservation, encouraging the engagement of the population in local and regional initiatives (João, D. F., ED/2024).

Both organizations have also played an important role in creating institutional networks and partnerships, expanding local capacity to preserve and enhance the valimba. These networks include government and academic institutions, which has facilitated the holding of broader educational events and actions.

In short, civil society organizations have proven to be indispensable for the maintenance and development of the traditions associated with the valimba in Dondo. Its multifaceted work, encompassing cultural preservation, education, communication, tourism and community development, represents an effective and inspiring model for other communities seeking to preserve and promote their intangible cultural heritage.

5 LOCAL KNOWLEDGE IN MOZAMBIKAN EDUCATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF PAI LEÃO/DONDO'S VALIMBA

The study that gave rise to this article also historically contextualizes the importance of recognizing local knowledge in the Mozambican educational system, emphasizing the challenges and advances of recent decades. The curricular inclusion of traditional knowledge, especially valimba, was analyzed as a powerful mechanism for the affirmation of community identity and the empowerment of new generations.

The integration of local knowledge into the school curriculum becomes necessary not only for cultural preservation, but also for the formation of a solid community identity. This educational practice reinforces the sense of belonging and connects students to their cultural roots, offering a counterpoint to the historical influence of colonialist educational systems, which often marginalized indigenous knowledge (Braço and Casali, 2007).

In the Mozambican context, marked by a long history of education influenced by the European colonial model, the valimba emerges as a symbol of cultural and educational resistance. The educational approach based on traditional knowledge, such as valimba, challenges the prevailing Eurocentric paradigm, providing students with an alternative and inclusive view of local history and culture.



The research carried out in the schools of Dondo evidenced the potential of this educational strategy. Local teachers and educational managers highlight the importance of preserving and teaching cultural practices such as the making and musical performance of the valimba, not only as art, but as pedagogical elements that strengthen students' practical, cognitive and social skills.

In addition, the school becomes a space for cultural mediation, preparing students not only to preserve the Sena culture, but also to present it to external visitors, enhancing cultural tourism in the region. By learning the valimba, students become able to act as cultural ambassadors, providing authentic and educational tourist experiences.

But the challenges for the school to effectively exercise this role as a space for intercultural dialogue are still significant, where local traditions are valued and taught in a critical and reflective way, allowing students to understand the historical and social dynamics that have shaped their cultural identities.

The research carried out in the selected schools of the Dondo District made it possible to verify that the principals and teachers know the concepts of Local Curriculum (CL) and local knowledge, as well as understand the importance of their insertion in education and in the resolution of issues related to social and student life, including with regard to female permanence and dropout, a significant problem for Mozambican society.

Students may not be familiar with the specific terminology of CL and local knowledge, but they demonstrate a clear understanding of what these concepts imply in their educational formation and express a favorable position for their inclusion in the school environment. The commitment of leaders and teachers in relation to this knowledge directly reflects the perception and interest of students in the cultural issues that are part of their education.

The schools located near Pai Leão's residence, in general, have an interaction with the valimba. Most students and teachers know both the musical instrument and the Master who represents it. However, despite this knowledge and cultural interest, the valimba is not formally integrated into education. There are no workshops dedicated to the instrument, performances are rare, and there are no incentives for students to participate in the rehearsals of "Professor Leão" or for him to have a more active role within schools. This situation indicates a disconnect between the recognition of the cultural importance of the valimba and its effective inclusion as part of the educational curriculum.

The initiation rites, present in a more marked way than other cultural aspects, are incorporated as transversal themes in disciplines that have greater affinity with this theme. In certain cases, these rites are addressed in the classroom by school support bodies, which include the participation of teachers, students, parents and community representatives. The



effectiveness of this approach is directly linked to the sensitivity and interest of the school management and teachers. Students, especially those with greater maturity, show that they value and yearn for the inclusion of initiation rites among school themes, aware of their importance for the transmission of traditional knowledge and for the identity formation of Mozambican men and women.

In general, the public policy to encourage the local curriculum needs more consistent monitoring and updating. Currently, the implementation of the CL depends heavily on the individual interest of the school board and the proactive performance of engaged teachers, which exposes the proposal to serious risks of discontinuity. Without the proper support and supervision of district, provincial and national education bodies, the CL proposal risks becoming obsolete, remaining only in official documents and in the memory of a limited group of people, without achieving the cultural and educational impact it could have in practice.

The intercultural educational approach, integrating valimba as local knowledge, reveals itself as a powerful strategy to promote cultural sustainability and socioeconomic development in the region. It strengthens ethnic tourism and lays a solid foundation for a future in which Sena traditions are recognized, cherished, and sustained by future generations, contributing significantly to the identity and development of the Dondo district. However, to maximize its tourist and cultural impact, effective implementation is essential, with adequate structural and financial support for traditional schools, educators and teachers.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There were many repercussions suffered by the traditional cultural heritage of Mozambique in these 50 years of Independence. After the significant cultural and linguistic losses of the period of colonial domination, traditional culture began to face, during the one-party system, policies aimed at eradicating intangible heritage, persecuting and even physically eliminating traditional community authorities and holders of traditional knowledge.

These actions reflected a systematic effort to suppress local cultural identities through ideological mechanisms and to dismantle traditional cultural and social structures in favor of a so-called modern and centralized view of the state. The new, highly centralised model aimed to create the Mozambican "New Man", while excluding cultural diversity, seen as an obstacle to national unity.

With the establishment of multiparty democracy and the signing of the General Peace Agreement, Mozambique began to revalue its cultural diversity, recognizing the value of mother tongues and traditional practices in building an inclusive and prosperous national identity. The revaluation process implied a greater opening to the private and international



sectors, reflected in significant changes in local cultural dynamics. With globalization came new opportunities and challenges, which, however, were not accompanied by the necessary institutional strengthening, resulting in external financial dependence and fragility in the internal system of cultural management.

Despite historical and contemporary complexities and difficulties, there is an urgent need for more integrated, inclusive, and sustainable cultural policies. These policies must consider regional specificities and promote the active participation of communities, ensuring not only cultural preservation, but also economic and social strengthening. In this sense, the development of ethnic tourism can be an opportunity, as is the emblematic case of the valimba in the district of Dondo.

This article demonstrated the strategic importance of valuing traditional knowledge and ethnic tourism as viable alternatives for the sustainable development of the central region of Mozambique. The valimba, more than a simple musical instrument, represents a fundamental link for the maintenance of cultural identity, also providing a solid basis for local economic initiatives. In short, it highlighted that the valimba represents a unique and strategic opportunity for the sustainable development of the Dondo district, integrating cultural tradition, intercultural education, community empowerment and sustainable economic development.

Promoting valimba as a cultural heritage of Mozambique and humanity and integrating it into tourist circuits implies an ethical and cultural commitment, which recognizes and values the complex cultural, social, educational and gender relations involved. Ethnic tourism in Dondo, articulated around the valimba, can provide a unique and profound experience, while promoting cultural preservation, socioeconomic development and the strengthening of local identities, contributing decisively to a balanced and sustainable development of the region.

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