

interrogates the role of tradition in the colonial landscape and the ways that both government officials and local people grappled with its meaning and place. As the conversations continue in the same communities today and among scholars, this book is a valuable contribution to the literature on the relationship between ‘indigenous knowledge’, ‘tradition’, and ‘modernity’, and how these processes shaped natural resource management and conservation policies in colonial Africa.

AMANDA E. LEWIS  
SUNY-Geneseo

## MASKS AND PERFORMANCE

*In Step with the Times: Mapiko Masquerades of Mozambique.*

By Paolo Israel.

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*Mapiko* are masks depicting humans, animals, and fantastical creatures carved from the wood of wild kapok trees and worn by male dancer-spirits (*lipiko*) on the Makonde Plateau of northern Mozambique. *Mapiko* are danced to the furious pace of a drum orchestra and embody not only spirits of the dead and of the bush, but changes experienced in this somewhat peripheral part of the country from times of slavery and colonial oppression, to the war for liberation, subsequent civil war, and the uncertain terrain of the postsocialist present.

In this beautifully crafted analysis of *mapiko* performances, Paolo Israel interweaves the history of Mozambique with close readings of hundreds of song lyrics and detailed micro-histories of events and individuals that gave rise to this performance tradition. In so doing, he brings clarity of understanding to both political history and *mapiko* performance, offering a counterweight to analyses of Mozambique focused on spirit possession or class conflict. Israel deploys *mapiko* as a means of uncovering political action, historical consciousness, and subjectivity among one section of the rural peasantry, who are typically disparaged as political ‘others’ by cosmopolitan urban elites and Frelimo party cadres. Danced typically during sex-segregated initiation rituals, *mapiko* are motors of innovation and change that fuel rivalries between lineages, generations, and villages through *schismogenesis*, the generation of social difference (a concept Israel borrows from Gregory Bateson). During the war for liberation, *mapiko* went underground, silenced by the need to protect and not draw unwanted attention to rural communities. Yet after independence, we learn that Frelimo appropriated *mapiko* as ‘a collective investment in a socialist utopian subjectivity’ even as Makonde performers ‘used the symbols and aesthetics of socialism as weapons of competitive rivalry, to bolster specific local identities’ (111).

This book is a great achievement, written with elegance and an engaging style that successfully travels across time periods marked by the rise and fall of different *mapiko* genres,

and the social/political meanings that animate them. Through the lens and sounds of *mapiko*, Israel explores how aesthetic principles do not always fall prey to political exigency but rather can be reasserted and resurrected in new circumstances by new agents. The impact of ethnicity, nationalism, gender, generation, race, sexuality, and migration all come into play in this analysis, which might have felt too wide ranging in the hands of a less talented scholar. But Israel's exploration remains coherent and focused through its commitment to micro-history and its treatment of musical performance as a popular archive of historical memory and experience.

To give but a few examples, Chapter Seven details Frelimo's appropriation of *mapiko* and the troubles therein, such as having to accommodate government prescriptions that culture should: serve the fight against tribalism (yet *mapiko* are deeply linked to Makonde ethnicity); support the struggle against superstition and obscurantism (yet *mapiko* are associated with spirits of the bush and sorcery); advance militarization and discipline (by imposing choreographic uniformity); and, further the revolutionary aesthetics of the party (by adopting party rhetoric and mythologizing party heroes). However, this attempted nationalization or 'frelimization' of *mapiko* did not succeed and instead resulted in the emergence of a new genre called *nshesho* that perfectly accommodated these strictures.

In Chapter Nine, Israel details the innovation of female *mapiko* masquerade dances, how they met condemnation by male performers, and how they, too, were subsequently replaced by a more socialist, politically accommodating genre called *utamaduni* ('culture' in Kiswahili). Israel embeds this argument within a broader frame of truncated feminism: Mozambican women who experienced great strides towards gender equality following independence saw these advances eaten away soon thereafter. This appropriation by women of *mapiko*, he argues, constituted an ultimately misplaced attempt to assert equality that transgressed the deep commitment to a socially acceptable, performatively contained gender rivalry in male-dominated *mapiko* performance. It helps us understand, however, why women have maintained a stronger sense of nostalgia for the socialist period, which for all its failings nevertheless offered ideological commitment to gender equality, something that would fade markedly in the postsocialist present.

Israel champions the micro-historical approach, showing how attention to specific individuals or events can render intelligible broader patterns and processes. Stories about *mapiko* master carver Nampyopyo or the songs of migrant laborers, the spectacle of state festivals or a series of attacks by lions who turned out to be sorcerers instead, are all mined to great effect for their connections to their historical moments and their political resonances. The desire to continually innovate and attract popularity led *mapiko* performers to enter and engage terrains rife with political danger, but they also produced in the end a cultural and historical archive, preserved in song lyrics and transient genres, in the materiality of masks, and in memories and narratives of the past. Those interested in how and why performance matters will find much of value in this superb text and accompanying video and audio materials on the companion website.

KELLY M. ASKEW

*The University of Michigan*