

In Step with the Times is an ethnographically rich historical examination of the famous Makonde masked dance called *mapiko*. In each exceptionally well-researched, -organised, and -written section of the book, Paolo Israel uncovers the layers of meaning invested in *mapiko* by a wide range of human actors (missionaries, colonial officials, scholars, revolutionaries, artists and peasants) and masked characters (Ngoni fisherman, Masai quack, hungry Makua, wild animal, lazy soldier, disgruntled youth), whose perspectives describe the history of the Makonde people from the early twentieth to the early twenty-first century. The *mapiko* dance field is where the Makonde have performed their values, gender roles, religious beliefs, political ideologies, artistic talents and sense of tradition and modernity. By studying various genres of *mapiko* at different points in time, Israel is able to discern shifts in each of these aspects of Makonde life and understand how slavery, colonial conquest, cosmopolitanism, capitalism, socialist revolution, civil war, democracy and generational divisions have shaped Makonde society.

Israel casts a wide net for theoretical inspiration, but Gregory Bateson's *schismogenesis* is the big catch. Israel uses the concept to understand the critical role that competitive rivalry has played in differentiating the Makonde from their neighbours and more importantly in acting as the 'engine of creativity' that thrust new *mapiko* genres into being. For example, Israel describes a rupture that occurred in the 1930s, when the Makonde converted the lineage-based organisational structure of *mapiko* to a patron-based, talent-rich, innovation-inspired principle known as 'meat is meat' (58). This change pivoted around a master named Nampyopyo, who resurrected an older genre of character masks known as *mileya*, which he populated with masks he carved himself. Israel explains how the renowned artistic giant captured the physical attributes, mannerisms and habits of locals and foreigners while maintaining a strict code of secrecy that made the new masks even more powerful and dangerous than their predecessors (86). Israel introduces readers to a host of Makonde artists such as Nampyopyo, who come to personify each *mapiko* genre and bring it to life.

Historians will admire Israel's careful use of historical text, oral history and song text within a critique of historicisation and with an acute awareness of the ephemerality of performance. Scholars of performance studies will appreciate Israel's theoretical analysis of the elements of secrecy and mimesis found in *mapiko*, as well as how he integrates first-person narratives by *mapiko* masters and dancers. For example, Israel meticulously studies the vocabulary masters use to focus on the four components of *mapiko* (call song, mask, dance, and narrative performance), and their aesthetic qualities. And he demonstrates how transformation of *mapiko* is captured in the Shimakonde vernacular by providing a litany of examples:

Genres can be tried (*kulingangila*), launched (*kujela*), learned (*kulipundisha*), imitated (*kujedya*), bettered (*kwanjedya*), and transformed (*kubadilisha*); they can rise to fame (*kuumanga*), circulate (*kudingula*), and spread (*kulyandadya*); they become insipid (*kudidimanga*), age (*kunyakala*), go to ruin (*kubyaika*), and eventually are abandoned (*kuleka*) and forgotten (*kulivaliva*) – for the youngsters, even shitted away (*kunkagali*) or else they are passed on to new generations (*kwimyanga*) and resuscitated (*kutakatuwa*) to be danced again. (78)

A note from the Introduction refers to a link to a webpage featuring a collection of Israel's video footage of masquerades and interviews with *mapiko* masters explaining various aspects of the performances and the rituals that surround them (263). When visiting the webpage, one finds that captions to the video segments include page references to the text. One wonders if the electronic edition of the book (ISBN 978-0-8214-4486-3) includes links that facilitate moving between the footage and the text, and further enhance the readers' ability to witness *mapiko* for themselves.

The personal insights Israel draws from his eleven years of research, three years of which he spent 'in the field' among Makonde artists, are of particular interest to ethnographers. I respect his ultimate abandonment of the search for the perfect anthropological explanatory model for *mapiko*, and his conclusion that only in 'the thought and practice of *mapiko* players themselves' can we find the answers to how *mapiko* has changed over time, and why (53). All readers will be mesmerised by Israel's attention to detail, ability to flesh out the mood of each period under study, and explanation of how the Makonde represented that mood and what was going on in their daily lives through the characters they brought to life through *mapiko*. Indeed, it is the artists' remarkable ability to 'seize the spirit of the times' (78) through *mapiko* masquerades that allows individual Makonde to remember how they conceptualised, negotiated, adapted, challenged, acquiesced and represented important social and political transformations over time.

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