

SEMBAPATRIMONIOIMATERIAL. COM: LOCAL PERFORMANCES, IMAGINED NATIONAL NARRATIVES, DIALOGUE FROM THE FIELD

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DOSSIER LOCAL MUSICKING

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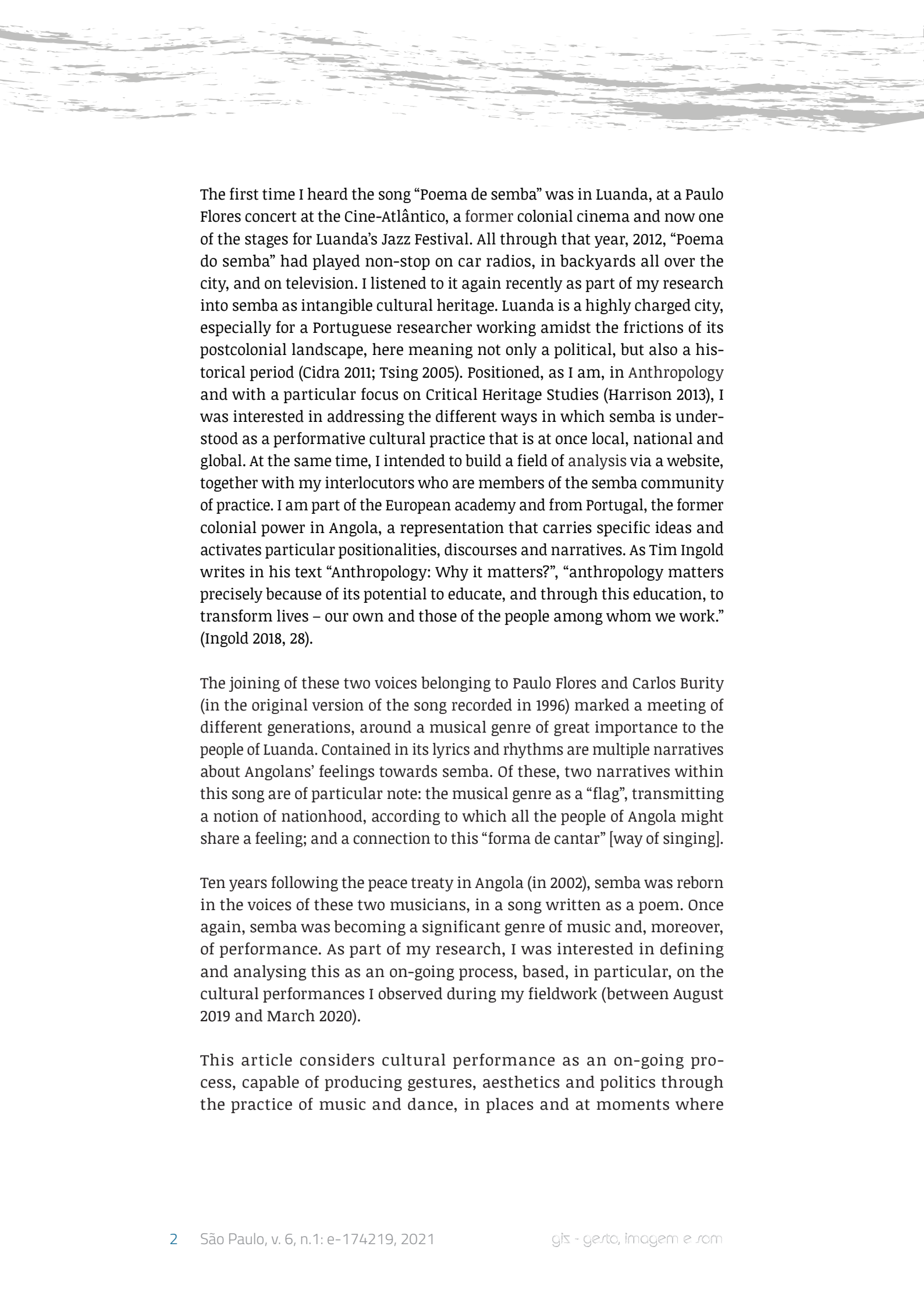
ABSTRACT

Developments in semba in Angola, from “live” to “online” performances, and its heritagization, have provoked much discussion among its *communities of practice* (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) and other *imagined communities* (Anderson 1983). This article concerns on-going research, based on collaborative work with key interlocutors on the compilation of the website sembapatrimonial.com as a methodological approach. Based on a series of collaborative posts, the interlocutors discuss dissensus (Rancière and Corcoran 2010) in the various visions and versions of heritage in the present, a process of “past-presencing” (Macdonald 2013).

KEYWORDS:
Semba in Angola;
Heritage making;
Imagined
Communities;
Communities
of practice;
Collaborative
Ethnography.

“O semba à tua maneira “mo” kota
Semba é nossa bandeira
Nossa forma de cantar”¹
(from the song “Poema do Semba” by
Paulo Flores and Carlos Burity 1996)

¹ “Semba, your way, my old chap / Semba is our flag / Our way of singing”, Semba Poem



The first time I heard the song “Poema de semba” was in Luanda, at a Paulo Flores concert at the Cine-Atlântico, a former colonial cinema and now one of the stages for Luanda’s Jazz Festival. All through that year, 2012, “Poema do semba” had played non-stop on car radios, in backyards all over the city, and on television. I listened to it again recently as part of my research into semba as intangible cultural heritage. Luanda is a highly charged city, especially for a Portuguese researcher working amidst the frictions of its postcolonial landscape, here meaning not only a political, but also a historical period (Cidra 2011; Tsing 2005). Positioned, as I am, in Anthropology and with a particular focus on Critical Heritage Studies (Harrison 2013), I was interested in addressing the different ways in which semba is understood as a performative cultural practice that is at once local, national and global. At the same time, I intended to build a field of analysis via a website, together with my interlocutors who are members of the semba community of practice. I am part of the European academy and from Portugal, the former colonial power in Angola, a representation that carries specific ideas and activates particular positionalities, discourses and narratives. As Tim Ingold writes in his text “Anthropology: Why it matters?”, “anthropology matters precisely because of its potential to educate, and through this education, to transform lives – our own and those of the people among whom we work.” (Ingold 2018, 28).

The joining of these two voices belonging to Paulo Flores and Carlos Burity (in the original version of the song recorded in 1996) marked a meeting of different generations, around a musical genre of great importance to the people of Luanda. Contained in its lyrics and rhythms are multiple narratives about Angolans’ feelings towards semba. Of these, two narratives within this song are of particular note: the musical genre as a “flag”, transmitting a notion of nationhood, according to which all the people of Angola might share a feeling; and a connection to this “forma de cantar” [way of singing].

Ten years following the peace treaty in Angola (in 2002), semba was reborn in the voices of these two musicians, in a song written as a poem. Once again, semba was becoming a significant genre of music and, moreover, of performance. As part of my research, I was interested in defining and analysing this as an on-going process, based, in particular, on the cultural performances I observed during my fieldwork (between August 2019 and March 2020).

This article considers cultural performance as an on-going process, capable of producing gestures, aesthetics and politics through the practice of music and dance, in places and at moments where

semba is performed, following Diana Taylor, “as a logic of knowledge production and transmission” (Taylor 2008, 93)². As the folklorist

Richard Bauman suggests from his fieldwork in Mexico and Cuba, “cultural performances are social occasions in which the deepest meanings and values of a culture are embodied, enacted, and placed on display before an audience. Thus materialized and placed on view, these enactments allow not only for the contemplation of received and authoritative truths, but for experimentation, critique, even subversion.” (Bauman 2008, 7).

Semba had been sung long before the end of the civil war, but singer Carlos Burity revived the genre following years of obscurity, or rather in the aftermath of an amnesia brought about by the colonial and post-colonial conflicts and the subsequent long civil war (lasting from 1975 to 2002). Paulo Flores earned international success and was credited with “the renaissance of semba”, though he had in fact started off singing kizomba back in the late 1980s. Flores took semba to numerous stages in Luanda and Angola, performing at *Worldwide/Music/Expo (Womex)*, among other musical festivals worldwide. At the dawn of a new century, semba made a return – in song, on the radio waves and across many stages, as well as in the memory and affections of the peoples of Luanda. It was as if semba also drawn on kuduro and kizomba’s growing popularity, as these two genres of music and dance quickly spread worldwide to place Angola on the map, musically, and in terms of its fantasies and imaginaries, and its potential cultural circulation (Alisch 2017; Soares 2015; Moorman 2014; Marcon 2012; Moorman 2008; Stokes 2004).

Paulo Flores spent ten years on the road with Banda Maravilha, reviving semba as a form of cultural heritage in a quest that was both personal and collective: “I thought I needed to do something, because I felt it was being lost” (Flores 2018).

In the film “Canta Angola” by Ariel de Bigault, the French documentary filmmaker tries to capture this sense of semba as a local cultural phenomenon that expresses a feeling of nationhood, following several musicians connected to the urban centre of Luanda. Carlos Burity says that “when you sing semba, you sing with more feeling and more pleasure” (Bigault 2000, pt. 12:53). The film also shows the singer being officially recognised at the 1999 Radio Luanda awards, with a prize for the best semba. Minutes earlier, Paulo Flores has revealed how he came to sing semba, inspired

² Performance studies, initiated by Schechner and Turner with contributions from the fields of ritual, theatre and dance studies, contributed to destabilizing understandings of culture, and going on to reveal the importance and significance of “practice” to the detriment of theories of stabilized cultural objects, seen as the essence of a group or community (Turner 1986).

by Carlitos Vieira Dias – the son of Liceu Vieira Dias, who was one of the founding members of Ngola Ritmos, a group that was hugely influential on semba's rhythmic evolution. Now, this is how semba was said to have been born, with the band Ngola Ritmos. But other narratives suggest semba has its origins in *caduque*, a rural musical genre from the region surrounding Luanda; or that it comes from *massemba*, a Luandan genre of music and court dance, a way of mocking the Portuguese colonial occupation like *rebita*; or, indeed, as I often heard during my research, that its origins lie with carnival, and in particular with groups from the Ilha de Luanda peninsula (Weza 2007).

Semba evolved as a Luandan rhythm and musical style, but it was also projected as something that encapsulated a sentiment connected to the Angolan nation, or even that produced a sense of *angolanidade* (Angolanness)³. The group Ngola Ritmos, which came together in the 1940s, produced a series of images and sounds that could both synthesise and represent the construction of a newly independent nation. The band's origins lay in a play by the Gesto theatre company. Around that time, Liceu Vieira Dias began to try and manoeuvre the band into spaces in Luanda's city centre that were frequented by the white colonial population. The band's rehearsals and discussions took place in the Bairro Operário neighbourhood, built in the 1950s to house the black "assimilated"⁴ population of Luanda who were part of the Portuguese colonial system. Gilberto Freyre's Luso-tropicalist ideas (Freyre 2003) were already proving effective for the Portuguese colonial regime. Semba emerged as a rhythm that could translate Luanda's local and immigrant cultural characteristics, at the same time as pleasing white colonial audiences who enjoyed listening to "folklorised music"⁵, or *músicas da terra*. Although a few Ngola Ritmos songs were sung in Portuguese, most were in Quimbundo, with phrasings that could capture anything from the suffering of unrequited lovers, to the rural/urban relationship and its comic results, metaphors which functioned as

3 A concept relating to what constitutes the Angolan nation, implying a social consensus on the constitution and governance of the nation-state, encompassing all people, independently of their origins, position, social affiliation, politics or ethnicity – according to Historical Dictionary of Angola, W Martin James, The scarecrow Press Inc, Oxford, 2004.

4 The so-called "assimilated" constituted a cohort under the Statute of Portuguese Indigenous people from Guiné, Angola and Moçambique Provinces, approved by Decree-law of May 20, 1954, aimed at "making Portuguese" the black population and workers from the city of Luanda. Ngola Ritmos is made up of citizens within this regime, which pushed the Catholic religion and dominion of the Portuguese language and the values of the Estado Novo. Amadeu Amorim, one of the instrumentalists in Ngola Rhythms, referred to the group as "tropicalizing" fado and Portuguese folkloric music to please the colonial audiences in the city center.

5 The work of historian Marissa J. Moorman (2008) in her book *Intonations: a social history of music and nation in Luanda, Angola*, from 1945 to recent times, explains in detail the context in which Ngola Ritmos arose and how they help to build "Angolan cultural sovereignty" through music and dance. Ngola Ritmos music and cultural practices "are not only the basis for nationalism, they are intimately linked to the production of nationalism throughout the struggle for independence". (Moorman 2008, 53)

narratives for the local Quimbundo-speaking populations around the city of Luanda⁶. This was music as a form of resistance and struggle, but also the projection of a nation free from the yoke of colonialism (Moorman 2008). It is this very projection of a local culture onto the national and international stage that has come to provoke much debate and many competing narratives around semba as an artistic cultural expression and its heritagization process endorsed by the Angola Ministry of Culture (Fragoso 2018)⁷.

A series of terms preceded the classification semba, as a local musical style within a complex colonial, national and socio-political context⁸. Initially, according to my interlocutor Ruy Mingas, a singer and composer close to Ngola Ritmos, semba was a word associated with a dance, described by the folklorist Óscar Ribas as “umbigada (Angolan dance). Two creatures bumping together accidentally but facing each other” (Ribas 1969). This dance is also described by the colonial “adventurer” Alfredo de Sarmiento as being local to Luanda, and with movements dictated by the beat of a *batuque* drum percussion, and consisting of “a circle formed by dancers, with a Black boy and a Black girl taking the centre, who after dancing many steps then go and bump bellies, which they call semba, with the person who then goes into the centre of the circle to take their place” (Sarmiento 1880, 127).

From this term, used to describe a dance, came a term associated with a rhythmic beat alongside many different narratives about when and how semba became an established form of music and dance that was taken up and practiced all over and beyond Angola. According to Ruy Mingas, the word “semba” was reinforced after Angolan independence; Carlitos Vieira Dias describes the term as having been taken from dance

6 The Quimbundo language spans across a vast region of different peoples. The language was discussed by colonial ethnographers like José Redinha: “the group of peoples today called Kimbundu, to which the Ambundu belong, created a confusing problem that we have already designated and we still designate the mbundu complex, responsible for the indistinction between various peoples or tribes of the Kimbundu group, namely the Ambundos, the Ngolas and the Jingas, and because of which, paradoxically to the radical predominance of mbundu, the Ambundos ended up disappearing, to the point of not appearing either in the registers or on ethnicity maps of the Province” (Redinha 1962).

7 At the end of 2018 the Minister of Culture of Angola publicly announced its intention make an application for semba to gain United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity status. This reveals the way this type of heritage is activated on a national scale and Angola’s accession to the most recent Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter PCI). The Angolan Government ratified the Convention in 2011 and, since then, has sought to propose national immaterial cultural assets for inventory.

8 Musicologists attribute the transposition of rural and danced rhythms to urban forms and with electronic harmonic instruments to Liceu Vieira Dias, as Marissa J. Moorman says “musicologists attribute to Vieira the songs translated from rural origins into popular music that was danceable and, in doing so, triggered the development of urban popular music and, in particular, the form known as Semba. The technical innovation of semba is generally located in the transposition (or addition) of local instruments to European instruments” (ibid 2008, 63).

and movement, to classify a percussive rhythm, which Liceu Vieira Dias adapted for the guitar, based on the notes played by the *dicanza*⁹, as studied by the musician and composer Mário Rui Silva: “the guitar produces a rhythm that unites, almost in its entirety, the rhythmic impulses of the *dikanza*” (Silva 2015). Recently, at the first semba workshop held at the Rangel Casa da Cultural, Carlitos Vieira Dias recorded a video interview about the origins of the word semba, which he describes as a rhythm heard in the music of some carnival groups, in traditional music sessions and also in popular music bands – all arenas in which semba was generated and danced – and each representing specific musical periods in Luanda. According to Carlitos Vieira Dias, “my father (Liceu Vieira Dias) never said *semba*, he never spoke about *semba*. I mean, all the energetic and joyful rhythms that we play are *kazukuta*. So where does this word semba come from? For me there’s one possible explanation, which is that *kazukuta* was a style of music that came from the periphery, from the working class and, because most of the words were too improper to sing in public, the so-called *assimilated* Angolans, called it semba instead – to distance themselves from *kazukuta* (Faria 2019).

LOCALIZING THE SEMBA COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE, FOLLOWING THE THREAD FROM PRESENT TO PAST: BUILDING THE WEBSITE SEMBAPATRIMONIOIMATERIAL.COM¹⁰

The website “sembapatrimoniomaterial.com” was set up to serve two purposes, which I will describe here. Firstly, it was a way of stimulating writing and developing a line of critical thought during my research; and, secondly, it was a methodological approach that would make it possible to understand semba as a form of music and dance. My fieldwork pushed me to try and understand the different narratives around the origins of the genre from “sembistas” themselves., i.e. the different ways in which this “community” understood semba as an intangible cultural asset in the present day.

⁹ The *dicanza* instrument is of some interest in relation to this research. In José Ramos Tinhorão’s book on “*Rasga, a black Portuguese dance*” (Tinhorão 2007) there are some answers to be found about the instrument, how it has had several different names since its circulation during the slave trade pioneered by the Portuguese from the 16th century. The *dicanza* is described as a Black traditional instrument, used in *rasga*, a musical genre of Lisbon: “the fundamental characteristic of *rasga* music was the particular sound obtained by the simple scraping of a stick or thin rod of cane on the surface of a toothed wooden cylinder, which the player kept leaning in front of him, supporting the upper end of the shoulder, at the height of the clavicle” (Tinhorão 2007, 31) This instrument was a constant presence as semba was explored by countless instrumentalists in Luanda. It is self-produced from naturally occurring objects or materials available to people for producing musical instruments. These ecological objects fall into the category of idiophonic instruments, that is, instruments whose sound is produced by the very material from which they are built.

¹⁰ The website can be found here at this link: www.sembapatrimoniomaterial.com

The discourse offered by interlocutors¹¹ and the song sung by Paulo Flores and Carlos Burity, evoked a kind of national rhythm, a flag for the nation, or an imagining of the nation following the idea of *imagined communities* (Anderson 1983) – at the same time that, as I was on the ground, it was becoming clear that there existed a genre of music and dance that was local to Luanda, to specific neighbourhoods of the city and to specific musical assemblies. This was a fundamental requisite of plans to list semba under the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH). So on the one hand were the narratives produced by those who practice semba, and, on the other, the Official Discourse on Heritage as authorized by the State, by intellectuals and the media, by official cultural institutions, and also by curious bystanders, those who orbit around musicians and bands and who follow the developments within this genre with a certain (sometimes political) commitment (Smith 2010).

This paradox posed various challenges to my methodological approach and also impacted my research design. This was partly because the concept of intangible cultural heritage under the Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH calls for the undertaking of cultural inventories, for example in article 1, under “Purposes of the Convention – The purposes of this Convention are: (a) to safeguard intangible cultural heritage; (b) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned” (UNESCO 2003).

The idea of “communities, groups and individuals” led me to circumscribe my object of study to “involved communities, groups and individuals” and, more concretely, to understand how the *communities of practice* and the *imagined community*¹² of semba represented themselves and defined semba as rhythm and dance. In the context of the conversations I had overheard, I was seemingly faced with ideas that were linked to the construction of Angola as a modern nation-state, and that lent towards a

11 Here I use interlocutor, replacing a term previously used to describe people who inform a researcher. New terms like this might even help us to do away with the hierarchies present in field work. The term informant seems to me to be charged with a subalternity that I have tried to avoid during this research as much as possible. As Steiner Kvale draws our attention to: “the qualitative research interview entails a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee. It is a one-way dialogue, an instrumental and indirect conversation, where the interviewer upholds a monopoly of interpretation” (Kvale 2006, 484). A horizontal practice was a constant focus and challenge throughout the research or as advocated by Viveiros de Castro and quoting Levis-Strauss the idea of dialogue between two anthropologies, that of the ethnographer and that of the ethnographed (as they, too, are developing anthropology).
12 I use Imagined community meaning all the interlocutors with narratives about semba, but who do not practice or sing regularly. Here am I referring specifically to cultural agents, bureaucrats within the Angolan State and the Ministry of Culture, as well as journalists, those who, following Benedict Anderson, contribute to “systems of classification” – producing categories and listings – enabling the exercising of state power and authority, a meta-discourse that imagines the nation able “to turn chance into destiny” (Anderson 1983, 33).

somewhat essentialist, ethnic harmonization – and this was a path I did not wish to go down. As Chiara Bartolotto notes, heritage making tends fall into the hands of State actors: “presenting the nation as an ethnic community united around its heritage, States attempt to appropriate a practice, associating it to the nation as a whole” (Bortolotto 2017, 50)¹³.

The researcher Carlos Sandroni observed how plans in Brazil to “safeguard” Samba de Roda from the Bahia Recôncavo caused disagreement not only among “specialists” at Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, the Brazilian National Institute for Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) but also how the samba community of practice, as a community, are drawn into conflicts relating to individual and group protagonism (Sandroni 2010) – an example of the dangers of “groupism” within a community of practice that heritage processes always ignite (Brubaker 2002).

Here, the notion of a “community”, which increases the value of a cultural performance in the process of heritagization, might be seen as somewhat fictional, an ill-defined category – as noted by Dorothy Noyes in her article based on the parable, the Judgement of Solomon: “Community membership and the status of individuals within the network are defined by participation. Competition regulated by community norms stimulates engagement and innovation” (Noyes 2006, 32). What is being safeguarded, then? Songs, bands, instruments? And whom is it being safeguarded for? For Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, heritage that is still alive does not need safeguarding. Safeguarding for whom? Expressive Cultural heritage needs to be constantly performed live and online. This implies monitoring those who “bear” and “nurture” semba, so as to construct a body of critical analysis that can keep up with, and capture the spirit of intangible cultural heritage, as articulated in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH (Akagawa 2016; Fischer-Lichte 2005).

The definition of community has evolved over time within the theory of anthropology. George Marcus and James Clifford’s questioning of the “field” in their book “Writing Culture” (Clifford and Marcus 2009) broadened the field for other dialogical forms of approach, keeping up with new digital technologies that can harness the potential of multimedia including photography, sound, moving image and audio-visuals, and calling for more creative and participative ways of writing monographs, the corollary of anthropological work.

¹³ Throughout this article I have chosen to translate all citations originally written in other languages. Instrument names are placed in italics. The names of the musical genres will be spelled in lower case, as it is the conventional practice in academic writing. I will not italicize musical genres given the high number of repetitions, for example, of the word semba.

If we accept, following José da Silva Ribeiro, that we now find ourselves in the fourth phase of visual anthropology, the compilation of a website around semba as intangible heritage might allow not only for diverse voices from semba's communities of practice to be heard, but also for "expanding specific traditional aspects of ethnography, such as narrative structure, inter-subjectivity, multivocality, linearity and pedagogical application" (Ribeiro 2007, 33).

Hypermedia was a notion that helped me to narrow down the main voices from the *community of practice*, in my recordings of sounds, images, voices and words, at the same time and in contention with the narratives formulated under the umbrella of the State and based on my role as a researcher at the Instituto Nacional do Património Cultural, the Angola National Institute of Cultural Heritage (hereafter INPC).

Here it should be clearly stated that I positioned myself as an observer and *pro-bono* "consultant", offering suggestions on how a framework for an inventory of semba might be drawn up. My weekly presence at the institution helped expand my knowledge of the INPC and its role and legal jurisdiction in the conservation of Cultural Heritage in Angola. Although this remit is enshrined under the Angolan Patrimonial Law (Angolan Government 2005), the institute and its directorate appear to have little autonomy with which to create action plans around intangible heritage cases, their assessment, classification, or discussion with relevant groups, communities and individuals. From what I observed, a dependency on the political machinery of the Ministry of Culture, with all of its bureaucracies and hierarchies, makes it difficult for INPC staff to intervene. As such, semba's heritagization case has stalled¹⁴.

In terms of defining semba as ICH, it is important to take into consideration the role of the communities, groups and individuals who are involved in the practice of semba as music and dance, and, in particular, the way this knowledge is passed down from generation to generation.

Herein lies the problem with the category "community" – which is, indeed, always difficult to define and demarcate, and much more so in the context of processes of globalization and urbanity, and the advances in communication, transportation and technology that they bring. The traditions of a community "need not take root in ancestral plots; they live

14 It is worth noting, in addition to these two arguments, the appreciation expressed for this type of "representational system" – a website – by the body funding my research, the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). By giving visibility to research financed with public funds it might be seen as a transparent and ethical way of demonstrating written, visual, sound and audiovisual results, analysis and treatment of information, and exposing disseminating data to the public. In particular, in my case, this was done in collaboration with my key interlocutors.

by pollination, by (historical) transplanting” (Clifford 1988, 15). For Valdimar Hafstein “The relationship of intangible heritage to its practitioners is not mediated through land or territory. Instead, intangible heritage objectifies the practices and expressions of human communities. It is defined ethnographically rather than topographically” (Hafstein 2007, 93).

The concept of *communities of practice* and its application were relevant throughout my fieldwork. Based on Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner’s contribution, I decided to establish a criterion for finding semba’s community of practice. “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger- Trayner 2015).

I was interested in learning from the people who play and dance semba, in spaces where it is rehearsed and produced. This idea, to map a community of practice, resulted in interesting anthropological contributions that might help gain an understanding of aspects of other cultural expressions in the heritagization process. ICH candidates for heritagization include inventories in their candidacies that help trace the communities, groups and individuals involved in “sustaining” these intangible cultural assets, and, sometimes, in plans to “safeguard” intangible heritage under the Urgent Safeguarding list in cases where cultural assets are endangered. As Laurajane Smith demonstrates, “Heritage is about negotiation – about using the past, and collective or individual memories, to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity.” (Smith 2010, 4).

One instance of such a mapping process¹⁵ is the website developed by Filomena Sousa, O Observatório Digital do Património Cultural Imaterial¹⁶ or Digital Observatory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, a side project of MEMORIAMEDIA¹⁷. The visibility of these heritage processes helps us understand the global nature of intangible cultural heritage, at the same time as functioning as a platform for discussing intangible cultural assets that might yet come to be included in the UNESCO listings (Harrison, Vidal and Dias 2016).

Through the development of the website Semba Património Imaterial, my research became visible, and the site created a space for a more horizontal relationship with my interlocutors, reaffirming that “relationships

15 Mapping is understood here as a form of documenting, manifesting and locating semba in the current context. Music and dance have been the subject of a proliferation of “heritage acts” on digital platforms, and through exhibitions in museums, magazines and book publishing as Sara Cohen reveals in the book “Sites of popular music heritage: memories, histories, places” 2015 (Cohen 2015).

16 See: <https://digitalich.memoriamedia.net/>

17 The MEMORIAMEDIA project aims to study, inventorise and disseminate manifestations of intangible cultural heritage: oral expressions; performative practices; celebrations; knowledges of arts and crafts and practices and knowledge related to nature and the universe (<https://www.memoriamedia.net/index.php/memoriamedia-inicio/o-projeto>)

between researchers and researched have been changing with people worldwide able to read and criticise representations of themselves, and increasingly resisting being subjects of enquiry” (Sillitoe 2012, 184).

From the outset, employing the methodologies suggested by Sharon Macdonald, I decided that my work would be based on the present day, on current, regular *sembistas*, attempting through these interlocutors and their performances to understand how past versions of semba are converted into heritage narratives in the present¹⁸.

The concept of *past-presencing* (Macdonald 2013) helped me to assemble my questions for three specific interlocutors: Marito Furtado, drummer and founding member of Banda Maravilha, who has worked with Paulo Flores and Carlos Burity; Jorge Mulumba, composer and instrumentalist from the ancestral music group Nguami Maka, and Poli Rocha, carnival performer from the União Recreativo do Kilamba group. My interaction with these interlocutors helped me to gain access to the semba *community of practice* and its negotiations, conflicts and narratives. My collaboration with these interlocutors has been fundamental in developing the website and its index, and also in producing texts, videos and audio that enable multisensory observations and reflections on the connections between knowledges-in-construction and “cultural carriers”. It has led to discussion and debate around semba as a cultural and artistic expression, and constitutes an attempt to erode, as much as possible, the power-knowledge binary edified in the Western heritage I carry with me in the form of my body (Lassiter 2005). Following John Blacking, “music (and dance)-making is a special kind of social activity which can have significant consequences for other kinds of social activity” (Blacking 2007, 15). This idea is reinforced by José Reginaldo Gonçalves in his article on “Resonance, Materiality and Subjectivity: Cultures as Heritage”, in which he attempts to dissect the *emic*¹⁹ objectification of cultural heritage and its imagined projections of “experiences” and “actions” involving the body and its techniques, in music and dance performance, within semba. (Mauss and Lévy-Strauss 1983; Gonçalves 2005). We cannot reduce the “carriers” of this knowledge to mere passive “vessels”, “lacking desire, intentionality or subjectivity” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 179). The vivaciousness of semba, and the regularity and continuity with which it is performed “live”, have taken it online, owing, it seems, to the desires and drive of the semba community of practice.

18 As Sharon Macdonald writes in *Memorylands*, “the invention of tradition perspective does seem to be productive in some contexts, especially in those in which there is an active and even instrumental tradition-making going on (Macdonald 2013, 28).

19 Here we might turn to linguist Kenneth Pike who made an enormous contribution in the sixties so that researchers in dance and music might understand his place in his investigations. Taking the words *etic* (which comes from *phonetic*) and *emic* (which comes from *phonemic*) the author tries to place the researcher and their observation in two distinct places, that intersect in different levels whilst immersed in the investigative terrain (Pike 1967).

My research into semba as intangible cultural heritage was encouraged by the then-Minister of Culture, Carolina Cerqueira – however, neither the Angolan Ministry of Culture nor the Institute for Cultural Heritage have produced anything online or held any public discussions around the issue (although the Ministry for Culture, Tourism and Environment has all the necessary financial and human resources to do so). Nor has any State institution posted any information online about the intangible cultural assets that are candidates for heritage status, such as inventories or lists of cultural assets still being considered, and least of all relating to proposals that have not made it further than the corridors of the Ministry of Culture²⁰. This is despite the suggestion, under article 14 of the ICH Safeguarding Convention in relation to education, awareness-raising and capacity-building, that State Parties should promote “educational, awareness-raising and information programmes, aimed at the general public, in particular young people; (ii) specific educational and training programmes within the communities and groups concerned” (UNESCO 2003), the possibility of a website appears to have been shelved for now²¹. However, the development of Semba Património Imaterial online created some amusing situations, with some people who knew about my research interests sending me the link to the site, thinking that it belonged to the Angolan Ministry of Culture.

Irony aside, the debates among the semba *community of practice* do not appear to have been listened to by the Angolan State – even though, as Marito Furtado mentions in one of our conversations, “all they need is to put it online. We don’t even need to go and perform. These days everything is posted online” (Furtado 2019). At the same time he pleads a “*mea culpa*” on behalf of the *community of practice* in relation to the lack of knowledge about semba, saying “we have always been very closed when it comes to showing the world what we do, I can’t explain why. But we’ve always had this problem. It’s sort of, we are like this, and we’re going to keep it to ourselves!” (ibid 2019). This testimony from Marito Furtado lifts the veil a little on how semba has been “guarded” by the carriers of this practice, and how the State has managed the heritage candidacy of this musical genre. The *community of practice* seems to mistrust the way the *imagined*

20 The former Ministry of Culture has since been integrated into a larger Ministry with more responsibilities, renamed the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Environment in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 162/20 of June 8, 2020 (Presidency of the Republic of Angola 2020).

21 Together with the director of the Instituto do Património Cultural, I proposed workshops on the concept of intangible heritage in university courses, in order to launch the debate with young people in higher education. Two workshops took place in Luanda at Agostinho Neto University: one at the Faculty of Arts (8 October 2019) and the other at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences (18 October 2019). The participation of male and female students was quite revealing of the need for greater training and knowledge about the UNESCO PCI Safeguard Convention in Angola, its potential and application in the field of Social and Human Sciences studies. I would also add that it could be an excellent means of raising employability in this area, especially considering the still embryonic link between Universities and Angolan State Institutions.

community, under the umbrella of the State, wants to portray “sembistas” and their heritage. As Richard Kurin states in an interview, the observance of UNESCO guidelines has “In some countries... given politicians and bureaucrats more power over community artists and practitioners. It has over-valued international prestige over substantive, local accomplishment. And in the worst cases, it has diverted attention from fulfilling important needs to engaging in frivolous processes.” (Stefano L. 2017).

The spirit of the Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH implies lengthy, democratic processes from the bottom up. Meanwhile, Angola is still living through a foggy period of democratization, a result of how the country has been governed up to the present day by the MPLA “party-State”, the only party to have ruled in Angola (Pearce 2017). As Justin Pearce observes in his book about the military conflict in Angola “the ending of the war created the conditions for a “single elite” to make its control hegemonic” (ibid 2017).

It was necessary to challenge the narratives that have formed around semba, including among those who reified the idea of a “tradition” from a distant past. The interviews, conversations and encounters I conducted on the ground revealed a softer political atmosphere following the election of João Lourenço as the President of the Republic of Angola (2017). Nevertheless, this new phase has not been seen as an opportunity to put into place the proposals of UNESCO’s ICH Safeguarding Convention, either in terms of recognising local cultural practices, or in fostering discussions and knowledge of these important distinctions within this country of great cultural diversity²². Furthermore, the musical and political scenes in Luanda are still smarting from the arrest of the *rapper* Luaty Beirão, who went on hunger strike to protest his arbitrary imprisonment for encouraging people to read Gene Sharp, the inspirational pacifist revolutionary (Deutsche Welle 2016).

NARRATIVES AROUND SEMBA, A FIELD IN CONSTRUCTION: BANDS, GROUPS AND CARNIVAL TROUPES

Here we will explore the “dissensus” between semba’s *imagined community* – under the auspices of the State – and the *semba communities of practice*, between local musical/dance and national political cultural performance (Rancière and Corcoran 2010). “Live” and pre-recorded performances for the internet have ruptured the habits and behaviours of “sembistas”, who want to perform their work and heritage using an aesthetic that might be appreciated both at home and abroad, as cultural heritage that is

²² After the election of João Lourenço, debates began around the Local Authorities Law, published on September 25, 2019. The law establishes the creation of municipalities, towards to a decentralization of Luanda-centric power.

recognised and disseminated on the community's own terms and with their agency (Ortner 2006).

It was not only Marito Furtado who recognised the importance of the internet for “promoting” “our semba”, but also Jorge Mulumba, who asked on several occasions if I could film the group Nguami Maka's rehearsals at his house in the Marçal neighbourhood (Henriques (Mulumba) 2019). By opening up the carnival group's rehearsals to an anthropologist, Poli Rocha was establishing connections for future collaborations, including, later, a request to create a website for the União Recreativo do Kilamba group, which could document “our history, with photographs of our processions” (Rocha 2019).

Philip Auslander's analysis of performance documentation as “documentary” or “performative” to capture an audience, reinforces the potential impact of a website dedicated to semba: “artists who were interested in preserving their work quickly became fully aware of their need to stage it for the camera as much as for an immediately present audience, if not more so” (Auslander 2019, 431).

To the imagined community, semba is tied to the past and to the dynamics that narrate and reinforce the idea of the Angolan nation-state. At the same time, the semba community of practice sees semba as something that is alive, constantly performed, although still, as yet, lacking recognition – both in Luanda and throughout the international music world. These two opposing views of a single “inheritance” produce diverse points of view and distinct understandings about the intangible cultural asset that semba constitutes in various social spheres. Here we find there is a confrontation (and dissensus) between the idea of the “flag” (the nation-state) and the “way of singing” expressed so clearly by Paulo Flores and Carlos Burity in the song “Poema do Semba”.

I have selected three posts that I assembled and edited for the website to illustrate my interlocutors' reflections on semba as cultural performance – whose value is cultural but also sentimental and social, and constantly evolving and being developed, be that in the hands of bands, groups or carnival troupes.

The first is a post on the website dedicated to Banda Maravilha, which I entitled “Semba Maravilha”²³ and with which I hoped to draw attention to the specific features of the semba produced by Marito Furtado's percussion *bateria*, alongside the band's other instrumentalists. In conversations we held over the course of numerous rehearsals, Furtado told me that he had

23 <https://sembapatrimonioimaterial.com/2019/09/09/semba-maravilha-semba-cadenciado/>

“adapted the old framework” for his *bateria* based on the percussion instruments “from traditional music line ups”²⁴. “Traditionally”, these instruments include the *ngoma* solo bass, the *muquindo*²⁵ and the *dikanza* (we will return later to these instruments in relation to a piece presented by Jorge Mulumba on the Semba Património Imaterial website). Marito Furtado described how he transposed these so-called “traditional” percussive instruments to form his *bateria* line up. The sounds of the *dikanza* are reproduced with symbols; the *ngoma*, with the bass drum, the *muquindo* with the snare drum. Based on “Xicola” music (a corruption of the Portuguese word *escola*, meaning school), he demonstrates the rhythmic cells of the *bateria* percussion, which are articulated in tandem with the electric instruments including Moreira Filho’s bass, Isaú Batista’s guitar, and Miqueias Ramiro’s keys. The Quimbundo lyrics of the Xicola song were transcribed as text (on a computer) in a pause between recordings for Banda Maravilha’s most recent music video “Mena”²⁶. Banda Maravilha has established a way of playing semba that has been influenced by interactions with the various musicians and composers who have passed through the band over the course of the last 27 years, (including Paulo Flores).

After my interview with Marito Furtado and his openness to my presence at Banda Maravilha’s rehearsals and concerts, I felt able to start asking for suggestions in relation to my research. As a non-musician, I felt I needed to understand better this musical rhythm. As I have little experience playing instruments, I asked Marito to suggest someone who could help me to learn the *dikanza*²⁷, known in Portuguese as the *reco-reco*, and one of the instruments played in semba. Marito suggested Henriques Mulumba, who I did not know.

24 Jorge Mulumba is the founder of Nguami Maka, an ancestral music group, in his words. The Nguami Maka are a recent version of traditional music groups from 60s and 70s Luanda. Many of the them came out of carnival troupes and these assemblies later gave rise to musical bands. It is in this axis – bands – groups – carnival troupes – that I accompany the interlocutors of the semba *community of practice*.

25 Mukindu is a Kimbundu word that appears throughout the text as such as with all other instruments.

26 After many attempts I managed some time along with Moreira Filho, the Banda Maravilha bassist. In the band he represents the living history of semba, but also of other rhythms played in the band. This moment was only possible thanks to the insistence of Marito Furtado, since Moreira Filho, in addition to his shyness, is rarely open to interviews. My persistence was fundamental and welcomed by Moreira Filho. The lyrics of the song Xicola were written here with his help. The transcription was thus made by him and in conversation with me, and from an analysis of parts of the song, and can be found in the post “Semba Maravilha”.

27 The Semba Património Imaterial webpage made it possible to answer research questions and make this knowledge available. The creation of the “field diary” section (Malinowski 1995) made it possible to collect moments from the research process, at the same time as articulating practical knowledge of the instrument based on classes with Jorge Mulumba. The sound of *dikanza* is thus defined in the book by José Ramos Tinhorão as “a particular sound obtained by the simple scraping of a rod or thin rod of cane on the surface of a toothed wooden cylinder, which the player kept leaning in front of him, supporting him the upper end of the shoulder, at the height of the clavicle” (Tinhorão 2007, p. 31).

I contacted Jorge and we arranged to meet at the “More Semba Festival”, part of the events programme running parallel to the Pan-African Forum for the Culture of Peace which took place in Luanda at the end of September 2019. We met and spoke, Jorge agreed to help me to learn the *dicanza* with him, and we set a date for the following week at his house. The lessons began on a daily basis and spanned the month of October. Learning the *levadas*²⁸ and sounds of semba contributed greatly to a deeper understanding of this musical style, and how its rhythmic is affected by the *dicanza*. Now that I had some knowledge of the instruments, I was able to fully appreciate a rehearsal by the ancestral music group Nguami Maka²⁹, coordinated by Jorge Mulumba, and to broaden my understanding of the instruments’ role in the musical performance of semba. Two pieces published on the site are worth noting in this vein: the first relating to instrumentation – “The instruments used by Ngami Maka: the tin can; and a second, relating to my *dicanza* lessons – “Trio Kiami: learning *dicanza* with Jorge Mulumba³⁰.

Jorge Mulumba describes the *muquindo* as a cracked bamboo cane or stick, which is beaten with a stick and with thimbles worn on the fingers to “define the metric rhythm, as if it was a *bateria*”. Then he moves on to the *dicanza*, also an idiophone instrument, most often made from elements that naturally produce sounds from being vibrated, agitated, or by the application of friction, thus enabling “*levadas*”, rhythmic series that produce variations throughout their being played. Semba has its own particular kind of “*levada*” which can be listened to in a post I will discuss later. After these two instruments (the *muquindo* and the *dicanza*), Jorge describes the *hungu*, which goes by the name of *berimbau* in Brazil. The *hungu* belongs to the category of stringed instruments and is played by being struck with a thin stick. Then he moves on to another instrument that has a different name in Brazil, where it is known as a *cuíca*, and in Angola is called a *puíta*. This is a membranophone instrument, played by applying friction to a reed using a wet cotton cloth. After the *puíta*, Jorge talks about the *base* and the *ngoma solo*, also known as a *repique*. The last instrument to be presented is the *lata*, or tin can. The tin can really is just a tin can. Normally it’s a recycled *Nido* powdered milk can that is used, which almost everyone remembers from their childhoods, owing to the lack of home refrigeration in Angolan homes that meant many were raised on powdered milk. The *lata* is also a feature of carnival

28 *Levadas* are ascending and descending movements in semba, in a determined rhythm that produces cadences capable of being sung and danced.

29 Nguami Maka means “no problem” in Portuguese. This group was formed in April 2002. It should be noted that Jorge Mulumba is the nephew of Kituxi, one of the founders of the traditional music group Grupo Kituxi And Their Followers. Jorge Mulumba’s account confirms a patrimonial heritage and the passing of musical knowledge from generation to generation in accordance with the spirit of the ICH safeguarding Convention

30 See: <https://sembapatrimonioimaterial.com/2020/03/30/trio-kiami-aulas-de-dicanza-com-jorge-mulumba/>

semba; indeed, its sounds are what give carnival semba some of its most distinctive nuances.

The dialogue I had established with Jorge Mulumba, and that is evident in this video, is also indicative of my presence and my learning. Learning with him, my acoustic and sonic education in semba and its instruments were a feature of my *dicanza* lessons. In one lesson, before I had to leave my field work because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were joined by the Luandan filmmaker Paulo Azevedo, whom Jorge Mulumba had invited to film the lesson. The students were myself and the American historian Marissa J. Moorman (cited previously in this article) with whom I had developed a friendship and an academic rapport. I was sharing contacts, expanding my anthropological field, and generating points of contact and non-hierarchical ways of interacting that made it possible to experience this world, these worlds of the field in action. Jorge in turn felt the need to document the lesson so that it could be seen, mostly by the *imagined community*, that he was giving lessons to foreigners who “value our culture much more than most Angolans”.

To recap: the conversation with Marito Furtado from Banda Maravilha led to my meeting Jorge Mulumba from the ancestral group Nguami Maka, and to my taking *dicanza* lessons. That just left carnival semba, in order for me to complete the cycle around the *community of practice* and its various musical and dance affiliations. In light of the methodological approaches I had chosen, I was interested in meeting the carnival troupe that had won the 2019 carnival. Back in Lisbon that year, I had watched a programme on Rádio e Televisão de Portugal (the Portuguese TV network) about the Luanda Carnival, part of a programme that also covered the carnivals of Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe and Mozambique (Sousa 2019). From the programme I knew that the winners were the group União Recreativo Kilamba (hereafter URK). Introducing the group, the presenter mentioned that URK danced semba. Semba is identified as one of the carnival rhythms, among others such as kazukuta and cabecinha.

Once in Luanda, I set up a meeting with Poli Rocha, a carnival performer and the director of the URK. The aim of the conversation was for me to find out a bit more about the group, and if possible, for me to follow their preparations for the 2020 carnival *enredo*, or theme.

Our initial conversation, in October 2019, exactly four months away from carnival, flowed easily. Yet at the same time, Poli seemed a little apprehensive about my presence, being an anthropologist, and moreover one from Portugal. He mentioned that they had previously had a Brazilian in the group, but that owing to the financial crisis they were

only able to work with people from the Rangel neighbourhood, where the URK is based. Throughout the conversation, Poli spoke about Jorge Mulamba as being responsible for the carnival troupe's *bateria*. At that point, I mentioned that I knew Jorge. Poli Rocha told me that he and Jorge are related – “he’s my uncle” – and that he has been pushing to see carnival music played live again on the avenue during the parades³¹. Poli repeats this in our initial interview: “We’re absolutely behind this innovation. We are preparing to perform live at carnival” (Rocha 2019). After this conversation I made a brief visit to the group’s shed, which is situated behind the restaurant owned by Poli Rocha, and a temporary base for the URK. Stored there are their headdresses, trunks containing dresses and costumes, sewing machines and rolls of fabric, with the group’s trophies against one wall. Although only established in 2015, URK had already been twice champion of the Luanda carnival.

Poli gave me access to their world and by February 2020 I was already following the daily dynamics of the troupe, meeting people, and watching rehearsals at the Rangel football field, behind the São Paulo prison. It was only possible to upload my posts based on this period of field work after the rehearsals had ended and carnival had taken place, on the 24th February. Under the title “URK carnival rehearsals, group preparation, enacting diversity”³², the post reveals the behind-the-scenes preparations for the theme that URK took to the avenue: Ancestral Marçal³³. I was able to gain an understanding of the troupe’s different sections and their attributes. I posted four videos that illustrate the dynamics of the group rehearsals: 1) In the first video, commander Poli Rocha is seen in the foreground, directing the choreography. As commander he directs the choreography, signalling the transitions with his whistle; 2) The second video focuses on the rehearsal of the women’s section; 3) the third video shows the group’s dressmaker, Elias de Almeida, preparing costumes for the theme; 4) in the last video, we come back to the rehearsals and focus on the choreography of the men’s’ section.

31 One of the complexities pointed out by the carnival troupe is the need to pre-record, in a studio, the songs for the carnival themes that will be broadcast down the avenue through loudspeakers on the day. The carnival organization managed by APROCAL – Luanda’s Provincial Carnival Association – has not yet managed to develop the technical set up that would allow the groups to drum live on the waterfront avenue, where class A carnival groups, of which the URK is one, perform. This is little bit like what happens at the Rio de Janeiro Carnival, in Brazil.

32 See: <https://sembapatrimonioimaterial.com/2020/03/10/ensaios-do-grupo-carnavalesco-urk-preparacao-dos-corpos-diversidades-em-cena/>

33 The song for URK’s 2020 carnival theme “Marçal Ancestral” was composed and written by Dom Caetano, a musician and singer who is also an interlocutor in this research project. As the song and its title suggest, it was written to remember the musicians and figures of Bairro do Marçal (where Jorge Mulumba resides). It is a song that aims to honor/remember figures from the neighborhood such as Bonga Kwenda, Joana Arante and the traditional music group Fogo Negro. Further explanations are given in an interview by Dom Caetano and published on the site Semba Património Imaterial: <https://sembapatrimonioimaterial.com/2020/02/26/urk-desfila-marcal-ancestral/>

My regular presence in the daily life of the URK helped me to understand its group dynamics, the various elements of its leadership, the meaning behind the choreography and the steps, but also the troupe's social life, its spiritual nuances and, most of all, the way semba was interpreted for the avenue, as carnival semba. I also observed gender dynamics and the performance of memory, at the same time as coming to understand political positionings in relation to questions such as freedom of expression, precariousness, dissident identities, and where they belonged within the URK. "Playing at carnival", as Poli Rocha puts it, is a pretext for exploring political, aesthetic, kinetic and musical aspects that are less visible in day to day life.

Walking from the shed to the football field via the restaurant, filming the seamstresses as they adorned skirts, recording the playing fields during the choreography rehearsals, all placed me within the carnival context. Showing the material I had filmed created trust and closeness, but also, most importantly of all, dialogue: dialogue and relationships. These Relationships were reinforced by my induction as a member of the group by way of a gift, from Poli Rocha, of a shirt that I could wear on the day to follow the parade "from the inside" "in the midst" of the URK.

I consider that "live performances by the community of practice" and these kinds of collectives – Banda Maravilha, Nguami Maka and URK – were fundamental to the development and design of my research, and, at the same time, might offer a possible plan of action, based on ethnography, for a future "inventory" of semba involving both its community of practice and Angolan State institutions such as the National Institute for Cultural Heritage. After all, as Christopher Small states, "The fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works, but in action, in what people do." (Small 1998, 8).

The website Semba Património Imaterial functions here as a tool for gathering narratives, discourses and practices of both the *community of practice* and the *imagined community*, understood here as a conjunction of people who classify and articulate ideas about this genre of music and dance, which is of great symbolic and emotional significance to Luandans. Broadening the idea of the modern Angolan nation-state through the matrix of heritage would seem to be "a method of emphasising a national, partial or even transnational imagined community, maintaining the potential political thrust of heritage making, even when administered by UNESCO, an organization of the United Nations so profoundly entrusted with a mission to contribute to world peace" (Nicolas Adell et al. 2015, 8)".

In an article in the magazine *Transposition Music et Sciences Sociales*, Elsa Broclain and other researchers turn the critical question of what ICH does for music, into what does music do for ICH? (Broclain, Haug and Patrix

2019). They mention several research projects that might provide critical perspectives on participative heritage processes, a discourse that I wanted to draw on, based on my fieldwork in Luanda. The authors even suggest that “intangible cultural heritage can be seen as a laboratory for action research, and researchers find themselves analysing fields that they themselves have taken part in creating, renewing the ethical, reflexive and critical questions at the core of the disciplines involved.” (Broclain, Haug and Patrix 2019).

The words of Paulo Flores “semba a tua maneira, meu kota”, serve here as a reminder of the many different kinds of semba that exist within the Luandan music and dance communities. The line comes from the semba poem that provided the theme for this research project and, more importantly, that provided a basis for dialogue and debate throughout the research project, with the semba *community of practice*, around a conjunction of elements that are constantly being renovated and negotiated through the creative production of semba.

By way of conclusion, the following diagram summarises this article, using a schematic form to trace the approaches used in the development of the Semba Património Imaterial website. The lists, diagrams and layout reveal the directions and pathways I followed during my research, but also the constructive nature of the field in which I was working. Being more explicit about the phases and discussions that come about along these processes might make the “co-production of anthropological theory and practice more explicit by acknowledging the diversity of those involved and their relationships.” (Sillitoe 2012, 185).

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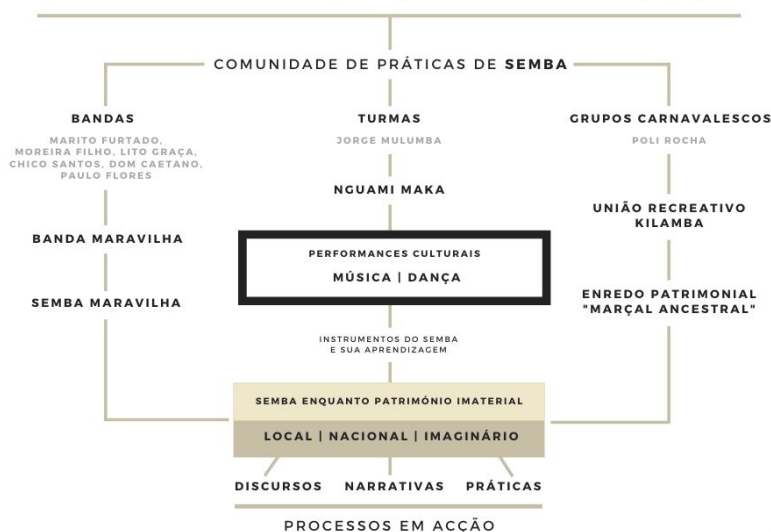


diagrama:
Mariana Camacho

TRANSLATION:
Ana Naomi de
Sousa

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