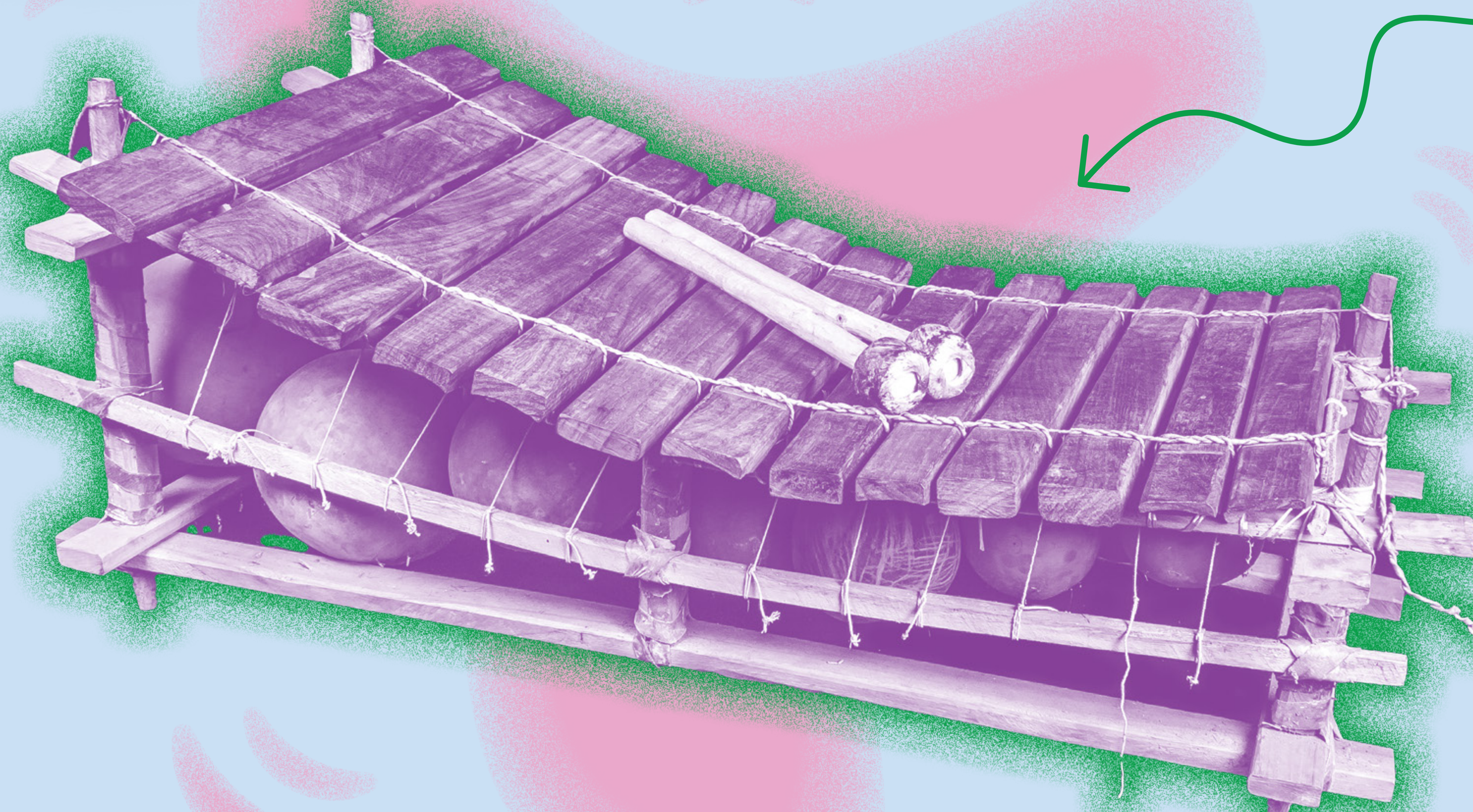


# THE MYTH OF MARIMBA



## A STORIED PAST

As is the case with myths passed down through oral history, there are many versions of the myth of Marimba. One version of the story of Marimba is an **ancient folktale** passed down by many generations across the continent of Africa. Known as **The Goddess of Music**, Marimba is believed to have created the first instruments and been the first to sing. She is also described as the most beautiful woman who ever existed. As an advocate for peace, she **refashioned weapons into instruments** and opposed the violence of war. Her otherworldly music guided and soothed people. Her powers of song and beauty **threatened other powerful deities**, and a curse was placed on Marimba setting up a classic confrontation between good and evil.

## NOTES ON NOTES

The “marimba” instrument is believed to be one of the oldest, invented on the African continent, before the Western diatonic scale was created. Therefore, many of the notes and tones that the marimba produces are jarring and unidentifiable to the Western trained ear. This is like jazz music (which forms the core musical identity of *Goddess*), which includes **“blue notes,”** notes played at pitches not represented in the 12-tone equal temperament system that characterizes most Western music. The tones of the marimba instrument are **based purely on luck**, and the thickness/length of the wood used to build the instrument.

## AN HOMAGE

Personifying the **marimba as a goddess** in *Goddess* is an homage to the myth, and a recognition of the layered history of the instrument. The marimba **traveled across the Atlantic Ocean** with enslaved populations in the 1800s to Central and South America. Different versions of this instrument characterize musical traditions across the Americas. A version of the marimba became Guatemala’s national instrument in 1821 and is recognized as a popular folk instrument of Mexico to this day. In Mexico, this instrument was eventually made using long vegetables such as zucchini, tightly wrapped with pig intestines. In the United States, the instrument **gained popularity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**, where it began being used in orchestras and studied in music departments in universities.



# A BRIEF HISTORY

# OF MOMBASA



Top: Map of the Pangani Coast, National Maritime Museum London, Kathleen Kemezis, 2010



## AN ISLAND CITY

A major **port city** along the **Swahili Coast**, Mombasa is a coral island that is connected to mainland Kenya by bridge and ferry. The former trading capital of Kenya, Mombasa has a rich history of **trade and travel**. Its strategic position as a central trading hub meant that the city remained continually fought over, until it came under the control of the Zanzibari Sultanate in 1840. The culture and architecture speak to the contestations between the **Portuguese**, **indigenous** populations and the

**Arabs**, and also include influences from **South Asian** migrant populations. Today, Mombasa is predominantly **Muslim**, contrary to the Christian majority in Kenya.

Mombasa is commonly identified as a major port city on the Pangani Coast, populated by a **Swahili majority**. Swahili people comprise the Bantu, Afro-Arab and Comorian ethnic groups. Over time, the “Swahili” identity has been extended to any individual who speaks **Kiswahili** as their first language, identifies as Muslim, and lives in a town/urban center like Mombasa.

# THE SWAHILI LANGUAGE

## THEORIES OF THE SWAHILI LANGUAGE

There are two contending theories around the emergence of the Swahili language. The first is the **creole hypothesis**, which suggests that the language emerged as a common point of communication when Arab traders interacted with indigenous people of the East African coast. Europeans speculated that the language emerged as an **Arabic based pidgin** that was then co-opted by indigenous people.

The second theory, emerging as a response to the above colonial theory, is the **Sabaki hypothesis**. This suggests that Swahili was a language of the indigenous **Bantu people** (those of the Sabaki complex). The Bantu people that traveled toward the coast for maritime or trading pursuits, adapted the language, and eventually became known as the “Swahili”, defining the language as **“Kiswahili.”**

Common to both hypotheses, is the idea that Swahili contains **a mix of different languages**, influenced by increased trade in the region. Many words in musicals like *The Lion King* and *Madagascar* (the movie) have been adopted from Kiswahili. The African American celebration, Kwanzaa also borrows many words from the Swahili language.

## GLOSSARY OF KISWAHILI COLLOQUIALISMS

Some of these are more colloquial and conversational, and others are pure Kiswahili.

**Njoo na mimi**  
Come with me

**Karibu**  
Welcome

**Moto Moto**  
Hot/fire/heated up

**Wacha wewe**  
Leave it be / let it go

**Hebu wait**  
Let’s wait (Hebu is used as a filler word)

**Au sio? // Ndio**  
Not so? // Yes (a call and response that asks for approval)

**Dem**  
Slang for beautiful lady

**Kabisa**  
Totally

**Twende Zamani**  
Let’s go back to the past

**Nchi ya usiku wa milele**  
The land of forever night

**Assalamu alaikum**  
Muslim greeting meaning peace be upon you

**Unazungumza Kiswahili?**  
Do you speak Kiswahili?

**Haram**  
Forbidden or unlawful

**Niambie basi**  
Tell me, then

**Kichaa**  
Madness, lunacy, inescapable evil

**Moja, Mbili, Tatu**  
One, two three

**Bwana**  
Man/husband, term used to describe a person of authority of marital age

**Kuwa serious**  
Get serious

**Samaki wa Kupaka**  
Coconut curried fish

**Sawa**  
Ok/fine

**Nini**  
Term used to describe a thing / filler word for when you can’t remember the name for something, also used to censor words

**Tetemka Dunia**  
Shake the earth

AU SIO?

NDIO



# AFRICAN SYMBOLS AND STORYTELLING PRACTICES



A baobab tree pictured in Lamu, in the compound of a sound healing center. Captured by: Karishma Bhagani, September 2024

## THE BAOBAB TREE

The baobab tree is a common symbol that appears in African art, and is the subject of many stories, values and beliefs. Some ethnic groups in Mombasa believe that the baobab tree is **home to their ancestral spirits** and holds centuries of history within its roots. Legend has it that the baobab tree became arrogant because of its unquestionable beauty and medicinal properties. To teach it a lesson, the gods overturned the tree, so **its roots became the branches**. This is why the baobab tree is **linked to the heavens** because of how its root-like branches reach out like fingers towards the sky. As a result of its spiritual connections, the baobab tree is also a place that has many magical and mystical connections associated with it. It is therefore

also believed that one must not visit or loiter around a baobab tree at night, as this is the time when the spirits (evil and good) are roaming around.

## CAVE PAINTINGS AND ROCK ART

In addition, cave paintings and rock art were another prominent mode of **archiving stories** across time and generations. Many references point to Egyptian cave paintings, but this art form is a common practice **across the entire African continent**. Many of the wall symbols and imagery in *Goddess* are inspired by the East African cave paintings.



Top: Two cattle with horns in twisted perspective. Left: Two red bulls face right. Mt Elgon, Kenya. 2013,2034.13635. © TARA/David Coulson

## GRIOT STORYTELLING

Griot storytelling is a distinctly **West African** tradition that privileges sound and the oral word, through music. Originating in the **Mande empire of Mali**, this form of storytelling is a prominent method of **archiving histories** and sharing age-old myths and legends of the Mande society.

Not everyone has the privilege to be a griot; one must be **born within a bloodline** of griot storytellers, who pass down the form, technique and stories that are shared by the community. The conceptualization of the griot in storytelling is significant because it allows for **different versions** of the same story to exist—everyone is a lead storyteller and has their version of the narrative that they are conveying to the community, and to the audience.

In *Goddess*, **all the members** of the ensemble are considered storytellers. The **Grio Trio** rely on their musical and vocal prowess to convey the story, and the rest of the ensemble uses movement and dance to visualize and represent the story. Having the ensemble as griots **democratizes the storytelling process** and allows for the community to have collective ownership of the narrative, instead of privileging a single perspective.



# THE CAVES OF MOMBASA

## CAVE CHRONICLES

For centuries, caves have influenced human consciousness, from an architectural and cultural perspective, serving as archives of our past. The Kenyan coast is known for its caves, which emerged from centuries of erosion from the sea waves. Some of these caves are **hidden** and have **secret tunnels**, which were used for different purposes across the years including as **hiding places during wars, for spiritual practices and ritual observances**.



Photo retrieved from X

## GOMBESHWAR CAVE

The Gombeshwar Cave is home to one of the oldest **Hindu temples** in Mombasa today. It is an active site of **worship**, with Hindus gathering for festivals such as Shivratri and Ganesh Chaturthi. It is believed that the temple contains a natural formation in the shape of a **lingam**, which is a symbol associated with **Lord Shiva**. A local Indian doctor stumbled upon the temple in the 19<sup>th</sup> century while treating a local herdsman from a bee attack.



Photo retrieved from: <https://alibarbours.com/>

## ALI BARBOUR'S CAVE

Ali Barbour's Cave is an upscale **restaurant** in Diani, Kenya. The cave is thought to be between 120,000 to 180,000 years old. The cave has **interlinking chambers**, and original cave holes that bring in natural skylight. It is a prime tourist destination, and guests can enjoy a candlelight seafood dinner under the stars.



## SHIMONI SLAVE CAVES

The **coral caves** in Shimoni, from which the set design of Goddess gleans inspiration, are entrenched within a **history of slave trade**. Shimoni, derives from the word **"shimo" meaning hole** in Kiswahili. It is believed that the pen of caves was used as a holding place for over **one million slaves** that were being shipped in dhows to markets in Zanzibar and later to Yemen in the 1860s. Many would not successfully make the journey, and those that passed away in the caves as they waited, were often thrown to sharks.



Shimoni Slave Caves, Copyright Africa Adventure Vacations, retrieved from: <https://africaadventurevacations.com/filming-in-shimoni-slave-caves/> . January 2025



## GODDESS

# GLOSSARY OF KISWAHILI COLLOQUIALISMS

Some of these are more colloquial and conversational, and others are pure Kiswahili.

### Njoo na mimi

Come with me

### Karibu

Welcome

### Moto Moto

Hot/fire/heated up

### Wacha wewe

Leave it be / let it go

### Hebu wait

Let's wait (Hebu is used as a filler word)

### Au sio? // Ndio

Not so? // Yes (a call and response that asks for approval)

### Dem

Slang for beautiful lady

### Kabisa

Totally

### Twende Zamani

Let's go back to the past

### Nchi ya usiku wa milele

The land of forever night

### Assalamu alaikum

Muslim greeting meaning peace be upon you

### Unazungumza Kiswahili?

Do you speak Kiswahili?

### Haram

Forbidden or unlawful

AU SIO?

NDIO

### Niambie basi

Tell me, then

### Kichaa

Madness, lunacy, inescapable evil

### Moja, Mbili, Tatu

One, two three

### Bwana

Man/husband, term used to describe a person of authority of marital age

### Kuwa serious

Get serious

### Samaki wa Kupaka

Coconut curried fish

### Sawa

Ok/fine

### Nini

Term used to describe a thing / filler word for when you can't remember the name for something, also used to censor words

### Tetemka Dunia

Shake the earth