

in *Mozambique! Stockholm Kulturhuset 1987.*

Stockholm: The Stockholm City Cultural Administration, 1988.

Annabela Roldan

On Mozambican Dance

Mozambique, a country of ten huge provinces, each one different: cradling different ethnic groups, languages, historical events and traditions. But each equal in its desire for independence. They got to know each other in the struggle. They understood that colonial repression was the same for each of them. The prohibition of an aggressive attitude towards traditional dances resulted in these dances being practised clandestinely, and confined each to its region. It was disco-

vered that in the north and in the south, without any collaboration, the dancers used to ridicule the behaviour of the sipaio (African colonial policeman), the colonial administrator and the religious authorities. These clandestine dances were transformed into resistance to colonialism.

With the spread of the armed struggle and the creation of liberated areas, a sense of national unity was born and nurtured.

Maconde dancers at a circumcision ceremony in Cabo Delgado Province



Armed struggle, liberated areas and national unity are three fundamental concepts, without which it would be impossible to talk about Mozambique today, even though we wanted to talk "only" of dance.

"... many (official) texts mention and denounce the use of culture by the settlers as a weapon to sow division in order to rule. While, on the other hand, it was an instrument in the armed struggle for national liberation, for unification, integration and affirmation of a Mozambican personality."¹

The liberated areas were in effect a great laboratory where experiments on integration were successful. Integration did away with concepts of regionalism and tribalism and opened the way towards the superior concept of the Nation, to a powerful sense of national unity.

The cultural diversity was understood to be unique, common wealth. The warlike ring of the Xigubo dances and the Timbilas from the south, the complex Nyau rituals from the centre, the Arab influenced women's dances and choral pieces from the north and the Mapico from the northern border itself all became part of Mozambique's cultural heritage.

The first National Folk Dance Festival in June 1978 and the first Festival of Traditional Song and Music in January 1981 provided the first opportunity for a survey.

From a technical point of view, the cultural diversity of Mozambique, its breadth and richness, are at the same time a wonder and a concern. One is dealing with a living legacy, one that "lives" in the people and must be preserved. What a great challenge!

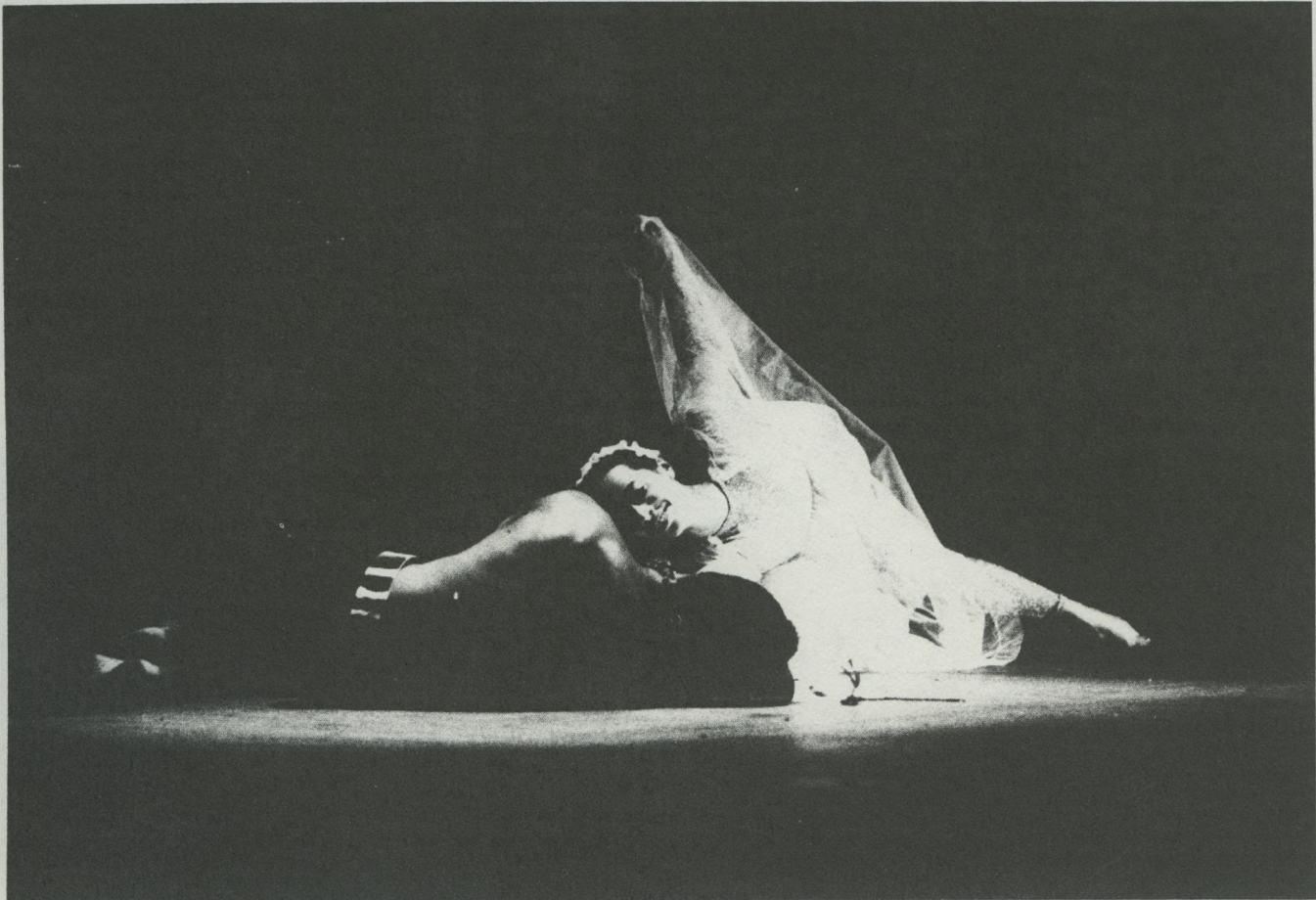
In the countryside people who have become literate have begun to explain nature and life without recourse to magical rites. Dances and songs, without the ritual content, are very often present in celebrations and community activities. This is the case with the Mapico, mentioned earlier.

People are changing and the community is changing with them, in its organisation and in social and production relations. People's cultural and aesthetic needs are changing.

In the towns and cities the process is very rapid, and often brutal. This is the price of progress.

But the inevitable collapse of the world of the ancestors can be counterposed to the systematic regis-

Companhia nacional de canto e dança: a scene from the "Hands"



¹ Our culture shows only half of itself. Luis Bernardo Honwana, in the *Domingo* newspaper, 18 November 1984.

tering of our cultural heritage. The school and the crèche are taking the place of the age-old system. They will have to be capable of maintaining the new generation's links with its cultural roots.

However, "... there is a great risk of falling into the trap of cultural nationalism, of imposing traditional cultural values as limits to creativity".

"...Essentially we defend the idea that the artist is an innovator, a creator. And we think that a creative person ought to drink at the appropriate fountain, the people, their problems, their worries and their daily life. They ought to know the history of traditions, but at the same time the incessant struggle for transformation and progress."

"The creative artist, possessing this material and armed with his own sensitivity, retells, synthesises and recreates. The artist is not a simple repository of the past. The artist is essentially a builder of the future and asks questions about the present. Through the artist's work, the people take possession of their own cultural heritage, enriching their own experience. And with the experience of other peoples they broaden the horizons of their culture, provided that relations between groups of people are not those of domination or exploitation."²

Proud of having called colonialism's bluff on the question of personality, the Mozambican nation felt that it should send a cultural envoy to deepen its relations with other peoples.

Priority was given to the creation of a National Dance and Song Company, despite the youth of the nation and its countless problems. The Company has already taken small samples of the variety and wealth of Mozambican dance to faraway places.

However, much remains to be done. It is no simple matter to transplant the dance from the village, its natural environment, to the specific conditions of

the stage. Spontaneity is obviously lost, as well as the feeling for the occasion, be it celebration or rite, that cannot be mechanically transposed.

This loss can only be made up with technical refinements. And achieving technical refinements is a very long process.

With this in mind, the National School of Dance was created in 1984. The school gives priority to vocational work with children of nine years and over who show natural aptitude for dance.

The children are taught step by step universal dance techniques. Slowly they transform their bodies into "a well-honed instrument" and at the same time they learn and perfect the rich heritage of Mozambican dance. This is not easy to achieve.

Some 250 dances were displayed at the Festival. This number indicates the variety of occasion in which dance is manifested in Mozambique. And the dances possess a diversity of rhythms, some accompanied by choral harmonies. Many different types of musical instruments also accompany them. There is much to be done.

Starting a systematic programme of researching and registering the immense wealth of Mozambican dances has still not been possible. What we do know is still at the level of an initial survey. And time is against us.

We need to know more, to research, to compare, to register and to film. We must learn and we must teach. We must train Mozambicans to take on this huge task.

It is a great and exciting challenge!

Translation from Portuguese Frances Christie

ANNABELA ROLDAN, Head of the National School of Dance, Escola Nacional de Dança, Maputo, Mozambique

² Ibid.

BUSES

On the luke-warm flanks
of buses bunches of
wild fruit are ripening
to the Mobiloil of despair on the running-board
while the tarmac
of the road in mounds of gravel
borrows the shape of the mouths of mothers
puzzled in the root stop.

José Craveirinha

(Karingana wa Karingana, INLD, Maputo, 1982)
Translation Michael Wolfers