

Performance Culture in Maputo: Categories of Expressive Modes in the Changing of an African Urban Society

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The relationship between expressive culture – as a group of artifacts for cultural mediation – and social and historical processes, and its agency in the shaping of modern society, are questions which deserve attentive observation in the setting of today's ethnomusicological research. This paper examines the musical categories in the confluence of four related sets of historical facts in Mozambique: labor migration, urban migration, independence and formation of nationality. It tries to clarify the significance of changing categories in the historical processes which took place in this African country, from the 1950's to about 1985.

The categorization made by the white colonial administration of local expressive behavior was a direct consequence of the population's major administrative partition in the ex-Portuguese colony: that of the black people was considered 'native', as opposed to that of the white people (or that clearly influenced by white habits). Such partition corresponded to the division between the population referred to as *nativa* (native), the population of the *assimilados* (black people who adopted living patterns of the white population) and finally, white people and people having originated abroad (in mainland Portugal or one of its colonies). Such categories of expressive behavior – native or other – had been defined following an expansion of its consumption habits in the developing harbor

city of Lourenço Marques in the mid twentieth century: this corresponded fundamentally to the introduction of new concepts by radio broadcasting habits, juke-box machines in suburban bars, and city night life.

The radio broadcasting station, Rádio Clube de Moçambique, used several concepts to set apart a category of musical products which apparently had no connection to western civilization. In 1955, 'Folclore Negro' (Black Folklore) was the name of the first radio program to include forms of expressive behavior belonging to the black population; 'Hora Nativa' (Native Hour) from 1959 on, was a program inspired in the *folclore moçambicano* (Mozambican folklore) (Roque 1988:58-59). The word *música* (music) was apparently used nowhere in such context. Its application was largely reserved for the sound products of performing groups that had been active in both American and European scenes, and also – though with less significance – in the Johannesburg sphere of influence. Together with Lisbon, Johannesburg was the main source for the broadcast material, through the close association of Rádio Clube de Moçambique with the South African Broadcasting Corporation,¹ and Lisbon. Within these sources' music repertoire, brass and electric instruments were perhaps the major sound novelty African ears did perceive. Thus, *música* came to convey, among the black population in Maputo, the sound products using those instruments and, sometimes, the instruments themselves.²

Juke-box machines were common in Lourenço Marques suburban bars, the so-called *cantinas*.³ They had been introduced mainly from South Africa – Durban and Johannesburg – in the mid and late 1960's. Juke-Box machines promoted a repertoire alternative to radio.⁴ Coming from South Africa, mainly through the agency of privately acting

¹ The close relationship between broadcasting in Lourenço Marques and in Johannesburg dated from 1933, when the first broadcasting equipment for Mozambique was bought in Johannesburg (Roque 1988:59). From then on a history of close associations followed.

² As a matter of fact, the word *músicas* (musics) is used nowadays in Maputo to refer to all the different kinds of European music instruments. These include particularly electric and acoustic guitars, electric keyboards, brass instruments and drum sets.

³ Cantina was a type of public lounge with mixed functions. Its internal space was half-grocery, half-tavern; externally, there was space for people to gather, sitting on small benches or simple logs, having always some kind of sound background, usually provided by a radio set or a juke-box.

⁴ Use of juke-boxes was relatively expensive. By the time of their introduction into the Lourenço

individuals, juke-box vinyl records eluded any kind of jurisdiction in matters of musical taste, language, text contents or other. As such, they represented perhaps the most broad-minded attitude through musical consumption in Lourenço Marques. Among cantinas' juke-boxes, South-African emerging musical styles were preponderant; this was the case of *mbaqanga*, *simanje-manje*⁵ and other popular styles. South African performers also became well known in Lourenço Marques through juke-box records. These included primarily Simon Nakbinde, known as 'Mahlathini', a leader of a group of eighteen singers – Mahlathini and his Queens – whose bass voice had roots in Nguni male singing. Such was also the case with John Bengu, known as Phuzhushukela ('drink sugar'), a Zulu guitar player, leader of an all male group; with Joseph Shabalala and his Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who polished *mbaqanga* style in the early 1970's; and with Miriam Makeba and her female *mbaqanga* singers (in the late 1970's). Although they could have been broadcast by the Rádio Clube de Moçambique,⁶ their popularity in Lourenço Marques was achieved primarily by the juke-box system; open air live-shows promoted by white entertainment organizations such as '1001' and 'Produções Golo'⁷ also helped to promote these artists. The products of these performances were also known as *música*.

City night life was a third agent for the creation of musical categories. It was concentrated in the down-town area of Lourenço Marques, close to the harbor centers of activity, a red-light district mostly centered in the Rua Major Araújo (Major Araújo Street) or simply Rua Araújo, as it became known. By the early 1970's it included five major night clubs, along with several minor bars, and at least seven brothels (Mendes 1985:151). The musicians featured by night clubs were black or, in most cases, *mestiços*; they used to perform a variety of genres belonging to the

Marques' suburbs, the cost of playing a record was 1\$00 (one escudo), the equivalent of about one day's salary of a domestic worker. By the late 1960's, the cost had increased to 2\$50 ('dois mil e quinhenta'). As a strategy for overcoming this excessive cost, cantina users often associated and had records paid in turns.

- ⁵ A style developed from *mbaqanga* featuring a male singer and a female chorus, played on Western instruments such as electric guitars, violins, and saxophones.
- ⁶ A few of their records show up in the archive of Rádio Moçambique, though with no strong indications of use. No broadcasting logs survive, and radio producers of the time are no longer available in Maputo to provide testimony on these matters.
- ⁷ These enterprises were born from individual producers of radio-shows, radio publicity and soccer match radio commentaries. They evolved into live-show producing, hiring primarily South-African performers.

locally accepted category of música folclórica (folk music), ranging from *Simanje-manje*, *Pfena*, *Muthoria*, or *Marabenta* to *música ligeira* (light music) which included local adaptations of some of the Anglo-saxon major hits of the 1960's. Groups of such musicians, who claimed distinctiveness by their featuring of string instruments such as guitars and mandolin-like instruments, were known as *conjuntos folclóricos*.⁸

The new social order brought about by the independence process also brought a new configuration to this expressive behavior categories scheme. Such categories, previously defined in terms of the introduction of new concepts by broadcasting habits, record industry and city night life, were then updated by the speech of government officials.

Perhaps the main feature of the new speech, in what concerns expressive behavior, was the introduction of the word *cultura* (culture). This was part of an ideological apparatus designed to replace the old colonial systems of classification in Mozambican society. Mozambican leaders who struggled for independence were also struggling for modernization. In doing so, they fought all social institutions reminiscent of *tradição* (tradition). These included initiation schools,⁹ local medical practices – also known as witchcraft –, divination and local expressions of animist religion, local economic systems (including agricultural procedures), foods, clothing, etc. Thought to perpetuate traditional values, the system of initiation rites was opposed in energetic terms:

[traditional education]...aims at passing on tradition, which is raised to the level of a dogma. The system of age groups and initiation rites is intended to keep the youth under the sway of old ideas, to destroy their initiative. All that is new, different and foreign is opposed in the name of tradition. Thus all progress is prevented and the society survives in a completely static way. (Machel 1981:30)

⁸ A group with these characteristics could be found in Maputo in 1992. It was a trio made of Ernesto Francisco Zevo (Mandolin and Guitar), Feliciano José Sitoye (Guitar) and Abílio Mandlaze (Guitar), who performed regularly in the suburbs, especially in private celebrations.

⁹ Initiation schools fell out of usage; they were described to me as *poucas vergonhas*, (shameless acts), a description due probably to the fact that boys and girls wore no clothing in initiation rites. The teachings of such schools were categorically forbidden; boys' circumcision, though, was allowed when performed in health-care facilities.

Tradition also included important modes of expressive behavior channeled through initiation schools, previously known as *folclore* to the white population of colonial Mozambique: this was the case of, e.g., *xigubu* and *xifase* songs and dances of the Tsonga of Southern Mozambique (Johnston 1972:484), among others.

In 1975 a government department was created to promote all aspects of the recently developed concept of *cultura moçambicana* (Mozambican culture). The Direcção Nacional de Cultura (National Board for Culture) built a staff of practitioners of the distinct expressions of such *cultura*, including musicians, who worked as experts on its enhancement. It eventually hired foreign specialists as well, as was the case of North Korean *especialistas de cultura* ('culture specialists') who taught courses in Maputo and Xai-xai in the early 1980's.

The official speech on the issue of *cultura* was channeled mainly through political addresses which took place at all of the annual national and party celebrations. President Machel himself led a strong campaign for culture:

Culture is a central question for the revolution. It is one of the fundamental questions for the building of socialism. There is no fight for liberty, there is no revolution, if the struggle against the domination of the bourgeoisie is not cast also in the cultural domain. (INAC s.d.:22)

In addresses such as this, a highly heightened speech would induce in the listeners strong ideas on their responsibility in such matters as the vitality of local organizations. These organizations were mainly residential committees, officially known as *Grupos Dinamizadores* (dynamizing groups) or simply GD's, and company, hospital or department committees, the *Comissões*.¹⁰ Among these organizations, formal expressive behavior groups were preponderant. Although the official designation for these groups was the *Grupo de Cultura* (cultural group) of the enterprise, market, hospital or quarter, they became known to the population simply as *culturas* (the cultures). In isolating the word 'culture' from the official designation, people selected the most noticeable element

¹⁰ Leaders of 'Grupos Dinamizadores' were powerful people in all aspects of daily life in the *bairros* (suburbs). They were delegates, known as *estruturas* (structures), as opposed to the common people they represented, known in the political speech as *elementos* (elements).

for its novelty in their daily context;¹¹ people also selected the word which represented distinctiveness towards colonial times.

As a consequence of this kind of classificatory experience, from colonial times to independence, three categories of expressive behavior became clearly established in the speech of the Maputo dweller. These are *Tradições*, *Música* and *Cultura*.

Tradições (traditions), the only one of the three words which has no match in the Tsonga vocabulary on expressive behavior, includes all modes of the old society, those not considered as modern, belonging to initiation schools, drumming schools, exorcism, social beer-drink, transition ceremonies, witchcraft, etc. *Tradições* also include forms of heightened historiographic and praise speech known as *stokhozele*, which take place in private celebrations such as weddings.

Música applies to modes of behavior where Western musical instruments are used – guitars, keyboards, brass, and drum-sets. With very few exceptions, *música* is apprehended only through radio and cassette; along with any other possible reasons, poverty is strong enough to set aside any attempt to buy – or even build – Western musical instruments. It is, thus, a media phenomenon, with the exception of a handful of young people who build their own guitars and drum-sets; exceptions are also two groups whose members migrate to in Eastern Germany, and were forced to come back in consequence of the events which led to German reunification in 1989.¹²

Finally, *Cultura* encompasses those modes of expressive behavior which are considered modern, though not necessarily Western. This is especially the case with choral groups of different kinds, such as *Makwayela*, *Makwaya* and *Canto Coral*. These groups represent a

¹¹ The introduction of the word *cultura* in Portuguese daily speech (apart from its other meaning as 'agricultural production'), in Portugal, also took place after the 1974 revolution. Before the revolution, expressive behavior was classified as *folclore*, and the only state department dealing with such matters was named *Secretariado Nacional de Informação* (National Board of Information). From 1975 on, a new department was active with the designation of *Ministério da Cultura* (Department of Culture).

¹² Upon their return to Mozambique, one of these groups – the 'Os Mondlane' –, established a kind of night-club in the Chamanculo A quarter. There, in a cane-enclosed yard, they play and sell food and drinks from about 9 p.m. to late hours. Many other migrants who returned from the DDR also opened small music-related businesses in the *caniço*, such as cassette dubbing shops.

departure from old habits in many different ways; they clearly point to modernity. Thus, they were encouraged over any other mode of expressive behavior, since they tend to symbolize the distinction between 'civilized' and 'bush' native musical styles.

The early documents of independent Mozambique addressed the issue of culture in a tenuous approach. Among the critical problems to face, culture was understandably not a priority: it was left to the end of all plans, after economics, health and education were dealt with. However, there are some instances which clarify the intentions of the new leaders in cultural matters. On the issue of the Party and its People's Fronts,¹³ President Samora Machel reported in 1976 to FRELIMO's third congress that an emphasis was to be placed on the creation of conditions for the cultural education of the people with no discrimination (Machel 1978:113). He also emphasized the need to fight what he called 'cultural conservativeness' (Machel 1978:137). The same year, FRELIMO's plan of action in the domain of culture contemplated the following:

...the valorization of all cultural manifestations of Mozambican people, giving them a revolutionary content and casting them on the national and international plan, in order to project a Mozambican personality. (FRELIMO 1976:23)

As a consequence, the political party established the priority task of:

1) Directing and stimulating the artistic creativity among the people, creating the necessary conditions ... in order to create instrumental and choral [performing] groups. (FRELIMO 1976:23)

The reverberation of these directions was such that hundreds of choral groups seem to have been created in a matter of weeks.¹⁴ As to the matter

¹³ The formula 'Party' with its 'People's Front' was peculiar to Marxist-Leninist regimes. It guaranteed that zealots were grouped in the most responsible bloc, and that other followers had a different place to exercise their partnership. Such conception had a correlate in all Mozambican sectors. The so-called 'structures' and 'elements', a hierarchy which overrun almost all previous forms of social organization, dominated all aspects of formal social relations.

¹⁴ It is now impossible to verify this information. However, several informants agree that a large number of formally created groups was established by that time. These seem to have been most often factory, school, communal village and state departments' groups.

of 'giving a revolutionary content' to culture, the outcome seems to have been more than satisfactory to FRELIMO's aims. Two years later, in a document on the issue of a National Festival of Popular Dance, the National Board for Culture makes significant remarks:

Since Mozambican people took power, a large effort has been made in order to identify and adapt the content of dances to the fundamental options of our people. We could even say that there is a tendency to repress and make silent everything which has no 'political and revolutionary' content... It is not fair to systematically condemn our folk dances, our popular dances, our traditional dances, because of some irrational aspects, mythical, superstitious, magical and religious. (DNC 1978:2).

The National Festival of Popular Dance, which took place in Maputo in 1978, became the stage for the most meaningful statements in the matter of expressive behavior ever made in Mozambique. Politically, it was the most important event of the year. It was the material manifestation of the ideological roots of the regime. All FRELIMO's gear was put to work on that project, in particular its exclusive logistic network outside Maputo – a unique tool in an area deprived of the most basic conditions; that was the only feasible way for any organization to gain access to the interior of the country, the so-called *províncias* (provinces). Groups from all-over the country participated in this festival, selected through a regional-hierarchical screening process; only one group from each region would come to Maputo for the 'Final Phase'. There were selection committees, that had to follow rules from the National Board for Culture. One of these rules went as follows:

...members of the committees have to consider in their decisions artistic value, duration, clothing, group and individual performance, musical accompaniment, accessory elements, but, above all, they shall take into consideration social and political content and cultural value. (DNC 1978:15)

Groups were eager to be selected for the 'Final Phase', since that could represent the only opportunity for their members to travel to Maputo; some song-texts made reference to this fact, emphasizing the particularity of the air travel:

Nossos filhos andam de avião,
nossos pais não andavam de avião (Cardoso 1978:14)¹⁵

Consequently, song texts were made to match the 'social and political content, and the cultural value'; as an example, initiation schools' songs from the Tete Province were sung to the words 'Viva a FRELIMO!'¹⁶ (long live FRELIMO!). Such practice became established all over the country, as a new aesthetic value for years to come.

The 'cultural conservativeness' Machel made a detrimental reference to was another important issue on the matter of Mozambican cultural affairs. Recently liberated from a conservative colonial regime, Mozambican society was struggling for new ways of life identified with the concept of modernity. Modernization became a key image for the development of the new nation, and was adopted as a pretext for the replacement of all ideologically objectionable aspects of Mozambican society, mostly those who could be tagged as previous to independence – related to colonial times: these belonged to the domains of allocation of village power, village social organization, religious beliefs, healing, etc. When applied to cultural affairs, modernization meant the adoption of new aesthetic values leaving behind the old – known as 'tradition'.

Changes in performance culture in the domain of expressive modes seem consistent with social change processes in Maputo. The range of expressive modes performed in the city was determined by processes of change at the social and political level, in the historical ventures from pre-independent, colonial situation to independence and socialist ideology. Those expressive modes which were considered 'traditional' were entirely neglected by the end of the period in consideration (c. 1985), in consequence of modernizing cultural policies: such was the case of *danças das províncias* including *muthimba*, *chigubo*, *zore* and *xingomane*. The range of modes made available conveys the nature and direction of historical processes (modernization, change, etc.); it also carries a direct relation to explicit political discourse, materialized both in song texts and in choreographies and costumes.

¹⁵ 'Our children travel by airplane, our parents did not travel by airplane'. This song was documented by journalist Carlos Cardoso (murdered in 2001 in Maputo) in the province of Niassa (Northern Mozambique), in 1978. It was performed in the context of a local group screening for the Festival.

¹⁶ FRELIMO stands for Mozambican Liberation Front.

A. Pre-independence expressive categories

- Rádio
- Folclore
- Música Nativa

- Red-light district
- Música Folclórica
 - Simanje-manje
 - Pfena
 - Muthoria
 - Marabenta
 - Música ligeira

- Bairros
- Música
 - Juke-box
 - Mbaqanga (RSA)
 - Simanje-manje (RSA)
 - Open-air live shows

B. Post-independence expressive categories

- Tradições
 - Initiation schools
 - Drumming schools
 - Beer drink ceremonies
 - Life-cycle ceremonies
 - Witchcraft
 - Stockhozele
 - Danças das Províncias

- Música
 - Performance involving Western musical instruments

- Cultura
 - Makwayela
 - Makwaya
 - Canto-coral

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