

## MOZAMBIQUE

Victoria Brittain  
on the cultural  
vitality of Maputo

# Artistic sweep

SATURDAY afternoon in the normally deserted former red light district of Maputo the lights are low, beer flowing and Thelonious Monk pours out of the saxophones in Topazio's. The self-taught trumpeter is a market stall holder the other days of the week, the pianist is a Cuban economist from the Ministry of Fisheries. All afternoon a dozen or more Mozambicans, a Dane and a Dutchman in turn held the packed restaurant entranced with the golden oldies of jazz. Upstairs the former doorman from the Portuguese days, now the owner, counted his takings.

The most overwhelming reception was reserved for a Mozambican composition for piano, double bass and clarinet, composed and played by a man who, at Independence, a decade ago, headed at the age of 22 Mozambique's largest secondary school. People here wear many hats simultaneously and work demands are extremely heavy.

To see a junior minister bouncing and clapping to the weekend jazz is to be reminded that Mozambique is that rare country where security chiefs and ministers of defence are published poets, too, and poetry readings in the Botanical Gardens in the centre of the capital are a regular event.

Entertainment, like everything else in Maputo, is done with virtually no resources. Sabotage and war have ruined the economy. There

are few cars moving on the wide tree-lined streets, named after African heroes such as Patrice Lumumba and Amilcar Cabral or the leaders of other revolutions such as V. I. Lenin and Ho Chi Minh. Buses are a rarity — there are neither spare parts nor much petrol — and people walk several miles to work in the city. An aid agency which brought in thousands of bicycles could raise productivity dramatically.

Maputo is just 60 miles from the South African border and the hostile neighbour is the focus of all attention here. The echoes of the war in the townships are ominously loud.

For years Mozambique has been a constant target of South African aggression in the region, although it has never actually been occupied as parts of Angola are. The Nkomati Pact with South Africa two years ago restrained the then expected open South African attacks on Maputo itself, but the covert destruction of the economy and the social fabric of the rural areas has continued with the infiltration of well-supplied guerrilla bands, mostly from Malawi nowadays.

However, the markets in Maputo still offer heaps of tomatoes, bananas, paw paw, pineapples and cabbages albeit mostly at prohibitively high prices. Some stalls sell state marketed goods at less than half the price. Staple foods — rice, maize flour and sugar — are supplied to every registered resident of the city on a ration card. The computerised system appears to work efficiently though the quantities are modest.

Foreign currency shops stocked with South African and European luxuries ease the lives of the hundreds of foreign aid workers who operate in every sector and the thousands of families who depend on a migrant worker for their support.

Mozambican painters have made more striking records of the deaths, disruptions, mutilations and terror of the last few years than the streams of neatly laundered aid officials who produce chilling statistics of the millions displaced inside the country and over its borders.

Over the weekend a new film of the work of the country's best painters gave a glimpse of the extraordinary cultural vitality which exploded here after the Portuguese colonialists left. Chichorro's paintings have the vivacity and brilliance of Chagall, Malangatana's huge complex canvases are dominated by great eyes, more eyes and the terrors they see, for example a knife slicing off a breast. This is a common reminder that the Mozambique National Resistance have left of their presence. Murals by Malangatana and other artists dominate parts of the city, Heroes' Square, museum walls, inside the Frelimo Party-owned hotel. The new film shows Malangatana teaching schoolchildren to make intricate patterns with coloured sand and sculpture from sardine tins. Education has been one of Frelimo's successes — illiteracy was cut by a quarter in five years, teaching staff has been doubled, secondary schools increased by 50 per cent.

A retrospective exhibition of Malangatana — at 50 the country's best-known artist — opened this week with paintings worth many thousands of pounds brought home on loan from collections in Europe and the United States.

Sculptors, poets, and writers are the subjects of the next three films planned in a series supported by Swedish aid money to the Ministry of Culture. A more ambitious historical feature film is now being shot in Maputo, too — work starts very early in the mornings not least as actors, directors, cameramen all do other jobs as well.