

A Revolutionary Life

Eduardo Mondlane was born on 20 June 1920 in the village of Nwadjahane in Gaza province. Memories of resistance to Portuguese rule were still very much alive. Only in the 1890s had the Gaza empire been extinguished and colonial domination enforced on the Limpopo valley.

Eduardo's father, who died when he was two, was the local chief. His mother, Makungo Mbembele, encouraged her son to go to school—and at the age of 12 Eduardo stopped tending the family's goats, and went to primary school for four years.

To complete his primary schooling, Eduardo had to leave Gaza for Lourenço Marques (now Maputo); he was able to do this with the help of Swiss protestant missionaries. Since the Catholic religion was identified with the Portuguese, in Gaza, Protestantism tended to go hand in hand with early forms of nationalism.

Colonial racism made it impossible for Eduardo to attend secondary school in Lourenço Marques; instead he took a two-year agricultural course at the Methodist missionary school at Cambine in Inhambane province.

He was 25 when missionary finance allowed him to take a scholarship at a secondary school in South Africa. He progressed rapidly and entered Witwatersrand University in 1949.

He was already an active nationalist, and while in South Africa became a founder member of the Nucleus of Mozambican African Secondary Students (NESAM).

Later Mondlane would say how colonial exploitation in Gaza—particularly the sight of his brothers fleeing to South Africa to avoid being recruited as forced labour for local Portuguese farmers—had made him politically aware.

Mondlane's political activities brought him to the attention of both the South African and the Portuguese governments. D.F. Malan's national party, campaigning under the slogan of "apartheid", had won the whites-only election in 1948, and implemented rigid racial separation. Shortly before he could take his second year university exams, Mondlane was expelled from South Africa. On arrival back in Mozambique he was arrested and questioned by the PIDE.

Undaunted, Mondlane managed to obtain a scholarship to Lisbon

University, but constant PIDE harassment drove him further afield. He completed his university education in the United States where he took, in rapid succession, a bachelors' degree, a masters' degree, and in 1960, a doctorate in Anthropology and Sociology from Northwestern University.

It was also in the US that he met and married Janet Rae Johnson. They had three children.

In 1957 Mondlane went to work in the trusteeship department of the United Nations, doing research on the former German colonies of Tanganyika, Namibia and Cameroon. But always he kept in touch with events in Mozambique, returning to the country in 1961 to test the pulse of popular feeling, and the possibilities of revolt against colonial rule.

Several small nationalist organisations existed, based in neighbouring countries, but Mondlane decided to join none of them. Instead he urged them to unite into a single movement, and in this he had powerful backing from Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere.

Three nationalist organisations fused to form Frelimo, with Mondlane as its first president, in Dar Es Salaam on 25 June 1962.

All attempts to negotiate with the Portuguese had proved fruitless, and so guerrilla fighters were trained, initially in Algeria, and Frelimo launched its armed struggle for independence on 25 September 1964.

Rapid military successes meant that Frelimo was soon governing large liberated areas in the northern provinces of Niassa and Cabo Delgado. Disagreements arose over how to run the liberated areas. Was Frelimo merely fighting to expel the Portuguese, to change the colour of the ruling class? Or was it fighting to end all exploitation? Mondlane, supported by younger men such as Samora Machel, argued that the liberation movement had not been set up simply in order to take over from the settlers.

Under Mondlane's leadership collective production was encouraged in the liberated areas, women were armed and a women's detachment



Eduardo Mondlane (Telecine)

formed in the guerrilla army. Clemency was shown to captured Portuguese soldiers (on the grounds that the struggle was against the colonial system and not against individual Portuguese) and Mozambican students sent abroad by Frelimo were told that they also must work in the liberated areas.

This was all anathema to the conservative wing of the movement, often referred to as "the new exploiters". They rejected the concept of "people's power", took racist and tribalist positions, opposed the liberation of women, and drew an arbitrary line between the "political" and the "military" aspects of the struggle.

At Frelimo's Second Congress, held in a liberated part of Niassa in 1968, the "new exploiters" were overwhelmingly defeated, and Mondlane was re-elected president.

Some of the defeated conservatives now went into open alliance with the colonial regime, and it was thus that, with the aid of some of Mondlane's enemies within Frelimo, the PIDE were able to murder Mondlane.

The death of the movement's founder on 3 February 1969 was a heavy blow, but the regime was badly mistaken in its belief that Frelimo would now collapse. Mondlane's work outlived its creator: the foundations he had laid did not crumble. In May 1970, the Central Committee elected Samora Machel to continue Eduardo Mondlane's work.