

Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane (1920-1969):

A Personal Memoir

Edward A. Hawley

On February 2nd of this year, the body of Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane returned to the land for whose independence he gave his life. It was accompanied from Dar-es-Salaam to Maputo, together with the remains of five other FRELIMO leaders, Josina Machel, Felipe Magaia, Mateus Muthemba, Paulo Kankhomba and Francisco Manyanga, by a top level FRELIMO delegation. Ceremonial re-interment followed¹ in the Mozambican soil which he had left in 1950 except for a brief visit in 1962 and his frequent visits to the areas.

Ten years ago, on February 6th, 1969, the remains of FRELIMO's first president were temporarily interred in Kinondoni Cemetery in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Nineteen howitzers of the Tanzania army boomed a farewell salute, and all present, his wife Janet, son Eduardo, and two daughters, Chudan and Nyeleti, his comrades-in-arms, Tanzania President Julius Nyerere and his cabinet, and ambassadors of all the major countries of the world, joined in the simple and touching African ceremony of adding a handful or shovelful of earth to the closing grave. Thus closed a chapter in the long history of Portuguese conspiratorial intrigue to maintain control of territories they carved out in the 19th century Scramble for Africa, a history that was to last only a few more troubled years, thanks in significant part to the efforts and inspiration of the one we laid to rest.

On a Sunday afternoon four short days before, at Silversands beach outside the city, Eduardo Mondlane had been splashing merrily in the warm tropic sea with his three children and half a dozen FRELIMO comrades. When he came out of the water we engaged in five minutes of light-hearted repartee at the door of his beach cabana. It was my last time to see alive a man who had been one of my closest friends for eighteen years. The bomb that was to take his life the next morning, and which Interpol later determined had been assembled in Lourenço Marques, was already sitting on a desk in the FRELIMO office, inside a book by Plekhanov, the Russian philosopher.

1. *Africa News*, Vol. XIII, No. 6, February 16, 1979, p. 12.

Africa Today's Executive Editor, Edward Hawley, is also a minister of the United Church of Christ, and officiated at both the wedding and the funeral of Dr. Mondlane. He was on the staff of the Christian Council of Tanzania as executive officer of that body's refugee program from 1964 to 1970.

That life had begun 49 years earlier in the back country of Gaza in southern Mozambique. As the youngest son of the third wife of a chief of the Tsonga people, his earlier years were spent herding his father's cattle. His principal inheritance, as the youngest of many brothers, was his name Chivambo, determined by divination — a prophetic name, that of his great-grandfather, one of the most revered leaders of his people. Only through the extraordinary persistence of his mother did he, beginning at the age of fourteen, receive an opportunity for formal education through Swiss Reformed and American Methodist missions, the only schooling opportunities available.²

Though his initial post primary training was in vocational agriculture, he proved such an apt pupil that he was offered a place at a leading Presbyterian School in South Africa. Again his aptitudes carried him to the top of his class and he continued his studies in 1948 at the Jan Hofmyer School of Social Work in Johannesburg. In February 1949, the year the Nationalist party came to power in South Africa, he entered Witswatersrand University, where he shortly became the center of the first in the long series of battles between that government and the beleaguered liberal tradition in South Africa.

The crunch came in September of 1949. Besides distinguishing himself academically Eduardo had been elected, among others, to represent Witswatersrand at an inter-university meeting. It was obviously impossible for the Nationalists to move at once against the limited access qualified South African blacks then had to the English medium universities. The Bantu Education Act was still in the future. But an alien black who had achieved some prominence could serve as a warning and a portent of things to come. So on August 26th his immigration permit was withdrawn effective September 2nd and he was forced to return to Mozambique. To their credit, the Wits authorities fought for his return, and when their efforts failed, broke all precedent by allowing him to complete the term's work *in absentia*, the first time his privilege had been accorded an undergraduate. But as he was already far beyond the level of any schooling offered in the Portuguese territories, his educational career in southern Africa was effectively at an end.³

Suspect in South Africa, Mondlane inevitably became suspect in Lourenço Marques, and was interned for several days of close questioning by PIDE, the Portuguese Security Police. But the Portuguese were torn between the upholding of white racialism and the scoring of an easy point in the long debate between Afrikaner white separatism and Portuguese assimilationism. After all, Mondlane was an "assimilado," even if a

2. A semi-fictionalized account of his childhood can be found in Andre Clerc, *Chitlangou, Son of a Chief* (Latterworth Press, 1950).

3. For more details see Philip V. Tobias, "A Little Known Chapter in the Life of Eduardo Mondlane," *Geneve-Afrique*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, 1977-1978, pp. 119-124.

somewhat suspect product of Protestant rather than Catholic missions. In the end, the chance to demonstrate the supposedly superior "tolerance" of the Portuguese won out, and before he left prison he was offered the chance to study abroad, and even offered a choice of countries. With the same diplomacy that characterized his later dealings with world leaders Mondlane first mentioned Lisbon, but had the forethought to mention Switzerland and the United States as well.

When Eduardo Mondlane reached Lisbon in 1950 he became the first African Mozambican in the 450 years of Portugal's "civilizing mission" to study in the Metropole, just as he was later to become the first Mozambican to successively acquire a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. The year in Lisbon, while providing the opportunity for a first acquaintance with future colleagues like Marcellino dos Santos, Amilcar Cabral, and Augustinho Neto, was also characterized by constant harassment by PIDE, and it was with a sense of relief that he went on to Switzerland the following summer and later to Oberlin College in Ohio to complete the last two years toward his B.A.

It was in Oberlin that our paths first crossed, and it would be easy to fill the rest of this article with personal reminiscences. A few are inevitable, because they reveal something of Mondlane the man: Eduardo at dinner in the home of the widow of a pioneer American missionary to Mozambique, a man who had first gone to the country in the 1870s, and sitting down at the piano after dinner to chuckle his way through the inept Tsonga rendition of the hymns, finally silenced by the answer, "My husband!" to his query "Who translated this?"; Eduardo returning from Nashville to tell of being turned away at the door of the large downtown Methodist church; the consternation of my landlady when she learned the student who was to share my apartment for a summer in abolitionist Oberlin was a black African; Eduardo coming home at night from his summer work in a cement-beam manufacturing plant in nearby Elyria full of stories of his new awareness of the problems of the working man in America; Eduardo's first major purchase from his earnings, a Zenith shortwave radio that was still in his home at his death, and our mutual astonishment at the first thing we heard: Radio Budapest playing a Louis Armstrong rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In"; the meeting in our flat with one of Eduardo's first Swiss missionary friends, who made a special trip from Geneva out of concern for rumors that Eduardo might marry a white American and Eduardo's expression then, as always, of non-racialism and black pride, which for him were never exclusive terms.

There must be literally thousands of Americans, black and white, who first became aware of the aspirations to independence of colonial Africa through the speeches of Eduardo Mondlane during his 12 years in the United States, but probably only a small minority of these who remember

the tall relaxed man with the ready smile ever became aware that it was this same man who became the leader of southern Africa's most successful liberation movement, or that this most reasonable and friendly of men became excoriated, and finally assassinated, by the Portuguese as an "irresponsible, bloodthirsty terrorist."



Dr. Eduardo Mondlane

(From a photograph taken on January 31, 1969, four days before his death, by Baldwin Sjollem of the World Council of Churches Fund to Combat Racism.)

But for many, lives were permanently changed. There are American blacks who first became aware of black pride through Eduardo Mondlane. There are American whites whose first awareness of the enormity of their involvement in white racism and colonialism came through him, and who literally re-ordered their lives to try to play some significant role towards ending this state of affairs. Of course, for no one was this more true than for Janet Johnson, just out of high school in the sheltered suburban environs of Downers Grove, Illinois, whose sensitivities were awakened by this man at a United Christian Youth Movement conference on the shores of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin in the summer of 1951, only a few weeks after his arrival in the United States. Five years later they stood before me to exchange their marriage vows in the parsonage of the church I was then serving in Chicago. The genuineness and depth of this commitment has been amply demonstrated by Janet Mondlane's ten years of continued selfless service to the FRELIMO cause and to the new nation of Mozambique since she rushed back to Dar from a fund raising tour of Europe to stand with their children beside her husband's grave.

But others of us were changed, if less dramatically: fellow students, faculty, church leaders at top-level conferences, workers and farmers and businessmen and housewives at countless local churches. Eduardo was an instinctive early proponent of “liberation theology” and retained his gut-level perception of the truth of the Christian gospel as at its core a message of liberation of the captives and freedom for the oppressed, even as he became increasingly disillusioned with what was preached from most pulpits, and with the church in most of its manifestations as an effective instrument for social change. His marriage and his refusal to cut white friends made his leadership role more difficult, but both his personal make-up, sure of himself at the core and convinced that authentic personal relationship in itself was a force for change, and his clear perception that racism and not another race was the real enemy, precluded any cheap compromise on this point.

Of his leadership of FRELIMO and the laying of the foundations of the modern state of Mozambique much, though not enough, has been written elsewhere.⁴ However, this memoir would be incomplete without some personal reminiscences from the years in Dar. These include anecdotal memories like Eduardo’s return from Moscow in 1964, shortly after our arrival, and his comments on the relatively great age of the U.S.S.R. leadership, in sharp contrast to FRELIMO’s youthful Central Committee, Tanzania’s cabinet, or even the Kennedy team in the U.S. Another that comes quickly to mind is his rigorous physical conditioning, never neglected, that enabled him to keep up with FRELIMO’s cadres on the long marches inside Mozambique, and his great amusement in recounting the contrasting agonies of an over-weight Egyptian general who as a member of an OAU observer team had to be carried back to the Ruvuma after proceeding only a few miles into the country.

A whole cluster of memories come to mind related to his realistic approach to his own safety. Never foolhardy, he nevertheless refused to be so cautious as to interfere with living life to the full. In a discussion in his living room only four days before his death he said he did not expect to live to see the end of the struggle, which he felt might take another decade, but that, contrary to the opinion of many, the future of FRELIMO was not dependent on any one person. Despite the painful recent defections and machinations of Lazaro Kavandame, Mateus Gwingere and others, the leadership of FRELIMO, he said, was a genuinely collective one, and he expressed special confidence in Samora Machel, who, though the leader least known to the outside world, nevertheless had a firm grasp of the

4. Mondlane’s own *The Struggle in Mozambique* (Penguin, 1968) is still the most valuable single source. See also George M. Houser and Herbert Shore, *Mozambique: A Dream The Size of Freedom* (Africa Fund, 1975). Shore is now engaged in writing the first full length biography of Eduardo Mondlane.

nature of the struggle and the future of Mozambique.

Other memories relate to some of the public scenes of his leadership of FRELIMO, though much of this took place within the confines of the spare but functional offices in Nkrumah Street or in the camps and in the field, beyond the range of peripheral observers. The memories include his speeches at the 25th of September public rallies at Arnoutoglu Hall in Dar, at a graduation ceremony for a class of nurses at the FRELIMO camp at Bagamoyo, and a memorable address to the students at the Mozambique Institute in support of FRELIMO's anti-elitist policy of requiring all cadres to spend time in service in the liberated areas. Most importantly, I remember hours he spent in personal problem-solving with relatively minor individual members of the movement, in a few of which I happened to be involved, but many others of which I came to know about through later conversations with the individuals helped.

Eduardo Mondlane's phrase "A Luta Continua," — The Struggle Continues, remains a key watchword for the present leadership as they struggle against poverty, ignorance, disease, and natural disasters, and stand in solidarity with comrades from neighboring Zimbabwe and South Africa as they struggle for control of their own destinies. His memory lives on in the University in Maputo that bears his name, opening the way for a new generation to the higher education which was unavailable for him and his contemporaries in his homeland, and in the hearts and minds of his countrymen and lovers of freedom and justice everywhere. To have known Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane was to have known the human spirit at its best.



Today
our Revolution
is a great flower
to which each day
new petals are added.
The petals are the land
reconquered,
the people freed,
the fields cultivated.

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Our Dream has the size
of Freedom

Picture and poem from
FRELIMO's 1969
New Year's card.