

THE ORIGIN AND ROLE OF THE FIGURE OF "ASSIMILADO" IN THE CONTROL OF THE BLACK IN THE COLONIES OF PORTUGAL

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The term "Assimilado" (Assimilated), as used in the post-independence period, has been redefined. It is more a "construction" of the revolutionary FRELIMO than a work of the Portuguese "settler". And in this context, its impact on the fate of Mozambicans after independence cannot be attributed to Portuguese colonialism without considering the evolution of the term as a result of internal ideological struggles within FRELIMO.

Purpose of the Briefing Note

This Briefing Note explains how Portugal compulsively used the assimilation process in its colonies in order to discipline and control black activism. Being assimilated was the primary condition for having a dignified life in colonial times, which is why practically all the literate Mozambicans who later founded FRELIMO or joined the armed struggle were overwhelmingly assimilated.

Defining the term

Assimilation is the "process of interpreting and merging cultures (traditions, feelings, ways of life) into a common cultural type¹". In this context, the person who becomes assimilated goes through a process of "absorbing and integrating a habit, custom, technique or other form of knowledge (e.g. after a few months, they have assimilated the local customs)²".

Assimilado is the term given to African subjects of the colonizing Portuguese Empire between the 1910s and 1960s, who reached a level of "civilization", according to Portuguese legal norms, which theoretically qualified them for full rights as Portuguese citizens. The Portuguese colonizers claimed as a goal for their assimilation practices, the "close union of races of different degrees of civilization that help and support each other loyally"; however, this notion of "close union" differed from its practical application in the cultural and social spheres of the colonies of Portuguese Angola, Portuguese Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea³.

¹ "assimilação", in Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa [em linha], 2008-2021, <https://dicionario.priberam.org/assimila%C3%A7%C3%A3o> [consultado em 28-06-2022].

² "assimilação", in Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa [em linha], 2008-2021, <https://dicionario.priberam.org/assimila%C3%A7%C3%A3o> [consultado em 28-06-2022].

³ <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/assimilado/m0fq860?hl=en>



Use of the term in pre- and post-colonial Mozambique as an instrument of domination of one group over another

In his article "Assimilados, régulos, Homens Novos, moçambicanos genuínos: a persistência da exclusão em Moçambique"⁴, Albert Farré argues that regardless of the political regime, social exclusion has been a constant in Mozambique before and after independence.

The figure of Assimilado was officially abolished in 1961, as a result of Portugal's attempt to avoid complying with the rules of the decolonization process underway at the United Nations. As a result, Mozambique no longer had indigenous or assimilated people, but only citizens of Portuguese overseas territories.

This attempt to consider everyone equally ended up creating even more contradictions between the assimilated and the Portuguese in the period following 1960, leading to conflicts that were reflected in the power struggles within FRELIMO, a struggle that was made official as state policy at its Third Congress in 1977 and officially concluded at the great meeting of the Comprometidos in 1982.

All Assimilados suffered the effects of discrimination between blacks and whites, but some suffered more than others. Assimilated people from "old" families, despite discrimination, had more access to colonial social networks than first-generation assimilated people, many of whom were the first to have access to formal education in their families. The discourse of the latter, being the most disadvantaged among the assimilated, was more radical than that of the older assimilated.

As Albert Farré says, "Thus, as colonialism continued, the colonial experience of the 'assimilated' black elite became increasingly different from the colonial experience of the 'traditionalized' Portuguese rural elite"⁵. On the other hand, Teresa Cruz e Silva, quoted by Albert Farré, argues that this divide was also intergenerational, with the younger and better educated being more radical.

The same happened among the assimilated urban and rural black elites, something that affected Frelimo's relationship with the countryside, and which led to major post-independence speeches accusing many segments of the black elite of wanting to "betray the cause of independence" by merely replacing the settler. Eliminating the forms of organization of black people continued in the post-independence period, even if it dismissed European racial superiority, race having been replaced by the superiority of the ideological thinking of the dominant group in the state. Modern Mozambique implied a continuation of the "assimilated" project, but with a different purpose.

⁴ Albert Farré, «Assimilados, régulos, Homens Novos, moçambicanos genuínos: a persistência da exclusão em Moçambique», Anuário Antropológico [Online], v.40 n.2 | 2015, posto online no dia 01 juin 2018, consultado o 26 juin 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/aa/1443>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/aa.1443>

⁵ Albert Farré, «Assimilados, régulos, Homens Novos, moçambicanos genuínos: a persistência da exclusão em Moçambique», Anuário Antropológico [Online], v.40 n.2 | 2015, posto online no dia 01 juin 2018, consultado o 26 juin 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/aa/1443>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/aa.1443>



As André Mindoso writes, referring to Aquino de Bragança's thinking on the subject, *"the question of tradition, tribalism and raciality were forms of social identification that should be eliminated, since they were artifices used by the colonial and international capitalist class to continue their domination of Mozambique. Such devices, he argues, were particularly present in the generation of older Mozambicans who, during the war of decolonization, and even in the early years of independence, tended to construct their social and political identity by linking it primarily to their ethnic, tribal or racial group."*⁶

According to André Victorino Mindoso, the colonial state played an important role in attributing the identity of the "assimilated", since it saw the Mozambican as the black and mestizo who had overcome the indigenous or uncivilized condition, becoming similar to the Portuguese settler. He also says that despite the expectations of the state and the colonial elites, the assimilated did not completely abandon their cultural practices of origin: identity was negotiated⁷. The process of assimilation did not end with the end of Portuguese colonialism. As Mindoso says, these assimilationist tendencies and practices can be observed in *both the colonial and socialist post-independence periods*⁸.

With the internal rifts and purges in FRELIMO after Eduardo Mondlane's death, the term *assimilado* went from being a Portuguese colonial term identifying all Blacks educated in the Portuguese system (Mondlane, Simando, Machel, Gwenjere, Joana Simeão, Chissano, Marcelino dos Santos, etc.) to a post-independence term of exclusion using criteria defined by FRELIMO after 1970.

A group of assimilated people came to be considered "enemies of the Revolution", because they did not identify with the plans of the group that won the internal war of succession. The winners of the internal struggle divided the Mozambicans into three groups. The New Man group, basically made up of the elite who won the internal conflict. This group of New Men considered the more recently incorporated guerrillas to be in the process of revolutionary formation, so that one day they would be New Men; and finally, there were those who continued to live in the darkness of the colonial world. From the point of view of the new Frelimo, the worst among them were those who had decided of their own free will to become involved in the institutions of colonialism: régulos, soldiers in the colonial army, civil servants, provincial deputies, wealthy farmers, etc."⁹.

⁶ André Victorino Mindoso, "A POLÍTICA DA ASSIMILAÇÃO E SUA AMBIVALÊNCIA: a experiência moçambicana", In Caderno CrH, Salvador, v. 34, p. 1-17, e021040, 2021, <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/crh/article/view/30656/25736>

⁷ André Victorino Mindoso, "A POLÍTICA DA ASSIMILAÇÃO E SUA AMBIVALÊNCIA: a experiência moçambicana", In Caderno CrH, Salvador, v. 34, p. 1-17, e021040, 2021, <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/crh/article/view/30656/25736>

⁸ André Victorino Mindoso, "A POLÍTICA DA ASSIMILAÇÃO E SUA AMBIVALÊNCIA: a experiência moçambicana", In Caderno CrH, Salvador, v. 34, p. 1-17, e021040, 2021, p. 4 <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/crh/article/view/30656/25736>

⁹ Albert Farré, «Assimilados, régulos, Homens Novos, moçambicanos genuínos: a persistência da exclusão em Moçambique», Anuário Antropológico [Online], v.40 n.2 | 2015, posto online no dia 01 juin 2018,



Connection with current reality

The term assimilated, as it is still used today in the post-independence period, has been redefined. It is more a "construction" of the revolutionary FRELIMO than a work of the Portuguese "settler". And in this context, its impact on the fate of Mozambicans after independence cannot be attributed to Portuguese colonialism without considering the evolution of the term as a result of internal ideological struggles within FRELIMO.

Assimilation is not a historical curiosity. It is important for understanding the behavior of governance in Mozambique today. The arguments about the Partisanship of the State put forward by the FRELIMO Party in the context of implementing the decisions of its Fifth Congress are basically about the assimilation of Mozambicans who want to integrate the state apparatus and the formal sector of the economy into the governing habits and culture of the FRELIMO Party.

At the time of writing, a report published in the newspaper O País indicated that "*the Minister of State Administration and Civil Service, Ana Comoana, has directed, by means of a letter, that the children of combatants be given priority in the hiring of civil servants in the province of Inhambane*". The term combatants as used in Mozambican jargon means those who have fought the liberation war and are connected to FRELIMO through the partisan association of liberation war veterans. Clearly, the mentality of exceptionality continues to dominate the relationship between the state and the people who inhabit Mozambique, and who are still waiting for the right to be considered full citizens.

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