



SAMORA MACHEL – SHORT BIOGRAPHY



Samora Moisés Machel
(29 de setembro de 1933 a
19 de outubro de 1986)

Samora Moisés Machel, the son of farmers Mandande Moisés Machel and Gougnia Thema Zimba, was born on September 29, 1933 in the village of Xilembene, in Gaza province¹. In the region where he was born, one of the largest settlements for settler farmers was built by Portuguese colonialism, and the permanent confrontations over the expropriation of his father's land and the countless other forms of oppression were a constant part of Samora's life².

Mozambique went through three phases of state building: the colonial period, the one-party/people's democracy period and the multi-party/liberal democracy period. During the colonial period, Samora Machel became an *assimilado*, the only way for Mozambicans at the time to study and work in the formal

sector of the economy and in the state. He worked as a nursing assistant in the hospital in Lourenço Marques.

His participation in the process of state-building in Mozambique dates back to the colonial period when, in 1963, Samora Machel joined the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), established in 1962, during which time he was sent to various African countries to receive military training. He led several military operations and was appointed defense secretary in 1966 and commander-in-chief in 1968. In 1969, together with Marcelino dos Santos and Urias Simango, he formed a triumvirate to take over the leadership of Frelimo in the struggle for power following the assassination of Eduardo Mondlane. The following year

¹ Notícias:1986

² Ganhão, S/D: 1

(1970), Samora assumed full leadership of the movement with the departure of Urias Simango and the support of Marcelino dos Santos.

It was under Machel's leadership that the National Liberation Struggle developed until its end in 1974 with the final collapse of the Portuguese regime³ after the Carnation Revolution, at the start of the Third Democratic Wave in the modern world. On September 7 of the same year, Samora Machel took part in the signing of the Lusaka Accords, which recognized the Mozambican people's right to independence and got Portugal to agree to transfer its powers over Mozambique to Frelimo⁴. On June 25, 1975, he proclaimed Mozambique's independence, becoming the country's first president.

Machel symbolizes both the greatness of the process of economic and political emancipation of Mozambicans and some of the extremes of direct and structural state violence in the post-independence period. It was under Samora Machel's leadership that Mozambique implemented one of the largest programs for the massification of social services in the modern world, especially in the areas of health and education, making the country an example to the international community.

The massification of education was not only due to the expansion of educational establishments, but also to the creation of conditions that allowed students from poor families to attend school from elementary to university level under the responsibility of the state. Similarly, there was the establishment and massification of free health services, which contributed to the eradication of many diseases that had previously been endemic in the country and the world.

Women's social and economic rights were also respected, promoted and defended under the Samora regime, both in the process of professional training (e.g. nurses) against harassment in

³ Marques: 1987

⁴ ARPAC: 2014

the public space, as well as against cultural norms that kept girls out of formal education or into early marriages.

On the other side of the coin, Samora embodied the socialist dictatorship and one-party rule in the country. He took a nationalist and socialist stance to the extreme, which was confused with authoritarianism, due to the policies he adopted during the period of defining the post-colonial state model and the intolerance of thinking differently. Examples include (i) the nationalization of social and economic infrastructures for the state, (ii) the socialization of the countryside, (iii) the 1983 production operation and the creation of unproductive urban areas, (iv) re-education camps for prostitutes, (v) the marginalization of traditional/local authorities, with the idea of killing the tribe in order to give birth to the nation. These, among other measures, made Samora Machel an unpopular figure for a considerable part of Mozambican society, and are considered an important cause in the socialization of the war in Mozambique, allowing it to turn from a war of destabilization into a civil war.

A charismatic leader with revolutionary socialist ideas, Samora Machel led the country from independence through the start of the 16-year war (1976-1992) between the Mozambican government (Frelimo) and Renamo (with support from Southern Rhodesia and South Africa). In 1984 it signed the Nkomati agreement with South Africa, with the aim of maintaining good neighborliness and putting an immediate end to the civil war. With the collapse of the national economy (due to civil war, droughts, destroyed infrastructure and low productivity), in 1985 Samora began a tour of the West in search of financial assistance for the country, laying the foundations for the liberalization of the country's economy.

Samora Machel was unable to achieve his goals. On October 19, 1986, while returning from an international meeting in Lusaka, the Tupolev 134A aircraft he was traveling in crashed in Mbuzini, South Africa. Despite being considered a national hero, some of the social policies he implemented after independence were highly contested by urban and rural Mozambican society.

Like any great historical figure, Samora Machel was a contested leader, partly because of the extreme and destructive dynamics inherent in revolutionary political processes. For those who

see the revolution as necessary in the political context surrounding the country's independence, Samora Machel was a visionary leader. For those who see the revolution as a justification for one group to seize and consolidate political power, Samora Machel was an instrument of a dictatorship that ultimately led the country into a bloody and destructive civil war.

Much of what is discussed today about what Mozambique could be (the ideal state), and even the disillusionment of commentators in the media about the country's governance, can be linked to the fact that Machel demonstrated that Mozambique can achieve its goals if there is political will.

The contestation over his historical role largely shows his position among Mozambicans as one of the strongest markers of national unity in the country.

List of Referênces

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