THE INFLUENCE OF THE SWISS MISSION ON EDUARDO MONDLANE (1930-1961)

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Introduction

The Swiss Mission in Mozambique made an important contribution to shaping the social and political consciousness of their believers, particularly but not only among the young. By developing a capacity to understand and analyse the world around them through non-formal education, the Mission extended the cognitive boundaries of young people. Promoting access to secondary and university education and preparing an African leadership for the church, the Swiss Mission helped in forming an educated elite and contributed to the development of political leadership.

Eduardo Mondlane’s life is of great interest since it shows the interaction between Mission training, particularly in youth education, and the emergence of an outstanding leadership figure.

Not only did Mondlane continue with his education in South Africa, Lisbon and the United States of America, in itself a testimony to the educational methods developed by the Swiss Mission within interdenominational cooperation, but he imaginatively initiated voluntary cultural and political organisations such as NESAM—Núcleo de Estudantes Secundários Africanos de Moçambique (African Secondary Students’ Nucleus of Mozambique), or the process of raising funds to support scholarships for Mozambicans. Mondlane’s participation in the foundation of FRELIMO—Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Mozambique Liberation Front) was of major importance in uniting and leading nationalists with different tendencies to struggle for a common objective—the liberation of Mozambique.

Eduardo Mondlane’s abilities to mobilise and organize, and his evident leadership charisma owed much to skills fostered by the Swiss
Mission. Thus, his life trajectory is a testimony to the manner in which the Swiss Mission work had significant political implications and consequences, even if these were largely unintentional and indirect.

For practical reasons, his life trajectory is analysed in chronological periods, corresponding to important phases of his history: 1) 1920-1939; 2) 1940-1943; 3) 1944-1949/50; 4) 1950-1961. Although most published information on Mondlane’s life relates to the period 1961-1969, when he was the President of FRELIMO, this period is not covered by our study whose purpose is to illustrate the way the Swiss Mission contributed to the development of his personality and socio-political consciousness.

Eduardo Mondlane’s life history has been reconstructed from different interviews with relatives and friends, from published autobiographies and biographies as well as from other written documentation.

Our research in the Swiss Mission archives in Lausanne, gave us access to important files containing correspondence between Mondlane and André-Daniel Clerc, where most material consisted of unpublished letters from Mondlane to Clerc. Written during the 1940s and 1950s, the letters reveal the stages of Mondlane’s growth, his hopes, concerns, joys and troubles. Testimony to the social and political periods he lived through, they also express the young Mondlane’s interpretation of society, free of further reinterpretation or censorship.

1. 1920-1939

Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane was born in a small village in the District of Manjacaze in southern Mozambique in 1920. He descended from a family of paramount chiefs; his father, a regent of the Khambane lineage, died when he was very small. Until the age of thirteen, his upbringing was in the care of his mother who was a daughter of a noble family and who seems to have had a very important influence on his personality and spiritual development. From her, he received a traditional education, rooted in the deeds of their warrior ancestors. Mondlane’s narratives about his boyhood and part of his youth in Chitlangou Son of a Chief offer numerous insights on the education he received from his mother, who obliged him quite often to repeat the names of his ancestors and thus initiated him into the history of the family. The book is also full of stories he heard from his mother about his lineage, as well as his place within that lineage. She used to tell him:

But you Chitlangou, you will restore the village; you will be chief; you will marry many women; you will be revered throughout the country; your children will grow up in numbers around you!"