



Mozambique

Area: 308,642 square miles

Population: 33,301,038 (est. 2022)

Capital: Maputo

Ethnic Groups: Makhuwa, Tsonga, Makonde, Lomwe, Shangaan, Shona, Sena, Ndau

Languages: Portuguese (official) and 40 other languages: Emakuwa,

Xichangana, Cisena, Elomwe, Echuwabo

Religion: Catholic, 28%; Protestant, 28%; Muslim, 18%; other, 7%), none, 19%

Life Expectancy: 61.7 years

Literacy: 60.66% (males, 73.26%; females, 45.37%)

Economy: Agriculture (cotton, cashew nuts, sugarcane, tea, beef; Industry: aluminum, petroleum products, chemicals, textiles;) Exports (aluminum, prawns, cashews, cotton, sugar, citrus, timber)

Gini (Income Inequality) Index: 54.0 (2014; comp.US=41.1)

Gender Inequality Index: 0.76 (low #127/162 in 2021; comp. US=0.204 Very High)



Crossroads for Continental Biodiversity

Mozambique was an important crossroads for Afro-Asian prehistory, including exchanges of flora, fauna, and early hominids on the move. Foraging communities were established by the Holocene (10,000 years ago). By the first millennium CE, Iron Age farmers occupied the fertile shores of Mozambique, where Tana pottery shared characteristics with other coastal communities as far north as Somalia and about 100 km inland. Islam thrived in the urban city states. Situated within the zone of Indian Ocean trade winds, the territory also had become a significant arbiter of coastal exchanges that obtained the interior's gold and ivory for foreign imports and attracted African, Arab, Asian, Swahili, and eventually European merchants to its shores. The arrival of the Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama in 1497 began a series of efforts by European interlopers in local trade and an influx of Portuguese settlers. Colonization followed in the 17th century, as did plantation agriculture, the era of slavery, and the modern era's exploitation of forced labor (*chibalo*) and migrant labor. Yet despite the importance of agricultural labor (especially women's labor), Mozambique remained a profoundly urban society.

Resistance to Colonial Rule

Armed resistance to centuries of Portuguese colonial rule intensified in the 1960s and early 1970s. Mozambican women showed great resilience, participating in the struggle and helping to shape the family and nation state. Once the authoritarian government of António Salazar was overthrown in Portugal, democracy at home in Portugal and abroad in the colonies was achieved by 1975. This was not the end of violence and suffering. At least 1 million people died during the Mozambican civil war, which broke out in 1979-92 and forced more than a third of the population into refugee status. The conflict involved the forces of the liberation movement-turned-political party Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) fighting a guerrilla war of insurrection waged by Renamo (Resistência Nacional de Moçambique) with support from Rhodesia and South Africa. Frelimo encouraged women to be "as capable and courageous as any of their male comrades" in their participation in the Women's Detachment. According to one visionary Josina Machel, "we are gradually winning the battle for they realize

that a literate and educated woman can make a far more constructive contribution to the revolution than an ignorant one.”¹ After the death of its founder Eduardo Mondlane in 1969, Frelimo and the remnants of the liberation movement came under the leadership of his deputy, the charismatic first president Samora Machel, who assumed power with a socialist agenda. Mozambique (and Angola) became sanctuaries for Southern African guerilla fighters, who eventually won independence and majority rule for Zimbabwe in 1980 and for South Africa in 1994.

After Machel’s suspicious death in a 1986 plane crash, Mozambique made a turn away from socialism and gained the support of many world leaders in the global economy. Machel’s widow married South African President Nelson Mandela twelve years later. Millions of displaced Mozambicans returned to the country. A 22-year effort to remove explosive devices ensued. Yet famines, cyclones, and floods have continued to devastate an already poor economy. As one Mozambican observed, “My friend, the war is never over. The time of Samora [Machel] is never over. The Chinese are the same as the Party [Frelimo]. We are never now. Suffering always just accumulates without exit.”²

The Lenses of Mozambican Filmmaking and Cultural Production

Mozambique’s pioneering first President Samora Machel had argued that films could be a tool for achieving political dreams and he created the National Institute of Cinema (INC) soon after independence. The institute attracted the attention of international giants of cinema, including Jean Rouch, Ruy Guerra, and Jean Luc Godard, and was dedicated to the education of the masses in a post-colonial world.

Despite support from the Cubans and Soviets, the industry struggled without government support during the years of civil strife. Now it is being revitalized by new, digital formats. Observers continue to debate the global and local impact of the streaming service Netflix, whose support of Mozambican filmmakers is underway, holding fast to Machel’s premise that cinema could be transformational and (in the wrong hands) dangerous.

¹ Josina Machel, “Revolutionary Women,” quoted in “‘Passive Women’: Uncovering the story of Josina Machel and the Mozambican Liberation front,” AM Blog (March 29, 2018).

<https://www.amdigital.co.uk/insights/blog/passive-women>

² “Ernesto” quoted in Bjørn Enge Bertelsen, “Civil war and the non-linearity of time” approaching a Mozambican politics of irreconciliation,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (S1) 2022: 50-64. Accessed at

<https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9655.13753>

Further Reading and Viewing

Cardosa, Margarida, dir., *Kuxa Kanema/The Birth of Cinema* (documentary film, 2003; distributed by Icarus films).

Nhalungo, Nicolas, “How Netflix is Catalysing the Mozambican Film Industry,” *The Native* (September 24, 2020).

Accessed at <https://thenativemag.com/netflix-catalysing-mozambican-film-industry/>

Sheldon, Kathleen, *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

Zimba, Benigna, “Review: Women’s Fights in Mozambique,” *Journal of African History* vol. 45 (1) 2004: 166-168.