

NOTES

# Samora Machel's 1963 Passage Through Botswana

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**Figure 1: The Photo is said to be of Samora Machel in the Hills near Lobatse in 1963**



*Source:* Samora Machel Museum, Lobatse

## **Introduction**

The Samora Machel Museum in Lobatse, which was opened in April 2022, celebrates the memory of one of Africa's greatest freedom fighters and statesmen, while further serving as a reminder of the contributions of the many additional patriots, from Botswana, Mozambique, and the wider region, who laid the foundations for Southern Africa's liberation. The peace and freedom we enjoy as a region today are a product of their collective struggle and sacrifice against the forces of racism, fascism, and imperialist repression.

Figure 2. Samora Machel Museum at the time of its 14 April 2022 commissioning



Source: author's collection

Before he became the first President of Mozambique, Samora Moisés Machel had distinguished himself as the leading military and political figure in Mozambique Liberation Front or Frelimo's (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*), armed struggle against the continued colonial occupation of the Fascist Portuguese *Estado Novo*. His personal journey to become a freedom fighter began in 1963 when he left his country bound for refuge in Botswana. What for Machel was a dangerous first step towards realizing his destiny, was also a milestone in the enduring friendship and collaboration between the peoples of Botswana and Mozambique as personified by the shelter and support that he and his two companions Matias Mboa and Angelo Vasoues de Lisboa received from the Kgaboesele family during the months they were forced to stay in Lobatse while trying to reach Tanzania (then called Tanganyika).

Machel and his comrades' 1963 passage through Botswana paved the way for others. Between 1963 and 1966 over one hundred Frelimo Freedom Fighters transited what was then still the British-administered Bechuanaland Protectorate (BP) to reach their movement's bases in Tanzania. Many more followed between 1966 and 1975 when Mozambique gained independence.

### **Machel's Journey Through Botswana to Become a Freedom Fighter**

By 1961 Samora Machel had become politically active. A turning point was his February/March meetings with the future Frelimo head Eduardo Mondlane. His growing activism thereafter soon attracted the attention of PIDE (an acronym for *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* or 'International and State Defence Police') who interrogated him on at least two occasions in 1962 (APARC (Arquivo do Património Cultural) 2014; Maguezo Editores 2001).

By the beginning of 1963, Machel had become restless in his desire to take an active part in Frelimo's emerging armed struggle. On 4 March 1963, at the age of 30, he finally left Mozambique, after being warned by Joao Ferreira, a senior colleague in the hospital he was working in, that he was wanted by PIDE. Accompanied by Matia Mboa, Machel began his exile by making his way to Eswatini (then called Swaziland). The two had become familiar while attending night classes together. Mboa recalls that their conversations at the time often turned to politics. Both officially became members of Frelimo on 20 July 1962 (Interview with Mr Matias Mboa 11 December 2019; (Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) OP 33/24, 21 March 1963).<sup>1</sup> While others such as Frelimo's first military commander Filipe Samuel Magraia, also fled Mozambique during the first half of 1963, Machel and Mboa, followed by a handful of others were the first to attempt to reach Frelimo's base camps in Tanzania via Botswana. Mboa would later recall that 'Simeão Massango was a nurse and worked in northern Mozambique. He had come to Lourenco Marques on vacation and then returned. From there he managed to go to Tanzania. We couldn't go with him because we weren't ready yet. Samora Machel already had children and needed to create minimal conditions for them. So, we went a little later. I arranged everything with Samora Machel, who was to introduce me to the troops, but as soon as the conditions were in place for us to leave Loureço Marques, he would help me to get out for military service to escape. Said and done. We managed to flee on 4 March 1963, with the help of the Anglican priest Matias Xikhogo, via Catembe, Zitundo, and then to Swaziland. In Zitundo, we had complications, because, in the store where I tried to exchange Portuguese Escudos for British Pounds, there was an administrator, who sought to know what my purpose was. He accepted my explanation that I need the money to buy a cow'.<sup>2</sup>

During their brief stay in Mbabane (Eswatini), Machel and Mboa were assisted by Prince Dlamini and Dr Zwane of the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC), as well as Dr Nquku of the Swaziland Progressive Party (SPP). With the blessing of King Sobhuza II, their Swati hosts gave them papers to support their cover story that they were Malawian migrant labourers who had been working in Eswatini. The cover story was intended as a ruse to facilitate their intended rail passage through the then Central African Federation. Mboa says that 'One of King Sobhuza II's sons, gave us a document that said we were Malawians who had been working in Swaziland and at that time we were returning to Malawi' (Interview with Mboa). Machel and Mboa were also issued travel documents by the British colonial authorities on 7 March 1963 (Figure 3). This enabled them to proceed by bus to Park Station in Johannesburg where they boarded a train bound for Mahikeng. During their stopover in Johannesburg, the pair apparently contacted members of the ANC including Michael Dingake from Botswana (Interview with Michael Dingake 18 December 2019).

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1 The Interview was conducted in Matola, Mozambique, 11/12/2019). See also additional 2/7/2009 interview with Mboa @ [https://macua.blogs.com/moambique\\_para\\_todos/2009/12/na-clandestinidade-mboa-escreve-mem%C3%B3rias-da-luta.html](https://macua.blogs.com/moambique_para_todos/2009/12/na-clandestinidade-mboa-escreve-mem%C3%B3rias-da-luta.html)

2 *Ibid.*

Figure 3: On the Right are Machel's travel document and bus ticket



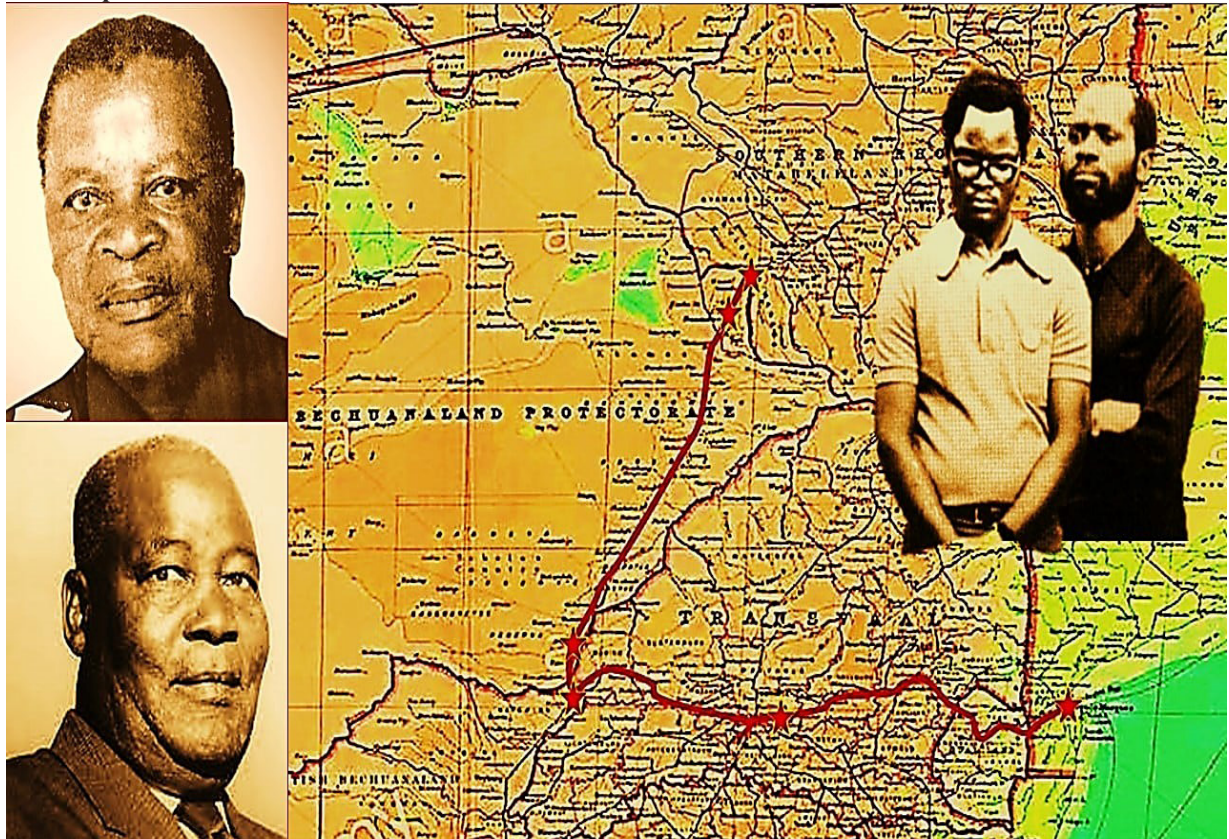
Source: Samora Machel Museum

From Mahikeng Machel and Mboa boarded the Rhodesia railways northbound train for then Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) via eastern Botswana. Mixing themselves among other returning migrant workers they encountered no problem crossing the border at Ramatlabama. When they reached the Rhodesian border at Plumtree, however, their inability to speak either English or Chichewa (one of the languages of Malawi) raised suspicions. They might have been detained had it not been for the intervention of a member of the Bechuanaland [Botswana] Peoples Party (BPP) who witnessed their predicament. The BPP member convinced them to return with him to Francistown where on or about 18 March 1963, they formally requested political asylum and were initially issued two-week permits by the District Commissioner, while their movements were observed by Bechuanaland Protectorate (BP) Special Branch. Mboa recounted that ‘We managed to cross the border between Swaziland and South Africa and from here to Botswana, no problem. However, when we reached the border between Botswana and Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), we were discovered because of the language problem as neither of us spoke English nor the local language of Malawi. Fortunately, we were not arrested, but we had to go back to Botswana in Lobatse, home of the head of one of the Tswana parties [ie. KT Motsete of BPP], where we spent almost three months’ (Interview with Mboa 11 December 2019).

Before they entered Botswana Machel and Mboa had been informed that if necessary, they could find local support from members of either of the then two major nationalist political parties in the territory –the BPP and the Bechuanaland [Botswana] Democratic Party (BDP). They were thus already familiar with the BPP when party members came forward to offer them advice and sanctuary while in Botswana. On instructions of the leader of the BPP, KT Motsete, Machel and Mboa thus travelled to Lobatse to await money from Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Upon their arrival in Lobatse, they were taken in by the Kgaboesele family at their modest Peleng home. There they were soon joined by a third Mozambican, Angelo Vasoues

[Vasco] de Lisboa Mucavel. At the time John Kgaboesele was a prominent member of the BPP who was also prominent among those in the Peleng community who were proactive in their support for the then large numbers of South African freedom fighters who passed through the community. For the route Machel and Mboa took from Mozambique to Zimbabwe see Figure 3 below:

Figure 4: Left top John Kgaboesele, bottom KT Motsete. Right: Machel and Mboa, showing the initial route from Maputo to Plumtree



Source: author's collection

Matias Mboa has many warm memories of the hospitality, noting that their Batswana hosts had virtually nothing in terms of material wealth, but generously shared everything that they had at great inconvenience to themselves. John Kgaboesele is further remembered as a man who was passionate about the ongoing regional liberation struggle in the region and beyond as well as the BPP's own struggle for independence of Botswana. Communication between the Mozambicans and their hosts was at times difficult, but was nonetheless sustained by the shared knowledge of South African vernacular, ie. 'isiZulu'. On 21 March 1963, Machel, Mboa, and de Lisboa were further interviewed by the head of the BP Special Branch Southern Division, Inspector Innes-Ker (BNARS, OP 33/24, 21 March 1963). Lisboa had initially been given two-month residence permits, with Machel and Mboa receiving one-week renewable permits. Vasoues fell within Category 1 (Student) Political Refugees, though the British were prepared to believe all three were motivated primarily by a desire for further education. As a result, after the interview, Machel and Mboa were also given two-month permits. During the interview, Lisboa took the lead in speaking. The resulting Special Branch report (full text):

1. On information received from D.S.B.O (North) I interviewed three Africans from Mozambique

who had come to Lobatse by train from Francistown. They wish to get to Dar-es-Salaam.

2. The three men were given temporary permits by the D.C. Francistown and on instructions from K.T. Motsete have come to Lobatse to wait money from Dar-es-Salaam.
3. Their particulars are:
  - (i) **Angelo Vasoues de Lisboa** a Shagaan born 27.11.39 at Chongoene, Mozambique. Occupation: Student. Studied for the Priesthood at Higher Seminary of Nomahacha in Lourenco Marques, had passed a three year philosophy course and was about to study theology when he decided to study law. He is a member of the Front National Liberation of Mozambique. Joined 20.11.62.
  - (ii) **Samora Moises Machel** Shagaan born 29.9.33 at Bilene (Circunsericao do Bilene). Occupation: Male Nurse at Miguel Bombarda Hospital in Lourenco Marques. Educated at College of Antonio Enes and passed J.C. He is a member of the Front National Liberation of Mozambique. Joined 20.7.62.
  - (iii) **Matias Zefanias [M]Boa** Shagaan born 6.1.40 at Marracuene, Lourenco Marques. Occupation: Agricultural Assistant at the Agricultural Mission at L.M. Educated at College of Antonio Enes, Lourenco Marques to J.C. He is a member of the Front National Liberation of Mozambique. Joined 20.7.62.
4. These men lived in the south of Mozambique, and said it was too far and too dangerous to go the full length of Mozambique in order to cross into Tanganyika so they came via Swaziland and South Africa and finally to Francistown from the Transvaal where they had boarded the train.
5. 'They said that they heard the B.P.P. would assist them as they were also Pan-Africanists'.
6. 'Lisboa states that Motsete instructed them to wait in Lobatse and that he would speak to the President of the F.N.L. of Mozambique when he met him in Accra and say that they required money to get to Tanganyika. Lisboa says his President has promised them such help'.
7. 'They claim that they can get America scholarships through their organization in Dar-es-Salaam'.
8. 'The name of the President of the F.N.L. of Mozambique is Dr. Eduardo Mondlane and he is based in Dar-es-Salaam. The vice is Adeline Gwambe in Cairo'.
9. 'They will apparently be here for at least a couple of weeks'.
10. 'The Front National Liberation is the union of two political parties principally based on the one-time UDAM (Union of Democratic National African of Mozambique). Eduardo Mondlane was previously President of UDAM and Gwambe was President of another lesser party now extinct'.

(signed) Innes-Ker

Divisional Special Branch Officer, Southern Division. (BNARS, OP 33/24, 21 March 1963).

Thereafter, on 28 March 1963, the BP Acting Resident Commissioner, JF Hayley filed a report with the HM High Commissioner in Cape Town noting that 'You will be concerned to learn that we now have three members of the Front National Liberation of Mozambique, who sought political asylum in Francistown 10 days ago, having travelled to the Protectorate via Swaziland and the Transvaal without [appropriate] travel documents'. He further wrote that 'They stated that they wish to get to Tanganyika, that the journey through Mozambique to Dar-es-Salaam is too dangerous so they preferred the route through the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and they hear the Bechuanaland People's Party would assist them as they were Pan-Africanists. Since they appear in no way to be genuine refugees, we are considering cancelling their

resident permits, deeming them prohibited immigrants, and requiring them to depart forthwith' (BNARS, OP 33/24, 21 March 1963). The above proposal was further adopted as a recommendation at the April 1963 meeting of the BP CIC (Central Intelligence Committee). Under 'New Development' paragraph 16 of the Committee's draft report recorded that:

In March 1963, three Portuguese 'student refugees' entered the territory en route to Tanganyika having passed through the Republic. From initial investigations, it appears that they are genuine students wishing to further their education. Although admitting membership of the Portuguese Nationalist Movement they stated that they had only joined for opportunities of scholarships such membership offered. They stated that the route used by them was blazed at their own initiative. Should they eventually arrive safely in Tanganyika it is not improbable that the same route will be used by succeeding students. It is impossible to estimate probable traffic (BNARS, OP 33/24, 21 March 1963).

The minutes of the meeting further state that:

The draft of the C.I.C report was approved with minor amendments agreed by the Committee. During the discussion of the report, the Committee was advised of the fact that three Africans from Portuguese East Africa [Mozambique] national status had entered the Protectorate via Swaziland and the Transvaal. These persons were reportedly travelling to Tanganyika and have said that it was easier and safer for them to travel to the Protectorate than to make their way through the length of Mozambique. The Committee, in light of this information, recommended that the Government should consider action to put a stop to such traffic from P.E.A. and to cause the three persons referred to above to leave the territory forthwith.

Proposals to rescind the resident permits of the Mozambique refugees were ultimately rejected by the substantive Resident Commissioner, Peter Fawcus, who undoubtedly acted with advice from above in accordance with the then prevailing policy. The Subsequent 1 May 1963 report noted: "With reference to paragraph 16, the Commissioner of Police reported that these three people were still in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and as far as he was aware were awaiting funds for onward journey. In the weeks that followed a fourth Mozambican named Armando Pinto Chungwane also appeared in Lobatse. The now four Mozambicans were finally evacuated to Tanzania in June of 1963. Records show that de Lisboa Mucavel and Chugwane departed together on 14 June 1963, from Lobatse to Mbeya in Tanzania with two other South African refugees in a small Bechuanaland Air Safaris plane piloted by Captain Herbert Bartuane (BNARS, OP 33/24, 21 March 1963). The above flight followed Telegram dated 4 June 1963, from Kearsley Travel, Dar-es-Salaam to Bartuane of BP Safaris with KT Motsete listed as a contact, requesting him to 'Arrange to fly 5 refugees to Dar-es-Salaam. Instructions Dr. Mondlane advise cost and date soonest. We will guarantee payment by draft on invoice. Grateful you investigate possibility to obtain permission to land Dakota Serowe. Evacuation purposes as Francistown uncooperative' (BNRS, OP2 33/7 also 33/2, 33/11).

For their part, Machel and Mboa finally departed from Francistown a week later aboard a chartered Dakota Aircraft, which had been sent to Francistown to further evacuate several high-profile South African refugees including ANC/Communist luminaries Joe Slovo and JB Marks. The flight followed the BP administration's authorisation of East Africa Airways (EEA) landings at the Aerodrome. Machel and Mboa's place aboard the aircraft had need negotiated with the ANC by Frelimo with whom Machel and

Mboa had been able to contact. In an interview with Mboa he said that ‘We communicated through letters with the comrades in Tanzania and informed Doctor Mondlane that we were detained in Botswana and there was no possibility of leaving. He promised to find a solution and said and done, got us a ride on a plane chartered by the ANC to Tanzania and so we arrived, where we joined the other Mozambicans who were already there’ (Interview with Mboa 11 December 2019). Thus, after much back-and-forth Kearley Travel (acted on behalf of the ANC) was able to charter an EAA’s DC 3 code VPKLA, which took off from Francistown on 21 June 1963, with Machel and Mboa listed among ‘26 South African students’ who were further joined by Joe Slovo and Joseph ‘JB’ Marks on board. After a layover in Blantyre, they arrived in Dar es Salaam on 23 June 1963.

Between July and August 1963, the ANC chartered several additional EAA flights from Francistown to Dar-es-Salaam to evacuate freedom fighters. These flights, however, came to an abrupt halt after the bombing on the ground of an EAA plane at Francistown airport early in the morning of 29 August 1963, by unknown agents (BNARS OP2 33/12).

### **Subsequent Movement of Frelimo Cadres through Botswana**

In 1969 Machel married fellow freedom fighter Josina Abiatar Muthemba in Tanzania. The couple had one son. However, Josina passed away in 1971 at the age of 25 due to cancer. Josina had been among the Frelimo cadres who had followed Machel’s footsteps by passing through Botswana to reach Tanzania in 1965. In this passage, she was accompanied by others including Armando Guebuza (BNARS OP2 55/16) shown in Figure 4 below. The latter became the third president of Mozambique from 2005 to 2015.

**Figure 5: Josina Machel (nee Muthemba) and Armando Guebuza in 1960s**



*Source:* Samora Machel Museum



Josina Muthemba was among 19 Frelimo refugees (including three children) who arrived in Botswana from Eswatini in May of 1965 and subsequently resisted efforts to deport them back to Eswatini. They were in turn part of a larger group that secretly left Eswatini to join the armed struggle, while also escaping the then increasingly risky security situation in Eswatini. Further to the above their arrival coincided with reports that prominent Frelimo member Ibru Him Abdullah Mangusso and Freddie Brown alias Ibrahim Li had been kidnapped by PIDE agents in Eswatini, as well as crackdown and arrests of Frelimo underground in Maputo (ultimately including Matias Mboa). For instance, a 21 May 1965 issue of *The Star* newspaper of South Africa under the title 'LM freedom cell broken' reported that 14 were held in police swoop, including Francisco Rui Omoniz Bareto (Rui Nogar) and Jose Craverinho. Among those who left Eswatini, at least 75, were arrested while in secret transit through South Africa and returned to Mozambique. The 19 who reached Botswana were: 1) Enoque Augustine Pipau Macuta, 2) Adelino Frenque Nhome, 3) Vincente Muiambo, 4) Francisco Mazuze, 5) Pasquale Nhapulo, 6) Jose Antonio Chambule, 7) Armando Adriano Kanda, 8) Josina Abiate Muthemba, 9) Rasaria Vincente Macambo, 10) Adelina Isabel Bernardine Paindana, 11) Armado Emilio Guebuza, 12) Aurelio Benete Manave, 13) Francisco Mangisa, 14) Manual Hassane Tanninga, 15) Alina Muiambo, 16) Ghiherme Muiambo (child), 17) Domingos Muiambo (child), 18) Ruth Muiambo (child), 19) Sabastinamo Mahie.

Guebuza and two others had arrived in Botswana through Martins Drift in May 1965, having been transported by a Swati, William John Morgan of Ngwane National Liberatory Congress, who further tried unsuccessfully to charter a plane to take them to Tanganyika. They were subsequently joined by others who entered Botswana from the South East to reach Lobatse. Morgan was later suspected by both the BP administration and Frelimo of being a double agent for the Apartheid regime. After much international outcry at reports that the 19 would be returned to Eswatini, Dr Mondlane was able to secure their overland safe passage to Tanganyika via Zambia. The 19 thus travelled from Francistown to Zambia via Kazungula. Their transport was arranged by Peter MacKay of Amnesty International. Thereafter until 1974, scores of other Frelimo made their way through Botswana and Zambia to reach Tanzania. By 1969 their movement had become fairly routine as shown in the BNARS files which contain lists and profile of many who transited. By 1965 some Frelimo freedom fighters such as Mboa were also using Botswana to transit back to Mozambique to carry out the covert operation (BNARS, OP 55/63, 55/79; OP 1/5/2965; SP 37/7/1 I-II).

### Acknowledgement

This historical note was initially drafted as part of the content prepared for the Samora Machel Museum and was subsequently published as a five-part series 'Samora Machel in Botswana' in the February-April editions of the Monitor newspaper. The photo is said to be of Machel in the hills near Lobatse in 1963.

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