

policy makers alike, as the displacement of peasants, often without compensation, can have devastating effects on human security — something that sub-Saharan Africa does not have in abundance.

The Africa Yearbook remains one of the most comprehensive and incisive reports on sub-Saharan Africa. As in the case of previous editions, Volume 8 is written in a very readable format without the formal jargon of footnotes and references. It offers a balanced and holistic analysis of a hugely complex region, and is a very useful source of data on individual countries. For those who need a well-presented and well-researched yet concise guide to sub-Saharan Africa, this is the ideal starting point.

**Katabaro Miti**

**Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria**

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**LeFanu, Sarah, *S is for Samora: A lexical biography of Samora Machel and the Mozambican dream*. Durban: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press 2012, 244 pp.**

LeFanu recounts the life and death of Samora Machel, first president of independent Mozambique, and his dream of building a new nation after independence from Portugal in 1975. The book is written a quarter of a century after his death in a plane crash in 1986, in the Mbuzini mountains of South Africa. It remains an open question if this were an accident or an assassination.

The structure of the book is unusual for a biography, yet very accessible: it employs a 'dictionary' format, discussing themes that are **organised** "from A to Z". The reader can therefore start from the beginning and read it like a novel, or simply page to a specific topic of interest. Events are ordered chronologically, recreating a journey back in time, and this history is brought to life by LeFanu's characteristic narrative prose. A sense of documentary intrigue is maintained from the first page right to the end, where the dramatic contents of the Aircraft Accident Factual Report and Cockpit Voice Recorder transcripts are revealed. 'Listening' carefully one can even hear the fatal plunging of the Tupolev 134 in the mountainous Mbuzini.

LeFanu weaves a rich tapestry of the multifaceted life and career of Samora Machel by combining journalistic and academic research

and her own experience. She draws on stories, speeches and memories of witnesses who lived around Machel and incorporates information and sentiments from a range of other private and official sources. In the process, she provides a captivating social, economic and political history of pre and post-independence Mozambique, evolving around the figure of Samora Machel. The book uncovers Machel's dream — the Mozambican dream — to fight underdevelopment in the country; to instil nationalism and national unity that cut across tribal differences, race and region, and to realise the dream of a 'New Man' free from false egalitarianism, indiscipline, laziness, *laissez-faire* attitude, meaningless bureaucracy, corruption, opportunism, and criminality.

Machel's life was so inextricably linked to Frelimo, the Mozambican liberation movement he headed, that the book also serves as a history of Frelimo's decade-long, ultimately victorious, armed struggle for independence. The reader is offered a fascinating insight into Frelimo's project of building a new nation, a Marxist state, and the lives of several of its leaders and heroes, including the founder of the movement, Eduardo Mondlane.

All of this happens in the gigantic shadow of the man Nelson Mandela once called 'a true African Revolutionary'. LeFanu describes Machel as a charismatic man with a strong personality and leadership skills; a good listener and mediator; a man with a vision for the future. A brave and defiant but also diplomatic and wise man with an energetic, sharply analytical mind. A man who spoke out against inappropriate behaviour; who sacrificed private pleasure for political duty; and a man who led by example — a man of equality and justice. A man of war but also a man of peace; who died seeking peace for Mozambique and the rest of the SADC region. A man who fought against the minority regimes of Apartheid in South Africa, Ian Smith in Rhodesia and the ambitious Kamuzu Banda regime in Malawi.

The author's admiration for Machel's political leadership is clear, but she mentions his policy failures: the failure to recognise the importance of African cultures and customs of private business and to allow individual initiative; the insistence on centralised control over a diverse population; the failure of revolutionary unpopular agricultural policies — ultimately, the failure to deliver prosperity to his people.

*S is for Samora* is a rare English-language biography of Machel written by a non-Mozambican, non-Frelimo cadre: LeFanu is a British

national who served as a *cooperante* in Mozambique for a few years after independence. (The *cooperantes* were foreign 'solidarity' workers who filled posts left vacant during the post-independence exodus of Portuguese technicians and skilled workers, to allow opportunity for locals to be trained to fill the posts.)

Although written by a westerner who was born and raised in the capitalist world, the author displays few disagreements and questions about the building of a Marxist project called Mozambique. LeFanu attempts to strike a balance in recounting Machel's story, but she is undeniably biased: her writing is influenced by the fact that she became 'revolutionized' and internalised the attendant euphoria. Her closeness to Samora Machel and Frelimo induces an idealised picture of both him as individual and the Mozambican revolution, something she admits to: "when you have a close relationship with someone, you can't be objective, it's just not possible" (p 204). Rather naïvely, she intimates that if the man she calls her 'hero' were still alive, the bad things in the country (such as corruption and assassinations) would not be happening.

Hence, LeFanu misses an opportunity to reflect on the life of Samora Machel and the Mozambican revolution in a substantively different manner from what had previously been written by Frelimo cadres. At issue, inter alia, is her selection of respondents: only people who worked closely with Machel, at senior levels of the Frelimo hierarchy, were interviewed. Missing from the bigger picture are the voices of ordinary citizens, the people (*o povo*) that Frelimo claimed to represent. Where are the voices of the counter-revolutionaries and the many ordinary people who suffered the hardship of revolution? And those who passed through Frelimo's 're-education camps'? Those who were tortured? The relatives of those who were executed by the regime?

The book provides shocking details of cruelties perpetrated by the Portuguese troops against the defenceless population during the liberation struggle and recounts also the barbarous crimes committed during the civil war by Frelimo's arch-rival, Renamo. First-hand accounts by witnesses are used to increase the impact on the reader. These perspectives are crucial in any understanding of Mozambique's history, but they do not tell the whole story, and LeFanu ignores the well-documented scope of atrocities perpetrated by Frelimo. She does indeed delve into the political infighting that surrounded Machel: betrayals among Frelimo's leadership, disappearances, and disagree-

ments within the movement about (in some cases misunderstandings of) the revolutionary path and the handling of Mozambique's civil war and external aggression. However, her critique of Frelimo is done in a cursory and hesitant manner. Does this indicate a lack of sufficient knowledge and research on her part, or simply unwillingness to expose the image of a deeply troubled movement?

The author's privileged status as a protected westerner might have prevented her from witnessing more details of the horrors inflicted on ordinary Mozambicans in the process of revolutionary nation-building. In her diary she alludes to her difficulty in accessing informants, but she fails to mention that Frelimo's revolutionary governance did not allow for freedom of speech — a culture of secrecy that still permeates Mozambican politics. The book also gives important and interesting technical details of the plane crash that controversially ended Machel's life, but does not give a voice to those who survived the crash. Was this deliberate?

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, the book makes an important contribution to a more sophisticated, and accessible, understanding of Samora Machel and the recent history of Mozambique. 26 years after his death, this reviewer experienced fresh memories about an extraordinary leader and the tortured history of Mozambique. For younger generations like mine, who were taught the official history of the liberation struggle and post-independence revolution from textbooks, this account offers important details about an icon of the struggle: a man who, even though he had had more than three wives, was against polygamy. A man who cried. A man we never knew could vacillate when faced with challenges during the liberation and civil wars and during revolution. A man we never thought capable of ordering executions.

LeFanu is a brave woman — bravery learnt from her struggle hero? — to have overcome all the obstacles, including the language and complicated interpretation of the lexicon of revolution, to bring Samora Machel to life. The book is highly recommended for anybody interested in Mozambique's contemporary history, and indeed the broader history of liberation struggle in Africa.

**Zefanias Matsimbe**

**Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria**