

AQUINO DE BRAGANÇA, 1928–86

Basil Davidson writes:

The death toll in the struggles for independence of the peoples enclosed within the Portuguese empire is a bitter aspect of that history which an outside world has tended to overlook, even appearing at times to have supposed that the destruction of the Salazarist state came with little pain. The truth was otherwise, and not least among the leaders of the lusophone liberation movements. Their role of honour was already long when Samora Moisés Machel lost his life in a plane crash last year and with him, as well as thirty-two others, the Mozambican historian and journalist Aquino de Bragança.

Much will be written about Aquino, who was heart and sinew of those struggles. The eventual historians of the liberation movements of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau will find him, when their moment comes, at almost every passage of those complex years. Such confidential archives as may then become available will reveal him, whether as trusted participant or shrewd chronicler, as having been repeatedly at the centre of difficult missions and secret exchanges.

Born in Goa in 1928, Aquino was so far typical of the colonial petty-bourgeois as to manage to get to secondary school and then to university, where he took a good degree in physics, but there the typicality ended. He joined the few who turned to anti-colonial activism, and he stayed in it. They were harshly testing years. I think that he was thirty when, as a militant of liberation movements then beginning to prepare for war, he first began to move among the handful of European Africanists and others who were aware of the imminent dramas of the Portuguese empire; and for us, from the start, he was both a source of reliable information and a guide to political realities. Transparently honest, he had the quality of character and intelligence to inspire trust and deserve admiration.

His long experience and wide contacts in Portugal itself came into their own after the Lisbon coup d'état by which the Armed Forces Movement overthrew the dictatorship in April 1974. The leadership of Frelimo (Mozambican Liberation Front) sent him to Lisbon as an intermediary whose judgement would be sound and whose tact, at that time, could be especially useful in helping the Armed Forces Movement to understand the realities of the situation they were in. In this he played an important role. His last scholarly paper is an account of that inner story given to a conference of historians early in 1986 (in P. Gifford and W. R. Louis, *The Transfer of Power*, 1987, forthcoming).

From diplomacy he went at once, after independence, to the work of founding the Centre of African Studies of the Eduardo Mondlane University of Mozambique. There his genial and yet determined leadership built up a valiant team of researchers, including the late Ruth First, the South African sociologist and activist who was murdered by a parcel bomb in 1982, an act of terrorism which all but cost the life of Aquino as well. He was to be allowed only a few more years. He will be sorely missed.