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Aquino de Braganca: An Appreciation

Aquino de Braganca, the Mozambican scholar, diplomat and humanist, was one of the victims of the plane crash of 19 October, 1986. **AJOPE** *joins many others in honouring a man who gave so much for the African struggle. This journal is equally honoured that Aquino agreed — only a month before his tragic death — to be one of the first contributors (see last article in this issue) to* **AJOPE**

It will be difficult to produce a biography of Aquino that will do justice to what he was, and to what he helped others achieve.

His generous availability accounts for the fact that a large number of his friends included people who would never dream of even saying "hello" to each other. Some of these friends were actually "friends", that is to say, people with whom he developed friendly relationships because that was something that his activities as a journalist and as a diplomat required. But, of course, Aquino's warm personality was such that every single one of these "friends" was convinced that they were friends.

Aquino rarely talked about his own politics or his own personal life, including those events in which he actively participated, something that irritated those of us who felt that his knowledge of the history of the continent was probably unmatched. And so, we are left with sketchy anecdotes of the kind he enjoyed recounting when he wanted to illustrate the fact that although not an academic historian, he did know about events and history makers that many professional historians did not know about. Quite often, the anecdote would be so valuable as to have the weight of volumes because it projected on the event a light which completely changed one's perception.

Various attempts were made to have him talk about his experience in a systematic fashion. He always refused in his well-known manner of saying no without saying no.

A professional journalist who followed and analysed the historical process of national liberation, he was also a rigorous historian, but rigour to him did not mean, could not mean dogma as it so often does. The abhorence for dogma was so ingrained in his thinking that it might be singled out as the characteristic that best defined him." He liked to say that he was "anti-anticommunist".

Among the parameters that defined Aquino's rigour must be singled out his training as a physicist, his first college degree before leaving Goa for Mozambique in the early fifties. Along with scholarly rigour went what could be called, for lack of a better word, political rigour as opposed to ideological rigour.

The largest body of his written work was centred on the denunciation of the colonial system and the Apartheid Regime. Such was the intensity of his work that it reinforced his conviction that the road to building socialism could not, by any means, be based on dogmatic theories.

He irritated many othodox marxist scholars when he wrote on the Marxism of Samora, because, in his view, at that moment of history, he saw President Samora's approach to Marxism as embodying his own conception of what Marxism ought to be about.

Whether Aquino actually captured President Samora's conception of Marxism or not is not important once it is realized that this was, in a sense, a sort of homage paid to a man he admired. They certainly shared the same sense of history. As President Samora liked to say Marxism must start from the Mozambican reality, from Mozambican history.

At the Centre of African Studies (CEA) that he founded and built up with Ruth First in 1975 and at the Eduardo Mondlane University, Aquino's efforts to disseminate what he knew about the history of Frelimo was without parallel. Whenever he could, he reminded those who could do something about it that the teaching of Mozambican history was too important to be left unattended.

It was this insistence on knowing one's history that led him to create within the CEA the history workshop, with the objective of studying the history of Liberated Zones by actually going to the Liberated Zones. He insisted on the Liberated Zones because he felt that that was one part of the history of Frelimo he knew little about; but more importantly, that if a Marxist history was going to be written, it had to be built from the ground where that history actually took place and not from some abstract theories. "Otherwise", as he liked to put it, because it drew a lot of laughter, "we might as well study Patagonia".

More recently, he was in the process of completing an exhaustive study of Savimbi. To say that he was critical of his earlier work, on the same topic, published in *Estudos Mocambicanos* would be an understatement; "contempt" would be more correct.

He never was satisfied with a piece of work. His attention to detail could be so fussy that it sometimes exasperated those who worked closely with him. However, his argument was that words had to carry a very specific meaning and they should not leave room for misinterpretation. The editors of AJOPE will remember his insistence that no word of the article included here be changed, even for so-called editorial purposes, because the words and sentences that had been chosen were chosen after multiple drafts.

Aquino's generosity was legendary. Ironically, he knew that he could not be accessible to all and everyone if he were going to be effective as a scholar, a diplomat. These two activities may seem contradictory in the subjective relationships they produce, but it is clear that, in the case of Aquino, the two activities fed each other.

It is this generous accessibility, combined with modesty, that made those who knew him realise that they had a privileged relationship, ranging from heads of states to colleagues, to his secretary, to his driver. He was as much at ease with heads of states as with peasants or workers.

In this day and age when scholars publish in order not to perish, when knowledge of any kind is constantly threatened with commoditization, it was refreshing to have to work with a man who had managed to keep things in perspective. He showed in his day to day life that one can be a first rate scholar as well as be a first rate husband and father. To Silvia, his wife, Maya his daughter and Radek his son, we present our deepest condolences.

Farewell our old man!
Farewell Aquino!