

# The Funeral: "A People Cannot Bid Farewell to Its Own History"

BY JENNIFER DAVIS

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Maputo was sad, and sombre, and yet, in a strange way also strengthening and reinforcing. It was a relief to be surrounded by people who were also grieving, even as they went about all the work that had to be done. It was moving and strangely comforting to share the ceremonies of burial and mourning with thousands of Mozambicans, to hold, even for a moment, old friends like Janet Mondlane and Joaquim Chissano, people who have lost so much more than me. And then, after the days devoted to the dead, it was helpful to have a little time to spend trying to collect information, discuss urgent needs, seek out photographs and films, so that, in the end, I was turned toward the future again.

I spent six days in Maputo, and, a month later I have still not been able to assimilate the experience into the ordinary web of my life. The days were filled with a multitude of different activities and impressions, but I am always busy in New York too. Perhaps what was different was my intense feeling of awareness ... I wanted to notice everything, big things and little things ... the way people looked, and moved and talked to each other, at the funerals, visiting families, in the streets. I wanted to hear what they said, absorb the way the city "felt", see what food people ate, count the cars in the streets, and the people in the buses. In New York one lives by blocking out surroundings. In Maputo, everything seemed to have significance, both in itself and as a "sign" of something else. Perhaps ultimately I was looking for the signs that could

speak about the existence of a future, for I had come bearing terrible questions about Mozambique's ability to survive the onslaughts of a murderous South Africa added to drought, flood and the mistakes made in the process of learning how to build a new socialist society.

I arrived in Maputo early on Monday morning, on a LAM flight from Paris carrying many foreign dignitaries as well as returning Mozambicans. Visitors were being handled by "protocol" officials, in a situation where chaos might well have prevailed ... some 130 official delegations and 17 Heads of State arrived for the funerals, often without notification, and always with far larger delegations than expected ... 29 instead of 3, I heard, in one case. This in a country with a handful of hotels, only one of international status.

But in a little while we were all sorted out. Along with two old friends from the European solidarity movement, I was found not only a house, but also an interpreter/"guide", Antonio, who gave

us endlessly of himself, in many ways. He lent us his parent's house, as they were away. He spent hours of his time, often from dawn to late at night, sharing with us his insights, carrying us everywhere in his motor car, making the many phone calls that filled out the details of our days, all in time that he had taken off from his commercial job, so that he could help in a time of crisis, and all with a quiet seriousness that asked nothing in return, and lives now in my memory as one of those "signs" of the future I was seeking.

Monday morning was hot, sunny and humid, and had to be spent on the technicalities of getting organized, so that I was too late for the funerals of my two closest personal friends, Carlos Lobo and Aquino de Bragança. But in the afternoon we went to the cemetery, which stands on the edge of town, to the funerals of other Mozambicans killed in the crash. Many were buried together, and we stood behind thousands of people, straining, in the hush, to hear the service and see what was happening. After a while



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the restrained quiet was broken by the wailing of women, then the quavering notes of a bugle, then the dull thud of earth on wood as family and friends filled in the graves. Suddenly heavy clouds gathered, and soon it began to rain in gusts. No one moved . . . we too waited for a while, and then went in search of the grave of another of South Africa's victims, Ruth First, long time activist, killed by a parcel bomb. I had once seen Ruth every day, intensely alive, as she ran in and out of the same building in which I worked, in South Africa. Now she lies in a quiet part of Maputo's cemetery, away from the ornate gravestones, under some flame trees. I carried a seed pod home with me, but in New York a customs official took it away.

From the funerals, we drove back into the centre of town, to wait, in Independence Square, for our turn to pay our last respects to President Machel, lying in state in City Hall. The Square was filled with thousands of Mozambicans, waiting their turn to file past the coffin. Many stood on through the night - there was no curfew; indeed the lack of obvious security throughout the ceremonies was notable - as though a decision had been made that soldiers bristling with guns would separate the leadership from the people rather than protect it.

Maputo's City Hall has a classic, columned facade, with tiers of steps leading down into Independence Square. As we waited, the daylight turned to dusk; floodlights washed across the portrait of Machel at the center of the facade; people stood so quietly, that I could hear the two flags flying at half mast on either side of the portrait snap in the breeze; classical music played in the background, and hundreds of swallows circled, swooping in and out of the light. We waited our turn for a long time, standing at the bottom of the main stairs, up which we watched the passage of President Mugabe and other Heads of State. The scene was both disorganized and organized - a common contradiction in Mozambique. All the time we were waiting a tiny stream of Mozambicans was making its way into the building, sometimes slowed by the passage of a VIP. From time to time some of the thousands of people in the Square surged impatiently up the stairs below us. As far as I could see, major crowd control responsibility lay in the hands and voice of one energetic, non-uniformed Mozambican woman, who intervened when things got out of hand, restoring order by exhorting people to behave in a proper Mozambican way. And they did. I had time to watch the faces of the people coming out of City

Hall, their faces sober, young formally clad men, old women, draped in many layers of clothes, an old man with tears streaming down his face.

After maybe two hours it is our turn. We walk up the red carpeted stairs, through a brightly lit hall, into a chamber banked from floor to ceiling with the flowers of many nations; in front of us is a group of young soldiers, they move slowly past the coffin, in a formal slow march, stopping to salute; then two diplomats from Japan bow, and then I stand for a moment in front of the closed shining wooden surface, and move on. We were all very quiet going home.

It was still raining early next morning as we gathered to catch the buses which carried all except the most senior of foreign visitors to the funeral of President Machel. Antonio told us that according to local belief great leaders come and go with rain; certainly the weather, cold and grey, seemed fitting symbolically.

The funeral ceremonies began at Independence Square, still crowded with thousands of people. The President's family, foreign Heads of State and Mozambican officials gathered inside City Hall, while we waited outside. After a while the coffin was carried to the head of the stairs, the army honour guard band playing sombre music; there were two brief speeches, honouring the President, one from a young man representing all the mass organizations and one from Alberto Chipande, on behalf of the armed forces. And then Marcelino dos Santos delivered a funeral eulogy that still reverberates for me. This was not a religious ceremony, but a profoundly political one; yet it rang with the beauty of poetry, and the feeling of a lifetime spent together in the struggle to build a better future for all the people of Mozambique. The program indicated dos Santos would speak for 15 minutes; he spoke for an hour, and the only movement in the crowd came as sometimes a hand

moved quietly to wipe away tears. At one point, describing Machel's links to the many different people in Mozambique, dos Santos began to weep, but he spoke on, through his weeping, dedicating himself and all Mozambicans to the future.

*"Your dreams are our dreams. Your struggle is our struggle. Now the most difficult moment for all of us has come, the moment of farewell. But we are only delivering your body to the earth. You remain with us. But we will never say farewell to you. A people cannot bid farewell to its own history. Samora lives."*

After this a small contingent of military units accompanied the President's body through the streets of the city, out to Heroes' Square, at the centre of which is a crypt

When the formal funeral ended people began to file through the crypt, moving on to convey their greetings and condolences to the members of the political bureau, all standing quietly in a line, with hundreds of people thronging about them. Later that day someone gave me a photograph taken last year, inside the crypt, of Machel standing in front of the slab marking Mondlane's resting place. As I walked out of the crypt I met Janet Mondlane, and she stopped for a moment, to embrace, and to ask how friends in North America were, in the face of this terrible blow. It was common for this to happen, and also for people to say how important it was for them that friends had come, physically, as well as in spirit, to share this time.



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in which lie buried Frelimo's first President, Eduardo Mondlane, and other Mozambican heroes. The ceremonies here were brief; there was no loudspeaker system, so, like the thousands of Mozambicans around us we stood quietly and waited. People had flowed out of the neighbourhood to pack the area, most children barefoot. There were a few hand-lettered signs, denouncing South Africa as the assassin - but mostly the mood was subdued, rather than militant ... a striking contrast to the pictures of recent South African funerals.

Waiting my turn in line I listened to the conversations around me. Much of the comment from foreigners was speculation about the succession ... who would be the next President. Interestingly, when I was with Mozambicans, I heard much less of this. There seemed little of the gossip and speculation about "infighting" and "power struggles" that might have marked such an event. Whatever the problems of the times ahead, it seems true that the Frelimo leadership picks up the renewed struggle with a high degree of commitment and loyalty both to

each other and to the Mozambican people.

I, a relative stranger, was exhausted by the day. As I embraced Marcelino dos Santos he seemed illuminated by grief, a portrait from an El Greco painting. Yet the next day the Frelimo leadership was alternating meetings with Heads of State, a Front Line State meeting and the many internal meetings to ensure a coherent transition to the next Presidency. And in the midst of all that, there was still time to think about the needs of people like us, who came representing no governments, able to offer no immediate massive food or military aid. Soon after our arrival we had indicated a desire to meet some members of the government, including Joaquim Chissano, if that was possible. In the next few days, we set about meeting as many other people as possible, both to express our condolences to the families involved, and to equip ourselves for new solidarity work, which is clearly an urgent necessity.

When I was in Mozambique in 1983 I was often struck by a kind of discontent with the slow pace of progress, a malaise which seemed to colour many people's view, so that they found it hard to be enthusiastic. Now the mood was different ... sober, but somehow less disgruntled, more committed to the future. Perhaps because there is now a very clear enemy. Nevertheless, no one was starry-eyed about the months to come. Yet in many different ways people were working on new projects, even despite the tremendous destruction being wrought by the bandits.

Aquino de Bragança's wife is an artist ... movingly she spoke of the brief time she had with him "I am only a short passage in his life ... there are so many who knew him longer, who always came to talk." But she also talked about ideas she had to engage the children of different countries in working for peace.

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I spent time with health workers and journalists, with people planning new films and people struggling to fill the food gap which will place 4 million Mozambicans at risk this year.

And then, on Saturday, our last day, Antonio arrived with the message that somehow, before we left, our request for time to meet with some government officials would be met. Late in the day, coming out of meetings, Joaquin Chissano and Armando Guebuza outlined the serious situation now facing Mozam-

bique, touched on the need for new international solidarity.

But perhaps the most memorable minutes of my stay in Mozambique were fifteen minutes spent with Graça Machel and hour before leaving. She had borne herself with great dignity throughout the public ceremonies. Now, face to face, she embraced me, listened to my messages of sympathy and solidarity and said, "We have always known that we had many friends, but it is good that you are here, so we can touch." Then she went on to talk about the tasks ahead.

She talked about aid for Mozambique in terms of strengthening mo-

bilization for sanctions - "Apartheid must be killed," she said. "We can go on for ten or twenty years, but we will not succeed to overcome our difficulties, with South Africa as an aggressive neighbour."

And finally she talked a little about herself, with extraordinary strength and dignity. "When they first told me he was dead, I wanted to die too, but then I thought, he did not die, he was killed. He wanted to live. So now I must live, and carry out the work."

The stars were shining one hour later when the plane left Maputo. Perhaps when I return again the sun will be shining.