

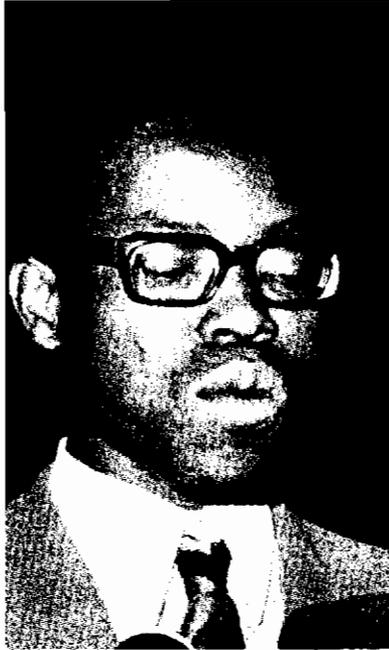
Fernando Honwana

BY ALLEN ISAACMAN

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At thirty-six Fernando Honwana had already given so much to his country and had so much more to give. He brought youthful energy, mature judgment and unfailing loyalty to his position of senior advisor and confidante to Mozambique's late President Samora Machel. A man of enormous intellect with a probing mind, Fernando was always ready to challenge received wisdom when it did not correspond to the Mozambican reality and Frelimo's socialist agenda. Perhaps President Chissano said it best: "He a was brilliant and lucid intellectual . . . [and] a respected leader loved for his competence and humanism."

Frelimo's leaders quickly came to appreciate Fernando's rare combination of critical inquiry and dedication. While still in his twenties, he was sent to represent Mozambique in the Lancaster House negotiations which resulted in Zimbabwean independence. The close ties he developed with his Zimbabwean counterparts gave him an important entry to that country's leadership after independence and proved to be critical in strengthening relations between the two nations. In addition to his frequent trips to Harare, Fernando went on strategic missions to countries ranging from North Korea to the United States. And while formally serving as special assistant to the President, he also held important positions in the military and security branches of the government. Nevertheless, for all his involvement in delicate matters of state, he loved nothing more than to relax with a spy novel.



Tempo

Fernando Honwana was born on November 24, 1951, in Moamba district. He came from a southern Mozambican family that was both fiercely proud of its African identity and deeply committed to breaking the chains of colonial oppression. His relatives had fought against the Portuguese colonialists at the turn of the century and both his father Raul and brother Luis were arrested by PIDE – the hated secret police. And yet when describing the indignities that he and his family members had experienced, he was never consumed with bitterness nor hatred. To the contrary, he had a rare inner strength and vision of the future which enabled him to transcend his own personal suffering and to mock the most absurd features of colonialism.

From his father Fernando developed a keen sense of history and appreciation of how the past could be

a powerful weapon to forge a new future. An outstanding student he was one of a handful of Africans to receive a higher education. He completed secondary school at Waterford in Swaziland, and won a scholarship to York University in England from which he graduated in 1973. Unlike a number of other Mozambicans studying in the west who chose to remain abroad after completing their education, Fernando underwent military and political training at Nachingwea in Tanzania. There, according to President Chissano, he "demonstrated his dedication to the cause of the people and his commitment to the revolution." He returned to Mozambique shortly before independence and began his varied and distinguished governmental career.

In death Fernando left behind a proud family who not only mourn his loss but, as Frelimo members, continue to struggle for a just society. This commitment is embodied in his wife Flavia Honwana, herself a leading militant and member of the Organization of Mozambican Women (OMM). In the infrequent moments they had together, Flavia and Fernando were always dreaming about the vacation they were never to have. I recall on several occasions walking along the beach with their young son Ozzie on my shoulders when he would point to the plane overhead and explain with glee, "Papa está ali – my father is up there." For Fernando was rarely at home.

Those of us who knew and loved Fernando will miss his radiant smile, witty sense of humor and penetrating intellect. People such as Fernando are rare, indeed. Our lives were enriched immeasurably by his presence. And in this moment of grief we re-dedicate ourselves to support Mozambique and the other front-line states against the violence perpetrated by Pretoria and its armed clients such as the MNR who seek to destroy everything for which Fernando stood.