

# Aquino

BY IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN

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Aquino de Bragança was my friend, my brother. I first met him, I believe, in 1959 in Morocco where he was then living. He was there as the leader of the Goa liberation movement and a member of the team who were laying the base for the creation of the CONCP, the structure that linked together the national liberation movements of the Portuguese colonies. Like so many others who knew him, I found him a warm, generous, passionate, intellectually alive human being, and we became close, almost immediately.

Aquino was a totally political person. He played, however, three different political roles. He was a militant, he was a diplomat, he was a revolutionary. They are not the same. But he played all these roles with an incredible integrity.

A militant engages the enemy. Aquino became a militant as a student in Goa, then continued in Lisbon and Paris. He was part of that absolutely remarkable group who came together in Lisbon in the 1950's to launch the struggle against Portuguese colonialism — Mario de Andrade, Amilcar Cabral, Viriato Cruz, Eduardo Mondlane, Agostinho Neto, Marcelino dos Santos, among the most well known.

When Algeria became independent in 1962, he moved to Algiers and there pursued his tasks as a militant. He wrote for *Révolution Africaine* (Algiers) and *Afrique-Asie* (Paris). He edited all the material relating to Portuguese-speaking and southern Africa for these two journals, which became major outlets of

expression for their national liberation movements. Aquino became in effect the prime spokesperson of the CONCP to the outside world.



Tempo

He was based in Algiers from 1962 to 1974 and came to be the communications link for the CONCP. All the major figures of the PAIGC, MPLA, Frelimo, and the CLSTP came through Algiers regularly. Aquino provided them their logistical base. But more importantly he was their discreet confidant, their honest counselor, and major channel of internal communication.

When the MFA overthrew the Portuguese Fascist regime in 1974, the situation suddenly changed. By 1975, all the Portuguese colonies would become independent, but not however without a great deal of political struggle. In this key period of transition, Aquino became the special diplomat, used by the movements (and especially Frelimo) to help them navigate the rapids of delicate political negotiations, particularly in Lisbon. A militant faces the enemy, but a diplomat faces the interlocutors. It is a different skill.

After independence, Aquino moved to Maputo where Samora Machel offered him many positions. But he requested only one, that of creating and directing the Centro de Estudos Africanos of the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane. It is, when you think of it, a remarkable choice.

I know of no other leader in a nationalist struggle in Africa (or elsewhere) who made a similar request to a president.

If Aquino wanted to create a university center of research, it was not because he was in love with scholarship or archives. He certainly sought no ivory tower. If he made this choice, it was because he wanted to be more than a militant facing the enemy or a diplomat facing the interlocutor. He wanted to be a revolutionary, and he knew that revolutionaries face their comrades, struggling with them in the search for how really to transform the world.

He railed in private and in public, ever since 1975, against "triumphalism" which he considered to be the betrayal of the revolution. He had no tolerance for slogans, for dogmas, for forced optimism, for sacred cows. He saw the temptation everywhere — in all the states and movements aspiring to be revolutionary — to fall into what the French call the "langue de bois," the heavy ritual language which deceives no one except those who use it and which he found all too widespread. For him, the Centro could offer an analysis that would be honest and sober, and therefore revolutionary.

He came to be known by everyone as an irreverent maverick. Some feared him for it, some ignored him, but most of us loved him for it. Samora loved him for it. Aquino came with no arrogance to his questioning, only with an "optimism of the will."

The day that Cabral was assassinated, we spoke. He cried to me: "They have killed our Amilcar." It was, typically, Aquino who would write soon thereafter the most comprehensive, honest reportage of the assassination of Amilcar Cabral, and of the role that elements within the movement, collaborating with the enemy, played in it. He grieved the death of Amilcar, but he sought to have us all learn from it.

They have killed our Aquino.