

SEMINAR HONOURS RUTH FIRST AND AQUINO DE BRAGANCA

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An international seminar was held at Maputo's Eduardo Mondlane University on 21 and 22 January in honour of two southern African scholars who died in tragic circumstances.

The scholars honoured were Mozambican researcher and writer Aquino de Braganca, who died alongside President Samora Machel in the October 1986 plane crash in South Africa, and South African militant and writer Ruth First, who was killed by a parcel bomb sent to her office by Pretoria's agents in August 1982.

Mr de Braganca was the Director of the Centre of African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University, while Ruth First worked as the Centre's Director of Research.

The seminar was organised by the present leadership of the Centre, headed by its current Director, Sergio Vieira.

Mr Vieira, one of the main speakers at the seminar, presented a paper on "The Vectors of Frelimo's Foreign Policy Between 1962 and 1975". The other main guest speakers were a member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, Mac Maharaj, and the Director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University in Grahamstown in South Africa, Professor Peter Vale.

Professor Vale's presentation was entitled "The Inevitability of Generals: An Anatomy of White Power in South Africa". Mr. Maharaj delivered a paper about "The Internal Determinants of Pretoria's Foreign Policy".

Another guest at the seminar was Professor Immanuel Wallerstein, Director of the Fernand Braudel Centre of State University in New York. Professor Wallerstein was the first guest to speak at the seminar. He recalled his comrade and friend, Aquino de Braganca, from the time they met in the early 1960s. Professor Wallerstein said the best way to honour Aquino de Braganca was by "continuing his revolutionary work".

The papers by Mr. Maharaj and Professor Vale revealed how South Africa's internal and external policies are being engineered by the

military. Although one paper dealt with the analysis of white minority power and the other with how specific internal factors determine foreign policy matters, both presentations stressed the violence of apartheid.

Professor Vale began by saying, "politics in South Africa is a history of violence," and stated that the majority of South African whites are "wittingly or unwittingly bound in a colonial mindset" and that they find it easy to run to the gun for solutions to domestic and regional matters.

He argued that there is in South Africa "an extra-parliamentary government", the military, which is the force that really governs the country. He said the military have used the media, particularly television, to successfully keep South African whites ignorant of the outside world and believing in the existence of a Soviet-led "total onslaught" on South Africa.

"One of the issues we have underestimated is how removed southern Africa is" from the consciousness of the majority of South Africa's whites. "There is no competing message in South Africa vis a vis white South Africans," he said. He added that the End the Conscription Campaign was an exception and that it was not just a pacifist movement but "truly an anti-apartheid" phenomenon.

Professor Vale said it was wrong to assume that only Afrikaners had participated in the making and defence of apartheid. He argued that many English-speaking white South Africans were equally responsible for the present situation and in fact supported the Conservative Party.

Mr Maharaj said that the government of President Pieter Botha had brought the military forward to decision-making roles, with the State Security Council, whose composition is largely military, being the actual governing organ.

Discussion by the audience on these papers was lively and the main point stressed was the fact that South Africa is today governed by an "extra-parliamentary" power, as Professor Vale put it.

Mr Vieira's paper on Frelimo's foreign policy from 1962, when the Front was created, until the time of independence in 1975, showed how the Mozambican leadership had battled with difficult foreign policy issues. The paper dealt with problematic areas confronted by Frelimo in the region, in the rest of Africa and at the international level during the struggle against Portuguese colonialism.

Discussion on this paper was equally lively. Afterwards the seminar was officially closed by Mr Vieira in a small garden by the Centre of African Studies.

Mr Vieira unveiled a marble memorial stone in honour of Aquino de Braganca and Ruth First. He was accompanied by Aquino's widow Sylvia, Mr Maharaj, and Professors Vale and Wallerstein.

The inscription on the white marble reaffirmed what the seminar had roundly stated: Aquino and Ruth were "killed in the cause of science, progress and peace".

Mr Vieira called on scientists in southern Africa to continue to serve peace through revolutionary work.