

The Stories of Two Poets

*Under the Portuguese
colonial heel*

ANTONIO DE FIGUEIREDO

JOSE CRAVEIRINHA GREW UP in the periphery of white Mozambique in more ways than one. Being a halfcaste son of a Portuguese father who died when he was only eight years old, he was brought up by his mother's family, in the African suburbs of Lourenço Marques. His literary talent led to his acceptance among white intellectuals and for many years he commuted between the extreme poverty of his African environment and the prosperous white city. When he became known abroad and had his poetry published in European countries even the authorities turned a blind eye to his Mozambican nationalist views. At 37, Jose Craveirinha, a co-editor of the daily newspaper *Tribuna*, was an expert at writing for the regime's censor, often succeeding in cloaking the true meaning of his comments in highly elaborate language. He was a part of the political show-case whereby the Portuguese Government deceives tourists and visiting businessmen, leading them to believe that Mozambique is an oasis of multi-racialism in Southern Africa.

But ultimately Jose Craveirinha, like so many others, was stifled by the hypocrisy and mediocrity of Mozambique's life under Salazar's rule. At heart, what animated him was the hope that the seven million African beasts of burden would one day break the chains that the early twentieth-century form of colonialism imposed upon them.

Early this year, Craveirinha had his opportunity. Having fled to Swaziland, after widespread arrests in Mozambique, he lived free in Mbabane for over a month.

However, in landlocked Swaziland his enemies were too near; his friends too far away. When the latter were closing in to rescue him from Swaziland, and to bring him to the big world outside, it was learned that his African wife and children, his sister-in-law and her husband, had travelled all the way from Lourenço Marques and induced him to return home. They found him in a moment of great inner conflict. After all, for Craveirinha, taking the road to freedom implied abandoning

his wife and children and facing an indifferent world, speaking no other than Portuguese and his native language. Completely unaware of the attention his case was receiving in the international press, he decided to return to Lourenço Marques, stating upon arrival that the PIDE (State Police) had been very correct and kind. No other news has been forthcoming since he disappeared behind the iron curtain of Portuguese colonial secrecy.

JOSE LIMA DE AZEVEDO WAS BORN in Benguela, Angola. Having showed great promise as a schoolboy, he was exceptionally privileged in being offered a place at the Faculty of Medicine of Oporto University.

Despite his own transcending of the race barrier, and the prospects of his medical career, he retained a feeling of solidarity with the African masses in Angola. He became a distinguished poet of a generation of Angolans who used literature and art to express social protest. His humble African mother in the Benguela suburbs was proud of what she heard of his achievements.

In 1961 Lima de Azevedo, having decided to break with conformity, joined other Angolan rebels in fleeing Portugal. He became a leading member of M.P.L.A. (Angola's Liberation Movement) in Accra and was later sent to Brazil—a former Portuguese colony with great influence in Portuguese politics—as their representative.

In April, 1964, during the *coup d'état* which established the present regime in Brazil, Jose Lima de Azevedo was arrested together with all other African students. Since this was a case where foreign citizens were suddenly enmeshed in what was essentially a domestic affair, most African students were later released and left Brazil.

Lima de Azevedo, however, met with combined wrath of the Portuguese diplomatic and PIDE services operating in Brazil, and is still in jail.

There is no doubt that he has met above all with a callous bureaucratic indifference on the part of the new government in Brazil. Found not guilty of a charge of "subversion

against Brazil" instead of being released on a plea of "habeas corpus", he is still detained in a cell only four square meters in area, together with four common criminals, at the Maritime Police headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. Technically he is under "administrative detention" pending a decision by the Brazilian Minister of Justice concerning his expulsion from the country. He had pleaded most movingly to be freed to await such a decision; he has complained of ill treatment and is now a sick man. When last seen by a visiting Brazilian reporter, who described his cell as filthy, he was not even allowed to shave, since the authorities, knowing of his fear of being extradited to Portugal and thus handed to PIDE, have taken precautions to avoid his attempting suicide. He has, moreover, repeatedly appealed to the Brazilian authorities to expel him and has had offers of political asylum from a number of African countries.

His mother, too, has joined in the protests. Having heard rumours of her son's plight in her humble village in remote Angola, she ventured to write to a busy Brazilian State Governor pleading his intercession and sending 20 escudos (five shillings) to her son should he need money.

Both the money and the letter were sent to Lima de Azevedo in jail. Thanking the Governor for having given him an opportunity to "remember his mother's goodness", Lima de Azevedo once again asked why he was still imprisoned, since "he had never infringed the laws of Brazil or any other country, or harmed anyone, anywhere", and, "the only fault of which he could be accused would be that he was an Angolan nationalist who loved his country and people". His cries have not yet been heard.

THE STORIES OF THESE two young poets, one humiliated by surrender and the other degraded by callous injustice, are by no means the most cruel in the Portuguese authorities' record of repression of African Nationalists. Many others have met with physical torture or perished in combat, leaving behind them bereaved parents, widows and orphans. But there is a quality about these two stories which reflects subtler forms of suffering that are a routine part of the struggle for independence.