Interview with João Ferreira


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### Interview with João Ferreira

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**Description**  
This interview with FRELIMO leader João Ferreira focuses on his relationship with and memories of President Samora Machel. A white Mozambican who was detained by the Portuguese secret police in 1961 for opposition to the colonial regime, Ferreira met Machel as a co-worker at Miguel Bombarda Hospital in Lourenço Marques. Ferreira escaped to Tanzania in 1963 to join FRELIMO in exile. He served as minister of agriculture in the mid-1980s.
Mr. João Ferreira, I would like you to begin by telling us the circumstances in which you met Samora Machel.

I met Samora Machel when I was working as a pharmaceutical sales person at Santas Laboratory in Lourenço Marques. I was working as a pharmaceutical advertiser for Santas Laboratory and my company also had some activities in this building, which was called Infirmary number 17 of Hospital Miguel Bombarda. That was the name of the hospital. I established my contacts with Samora after my release from prison in 1961. I had been detained by PIDE for six months in 1961. So, I was a well known figure among people who had interest in politics, particularly after being arrested with other non white Mozambicans. My detention by PIDE was an important test that facilitated and allowed me to begin certain kinds of political conversations. Before my detention, it was very difficult to find out who was a PIDE agent. My relationship with Samora evolved from that time. The way we established our contacts- and the fact that we are sitting here on the stairs of Infirmary number 17, has its own raison d’être –also explains how difficult it was to find other places [to meet]. I used to come here to the hospital to meet Samora Machel. During that time, it was extremely dangerous for a black man to sit next to a white man in a car. So, Samora used to sit in the back seat of the car and I drove the car. Sometimes, Samora brought his wife, Irene Buque, with him and she also sat in the back seat of the car. As a white man I sat in the front seat and as black people like Samora and his wife sat in the back seat. I drove the car and we talked. It was in these circumstances that we talked about politics and exchanged books. It was also during these times that we talked and strengthened our friendship. Our friendship was like that because we didn’t have an underground organization to build another kind of relationship. During one of my visits to the Hospital Miguel Bombarda I went to see my friend and ex-companion in the colonial army, Victor Hugo. I went to visit him because he was ill. Since we were friends, I went to greet him and he said, “Look, do you know somebody called Samora?” and I asked why? and he replied, “It is because PIDE agents came here to see me. They thought I was Samora.” So, PIDE went to see Victor Hugo thinking that he was Samora. I told him, “I have heard about Samora, but I don’t know him.” Although Victor Hugo was my friend, he lived in Mafalala area next to the house of José Craveirinha. He lived next to the Munhuana neighborhood. However, he liked to drink alcohol and didn’t like politics. I immediately came to this infirmary and met Samora who was working at that moment. I told him that I wanted to talk with him and we went down the stairs. There was no one in the vicinity. It was on these stairs where I told him that PIDE agents wanted to arrest him.

I am sorry; can you repeat the last part concerning Victor Hugo?
As I was saying, in one of my visits to the hospital, I went to an infirmary where my friend was hospitalized. Victor Hugo and I grew up together close to Mafalala and Munhuana neighborhoods. Victor Hugo was my buddy in the Portuguese military. After talking with Victor Hugo, I immediately went to look for Samora upstairs in this building exactly where we are standing now. I told him I wanted to talk with him. I told him, “Look, PIDE is going to arrest you, it is important to leave very soon.” It’s from this context that the famous statement by Samora comes. The sentence always appears as if it was a remarkable thing in the historical moment when it happened. His most famous and remarkable sentence is “During a revolution, there are always traitors.” We will remember this statement much later when we met again in Dar es Salaam in 1972. After being in other places I returned to Dar es Salaam and I met Samora and we remembered his sentence and our meeting where I told him about PIDE plans to arrest him. After giving him the information about PIDE plans to arrest him, Samora organized himself and left via Swaziland and South Africa for Tanzania. A year later, Jacinto Veloso and I went to Tanzania from northern Mozambique. So, the meetings that we had with Samora gave us [inspiration]; he was a charming figure.

Before you met him, did you hear any comments about him? Did you come across any stories that involved Samora’s name?

No. It was only after I met him that I came to know stories of his past. I came to know some stories about him after I met him and we started talking together. I knew extremely little about him before our meeting. You have to understand that no one asked direct questions about a third person because of the political atmosphere and arrests by PIDE. People were afraid to talk openly because they were afraid to be arrested by PIDE. So, people were very careful because it was difficult to know who was a PIDE agent. I had been arrested previously and I was an easy target. I could be easily traced. My meetings with Samora took place in a very special atmosphere and in extremely restricted circumstances. As I was a worker with my kind of job, I had to report to PIDE. I had to tell PIDE that I was going to the north and I was controlled and followed in every part of the northern region of the country. Wherever I went to the north, PIDE tracked me.

Can you explain the circumstances of your detention? What happened?

I was arrested in 1961. In a very strange way, pamphlets were distributed all over the country. This is not the right moment to introduce this subject, but the distribution of pamphlets precipitated the whole thing.

Were those pamphlets distributed by Eduardo Mondlane?

No, no, no. Mondlane’s distribution of pamphlets happened later. There were many pamphlets distributed in this country. These pamphlets were found in toilets, bathrooms, post offices, and other public places and they led to my detention and Filipe Samuel Magaia’s in Beira. I had very deep political conversations with Filipe Samuel Magaia. We became very great friends. We met while serving in the military at Boane. Both of us did military service in Boane and we became friends there. Then, he went to Beira where
he was arrested. Since they [PIDE] didn’t find any evidence to prosecute us, they freed Filipe Samuel Magaia in Beira and me in Lourenço Marques. A few months later, Filipe Samuel Magaia crossed the border into Rhodesia and a year later I also crossed the border at Rovuma into Tanzania. So, there was great danger in asking about people’s lives; it was dangerous to ask what people did. It was through my direct contacts with Samora that I learnt about his personality and the empathy and friendships he cultivated around him.

What were the circumstances that led you to meet Samora Machel? Do you remember something very special that you find important to talk about?

Well, I met Samora in 1961 under the circumstances that I have just described. I worked at Santas Laboratório in Lourenço Marques. I worked as a pharmaceutical advertiser [sales person]. Through my work responsibilities here in the hospital, I had the opportunity to meet him. Since I had been arrested by PIDE in the past, it had some implications within the society of Lourenço Marques and it also facilitated certain kinds of conversations. At least, [my detention experience] shortened the time it took to investigate and know people and to gain people’s confidence to talk about political issues. My contacts with Samora were too complicated. He used to meet me here in the hospital. I used to visit him at night because we had some patients in this hospital who were treated using our laboratory’s medicines. I used to come here at night to talk with him. Samora and I used to visit the patients and made reports to the laboratory. It was difficult to meet outside of the hospital and much more complicated to meet someone like me who was already in the PIDE file records. My relationship with Samora also involved giving him rides to his home on Angola Avenue. I gave him rides many times and sometimes I gave him rides with Irene Buque, but they always sat in the back seat. They never sat next to me to avoid calling attention to the police -although there was this belief that PIDE could always be more condescending with white politicians than with blacks. So, we had to be very careful. We exchanged books inside the car. On one of my visits to the hospital, I went to see my childhood friend Victor Hugo who was hospitalized. He was born and raised in Mafalala close to Munhuana. He also went to military [service] with us in Boane. I mean with Mariano Matsinhe, Filipe Samuel Magaia and me. Victor Hugo told me that PIDE agents had gone to his infirmary and asked him about Samora. He asked me if I knew Samora and I told him that I didn’t but I had heard his name. Victor Hugo was not involved in politics, he was just a great friend. I walked across the hospital and I came to the building where we are now. This building was called Infirmary number 17. It was here that they did some medical research. I met Samora and we walked down the stairs and I told him, “Look, PIDE is going to arrest you”. It is from this context that the famous statement by Samora emerged which is now widespread. It was an uncommon statement for that period of 1962, “In a revolution, there are always traitors.” Well, it was at that moment that I said, “Look, I am also going to [join FRELIMO].” So, I told Samora that I was going to join FRELIMO because they were already talking about some agitation [armed struggle]. How we would do that, we didn’t know. He had to leave and I also had to leave. So, my conversation with Samora ended in the stairway of infirmary number 17. After that conversation, I didn’t see Samora again in Mozambique; I met him again outside of the country.
What was the first reaction of Samora? How did he react to the information you gave him?

Samora was a person with a very strong personality. I believe that Samora was born without any complexes [without fear and with no feelings of inferiority]. Samora looked at people on the same level. He dealt with them on equal terms and footing. On racial matters, anyone who thought that he/she was racially superior to Samora noticed that he didn’t allow himself to be looked down on. He didn’t allow anyone to treat him as an inferior person. Those who didn’t have complexes of superiority and recognized racial equality as something positive and beautiful and not an anomaly in a person’s life didn’t have to confront him. But those who wanted to undermine his dignity and disrespect him had to confront him. He had an exceptionally strong personality.

By the way, many books were found at Samora’s house which suggested that he was an avid reader.

Samora read a lot. He read a lot. He read a wide range of books; he read various kinds of books. I never gave him a book which was clearly about politics. The so-called political books sold here with covers. For example, O Estado e a Revolução [The State and the Revolution] was sold here and it had a cover entitled 100 Maneiras de Fazer Cozinha [100 Ways to Cook], etc. He had some friends in Brazil who sent him books by Jorge Amado. Jorge Amado was a figure that defined our generation. It is true and I must say that in my case as a white person who was getting involved in a historical process I loved the characters of Jorge Amado’s books. Jubiabá was the character who was going to solve problems of slavery, anti-black racism. Later on, everything evolved and we started applying scientific analysis. We started to be attracted and fascinated by black elements who had a national vision. For example, Samora, without saying the word politics, had a vision of Mozambique from Rovuma to Maputo and of national unity. Samora was very proud of Mozambique, a big and beautiful country. He valued his country so much. Before Samora had a political vocabulary, or better said, an anthology of political vocabulary, his vocabulary was full of dreams. His language was full of dreams and he had profound appreciation for respect among people. He believed that people had to respect each other and work in order to make Mozambique a beautiful country. Later on, we called this beautiful country a country of national unity and territorial integrity. Samora used to say, “They are saying that there are some tribes more intelligent than the others. It is not true. It is just because some didn’t have the opportunity to study.” This was already a struggle against a colonial conception suggesting that there were some tribes in Mozambique more developed and intelligent than the others and these tribes were predestined by God. He didn’t agree with that. These beliefs were from within him; he didn’t develop these ideas by reading Mao Zedong, Lenin, and Marx. This is what led some of us to be frustrated on the day of independence because we thought that Samora would declare the Samorian Revolution and not Marxism-Leninism. Many of us dreamed of Marxism by Samora and not Marxism-Leninism because we knew his innermost values clearly. He had virtues to offer and it is something that he did.

Before you went and left prison, you had never heard of Samora?
No. I had other black friends. During the [colonial] period things were very complicated. Sometimes, we had to whisper, “Epá, come to have dinner in my house, but don’t tell anyone. There is a black guy who is coming to have dinner too.” It was very romantic, too, and many times the black guy happened to be a PIDE agent who ruined many people’s lives. However, it was a step, an important step to break with the colonial system and status. It was an important step to break with Portuguese domination in Mozambique. So, all of these methods were valid. During that time, we learnt that many things that might not be correct could be valid; truly, this was how we related to each other. The social interactions between white and black people were not easy in Mozambique. Do not confuse [this with] intermarriage between white men and black women; it was something that the Political Police [PIDE] never got involved in at any time. For example, Calanga where you have the white and black sweat. It is an example of what colonialism allowed to happen; it was free; it was never prohibited, on the contrary, it was promoted. However, we had to be careful not to have relationships between whites and blacks to discuss human rights and put an end to the colonial system under which we lived. That’s why I do not regret having met Samora on a few occasions especially if this helped to protect him against PIDE on the Mozambique territory. Had Samora been arrested by PIDE we would not have met him.

Who introduced you to Samora?

No one introduced me to Samora Machel. I knew him. As I said a few moments ago, a month and a half after I had started working for Santas Laboratory I was arrested. This caused a great deal of controversy and agitation at that time; this [Lourenço Marques] was like a village.

I would like to know what led to your detention.

You want to know the reasons for my detention? Some pamphlets were distributed in many parts of Mozambique, in post offices, public toilets, in the toilets of Gil Vicente Cinema and other places. We can discuss this issue at some other time, including the people who engineered the distribution of the pamphlets; however, Filipe Samuel Magaia and I were implicated in the distribution of the pamphlets. Magaia had served in the military and went to work at Mozambique Railways Company [Caminhos de Ferro de Moçambique] in Beira. Magaia was arrested in Beira and I was detained in Maputo and we were accused of being responsible for distributing pamphlets and being members of democratic movements for the liberation of Mozambique. These were just silly accusations. There is strong evidence to suggest that everything was fabricated by PIDE. But, we were arrested by PIDE and following our release, Filipe Samuel Magaia crossed the border to Rhodesia. A few months later, I crossed the border at Rovuma. However, I stayed here from October of 1961 to February of 1963. After a year and four months, many events unfolded very quickly inside Mozambique. So, I left the country, after Samora had left following my warning here in the Infirmary 17 of Hospital Miguel Bombarda, today the Central Hospital of Maputo.
Without going deeply into this subject, I was told by other people that those pamphlets were produced so that Mondlane could take them to the United Nations where he was going to say that the peaceful life that the Portuguese were claiming existed in Mozambique was a farce and not real.

Yes, I don’t want to discuss this issue at this stage. But, there is something which tells me that it was definitely not the case. There is only one reason: Mondlane’s intellectual integrity; I don’t think he would use such a sad scheme that led some innocent people to be arrested; it is like following the idea: (“as things get worse it is better to make the necessary changes”). This was never part of Eduardo Mondlane’s personality. So, I have strong reasons to doubt that Eduardo Mondlane suggested, organized and fabricated the whole scheme. Now, this doesn’t mean that Eduardo Mondlane who didn’t know about this and was not involved in it didn’t take advantage of the situation-this is my viewpoint. Because that incident led many people to be arrested – I think you have heard about the case of Albino Maeche. Albino Maeche and I were jailed together with people from Tete such as Violas, Francisco Violas. We were all detained in 1961. This is my feeling about this issue.

You mentioned Filipe Samuel Magaia and Mariano Matsinhe. Do you know if Samora knew both of them?

He knew them. They got to know each other at the Associação dos Negros de Moçambique. Mariano Matsinhe and Filipe Magaia were members of Núcleo dos Estudantes [do Ensino Secundário de Moçambique] –NESAM. [Núcleo dos Estudantes Secundários de Moçambique (NESAM)- Nucleus of Secondary Students of Mozambique] Chissano was also a member of the association. It is possible that they had a close relationship. I came to know Magaia when we were serving in the military in Boane.

What did you know about the relationship between Samora and Irene? Did you know anything about their relationship?

No. I never had any knowledge about their family life. For me, Irene Buque was my friend’s wife, I greeted her and Samora and I talked almost exclusively about politics. We talked about the dissatisfaction that was building inside us.

Did she listen to your conversations?

Not always, not always, not always.

After Samora left the country [for Tanzania], did you get information from him?

I didn’t receive any more information from Samora. It was only after I left the country that I met Samora again.

Can you describe how you left the country?
I don’t know if I am the right person to tell the story or [if it should be] the commander of the plane which we used to flee, Jacinto Veloso. I wouldn’t want to make this story public without his presence. I would rather have him with me to make this story public.

Anyhow, when you arrived in Tanzania, you established contacts with Samora Machel.

No. he was not there. He was having military training in Algeria. When we arrived in Tanzania, Mondlane was not there. Marcelino dos Santos, Samora Machel, and Filipe Samuel Magaia were not in Tanzania. The only friend who was present was Mariano Matsinhe, although we almost had some problems because we mentioned his name [Mariano Matsinhe]. It was a very tense political atmosphere.

Did you go to Cairo?

What did you say?

Did you go to Cairo?

We went to Cairo afterwards. We were invited by President Nasser. We were in Cairo and from there we went to other countries. But that is another story. Anyhow, going back to your question about leaving the country, don’t think I’m refusing to reveal the information. But Jacinto Veloso and I always asked, “When are we going to make this story public?” and since we haven’t reached any conclusion I think would not be a good idea to advance any more details on this subject. But I can tell him that you are curious to know and if he agrees we are going to sit down and talk. Or as I normally do on some occasions, I will let him speak and he will reveal the story.

You were in Cairo for a short period of time […] What were your first contacts with Samora? How did you reestablish your contacts with Samora? Did you write him letters?

No, I have never maintained contacts by letter. There is one aspect to understand: Samora rose inside FRELIMO; he didn’t come from any political movement. He might have shown some sympathy for the ANC which had a great influence in Mozambique. He could have that political stance; there is no question about that. ANC had a direct and indirect influence in our lives. The ANC had some influence in the political life of Mozambique. However, Samora Machel grew up independent from any political movement inside FRELIMO. He had virtues and no one can say that he represented any political group inside Mozambique or internationally. He didn’t come from the school of the Portuguese Communist Party as many Mozambicans did. It was like that in Portugal; those who were anti-Salazar were members of the Portuguese Communist Party. So, they [the Portuguese Communist Party] influenced the Mozambican youth in Portugal. It’s not a criticism, but it’s a segment of the Mozambican political society. Some came from groups based in Zimbabwe [Southern Rhodesia]; Samora had an independent trajectory. This was very typical in Samora’s personality. It was his independence from any political group; he didn’t have any political debts to a specific political group. He was an engine to fulfill his virtues and ideals: building a just society; creating a beautiful country as
Machado da Graça once said, “Let’s not compare ourselves with Dar es Salaam anymore; let’s compare ourselves with Hamburg or something close to that,” this was the great ambition of Samora. However, I don’t know if I have time to talk about something else: it’s about Samora’s memory. Many people have talked about several other issues concerning Samora, but I am going to tell you one story. In 1976, Samora decided to visit the Ministry of Agriculture which was headed by Joaquim Ribeiro de Carvalho. Samora toured different departments and when they opened one of the offices for him he saw an old white man with grey hair. The old man was dressed up and he was wearing a suit and a tie. Surprised by the sudden appearance of Samora, the old man stood up and said, “Mr. President.” Samora said, “Sit down, don’t say anything. I am going to tell you your name. Your name is Castro Amaro.” That old man was indeed Doctor Castro Amaro who was a veterinary doctor and he was working for the National Directorate of Veterinary in the Ministry of Agriculture. And Samora also said, “You don’t know me, but I will remind you…” – this event took place in 1976. In 1976, Samora Machel said, “Sir, Do you remember one stormy night when you were coming from Xefina by boat? You were in danger of death because of the storm. Do you remember a small boat coming to rescue you?” and Doctor Castro Amaro said, “Yes” and Samora said, “Was it a black man who rescued you?” and the Doctor replied, “Yes, yes.” Samora said, “That black man was me. It was I who went to rescue you. Do you know why we never forget that? Because you were the director of Veterinary at Fonte Azul [Blue Fountain], you had a servant worker who was my great friend.” Samora said, “One day, you called your servant worker and you told him ‘Look, my friend, I don’t know what you have been doing. But, be careful because PIDE came here looking for you.’ That person, Doctor Castro Amaro, was my great friend and we fled together [to Tanzania].” But Samora never mentioned the name of that person; it was something [secret] that remained between Samora and Castro Amaro. Samora said this to Castro Amaro, “If one day, you need something; just look for me.” Now we are looking at the other side of Samora. We have seen the memory of this man who in 1953 and 1956 saw that physician and recalls the name of that doctor 20 years later. Later on, Doctor Castro Amaro wanted to leave for Portugal and he had many personal belongings to take out of the country but he had some problems with the Mozambican customs. Custom officials didn’t allow him to put his grandparents [bibelôs] belongings in the container to take with him to Portugal. Castro Amaro requested a meeting with the President and Samora allowed him to take everything with him. So, Samora granted Castro Amaro an exception as a historical merit and gratification. On one hand, Samora had rescued him, and on the other, Castro Amaro had helped Samora’s friend. This shows that when people talk about racism and claim that Samora was a racist it is not true. Samora was not a racist. These are true lived experiences that speak for themselves and tell us who Samora Machel really was.

You have talked about his memory; but there is something else…

People make the mistake of trying to make Samora a god. The truth is that Samora was not God. Samora was a man who committed mistakes; we can only be friends of Samora and make him a memorable figure if we avoid making him a Christ hanging on the wall of churches. We must make him a just man full of fiber, blood, and nerves. We have to look at him as a man who committed mistakes, some of which we look at today as unfair.
What does it matter in a person? What matters is a combination of all these aspects. What does it matter in a person? What does it matter if he was an individual who got irritated easily? Is this an aspect that matters about Samora? Is this what we are looking for in Samora? If we want to get into those details, you will have to look at the size of his nails. Why not look at the size of Samora’s nails? Why not look at the shape of Samora’s nails? These issues do not interest anyone; what matters is that Samora became connected and identified himself with the Mozambican historical process at a particular moment. What matters is the Mozambican historical process. This is what matters the most. Who is Samora for me? For me, Samora was a former friend, as he said in 1972 when I arrived in Dar es Salaam. He invited me for lunch and asked me how I was doing. When the lunch was over, he said, “Ferreira, when you leave by that door I am your president,” and I never [again] addressed him by “tu” because he had given me orders that after that moment he was my president. I looked at him and I hoped that he would give us an independent country and he did exactly that. He did that very well.

You arrived in Dar es Salaam in 1972. Was it your first meeting with Samora?

With Samora.

You stayed in Dar es Salaam. What were you doing there?

I went to Bagamoyo afterwards; I went to the FRELIMO training center and secondary school in Bagamoyo.

Did you have other contacts with Samora?

Later on, we had frequent contacts when he would come to Bagamoyo; we went to Nachingwea; we went to all these places with him.

Do you have some other stories that help to define Samora’s personality?

I don’t remember any stories at this moment. Perhaps people who shared their lives with Samora in Nachingwea; these people may be in a better position to tell their stories. But, I don’t remember any other story right now.

So, your relationship with Samora was between a president and João Ferreira?

Exactly.

You didn’t maintain your friendship after 1972?

He never allowed that old friendship to happen. However, he always allowed me to talk with him in private whenever I asked a meeting with him. I was always straightforward with him. Those people who were very close to Samora know that he always respected my positions; he always listened to what I had to say. I am going to tell you a story. At some point, all the commanders and I were in Tunduro. Samito [Samora’s son with
Josina] was a very young kid and he was playing around. He approached a commander and kicked him; he ran to another commander and kicked him, and he went to another commander and kicked him. When he was approaching me to kick me I stopped him and said, “If you kick me, I will slap your face. Just because you are the son of the president doesn’t mean that you can kick the comrades.” Samora said, “It is necessary that my collaborators and comrades talk with me like that.” Samora needed people who openly and seriously talked with him and with integrity. He didn’t want people who flattered him. One day, we said that a hero is not to be photographed and his picture hung on the wall. People have the tendency of trying to do that. We cannot be ashamed to publicize Samora’s life including his love affairs. Otherwise, we will be trying to make him an alien figure. He was not an alien figure; he was a human being; he loved and hated; he adored women just like any other human being; it is important to tell these stories in our textbooks in schools; I want to say the following: why do many of us who oppose teaching a different history about Samora in Mozambique adore the Cuban education system? It’s because we know nothing about the Cuban education system because it is a system of education that teaches the life of José Martin; it talks about his love affairs and his involvement in the struggle for independence; it is a man with the biggest statue in Cuba. Cubans also teach José Martin’s letters and love poems. We have to teach our children that Samora married many times, why not? What is the problem with that?

What was the perception about the fact that Samora married many times?

I think his different marriages represented different historical moments in his life; they were a result of historical decisions in his life. Leaving Xefina for Lourenço Marques; and leaving Lourenço Marques for Dar es Salaam.

From your point of view, what were the characteristics of Samora as a president that marked you?

One of the moments that fascinated me – to use Samora’s favorite expression- was when Samora made the great option; he made one of his great options in 1982 and 1983 when he decided to reexamine the whole Mozambican historical process. He examined whether the option of socialism was in line with the needs of Mozambicans. He demonstrated strong skills and courage to reexamine the situation of the country in a context where the United States of America didn’t believe that he was going to give up on communism and the Soviet Union was questioning his commitment to communism. Samora fell into a period of great loneliness in international politics. On the one hand, they [the communists] started to doubt him, and on the other, they [North-Americans and Western Europe] didn’t believe that he was going to give up on communism.

Do you think his loneliness was also an internal one?

I don’t know. I can’t get into that analysis because we are talking about Samora’s personality and the evolution of his thinking. I can tell you a story which I am very sure was recorded; the episode happened in a hotel in Moscow. The conversation was definitely recorded in Moscow and not here. It was during the funeral of Brezhnev [the
former President of Soviet Union]. We stood for eight hours during the funeral and when it was over, Samora convened the Mozambican delegation. I was part of that delegation and in the meeting Samora asked, “Did you pay attention to the funeral that took place today?” and we replied, “Yes, it was very cold, but…,” and Samora said, “That is not what I am talking about; today, we didn’t bury a communist leader; today, we buried a Czar; the whole ritual is similar to the ones performed for Czars. It means that Soviet Communism hasn’t created a culture for a communist funeral.” This was Samora speaking. His thinking evolved even further and he said, “In some African countries, when a leader dies, people take a long period of time without working the land as a form of honoring the dead leader. How is it going to be in Mozambique? Do our Mozambican peasants know who Marx was? Do they know who Frederick Engels was? Do they know who Lenin was?” This was in 1985 after the death of Brezhnev. Samora started to question the political option of Mozambique and Communism. This was the great shift by Samora, by asking those and other questions, “Do our Mozambican peasants know who Marx was? Do they know who Frederick Engels was? Do they know who Lenin was?” This was in 1985 after the death of Brezhnev. Samora started to question the political option of Mozambique and Communism. This was the great shift by Samora, by asking those and other questions, “Do our Mozambican peasants know who Marx, Engels, and Lenin were? We have to find different ways of connecting and approaching the peasants. We want socialism,” and here he was; he now wanted to move towards Samorian socialism; he wanted to introduce his own perspective, thinking, and virtues. This is what was beautiful about Samora; his courage and creativity; he was very creative.

You worked in the Ministry of Agriculture which was almost certainly the most complex and complicated institution. Your ministry was probably under more pressure because it had to respond to the basic needs of people. What were the discussions like between Samora and you because of the failure of the ministry to respond quickly to the basic needs of people?

No. I am going to tell you that I went to the Ministry of Agriculture in 1983 after I intervened in the IV Congress of FRELIMO, an intervention which was recorded on the radio. Radio Mozambique (RM) hasn’t given me a copy of that intervention where I officially outlined my thinking about the development of agriculture in Mozambique; it was an entirely different approach from the way agriculture was being practiced until then – I take advantage of this opportunity to press to have a copy. My speech was highly applauded and Radio Mozambique broadcasted it for months, and I was nominated as Minister of Agriculture by Samora to implement my speech and thinking. My speech was anti-centralization of agriculture in the hands of the state and it was in favor of peasants. I never had any conflicts with Samora because of that speech.

There was a process of agricultural transformation and change, but the results were slow to come. Is this true?

Exactly

Were there any tensions because of the slow outcome of those changes in agriculture?

No. Because we had a third element around us, an exogenous element which was the war that concealed some of the problems in the agricultural sector – who knows? And why
not? As some people might say, the war helped to conceal my own failures as a minister. (Laughs) I think people have the right to ask the question, “If it was not because of the war, would he be able to implement his agricultural policies?” So, I try not to defend myself under the shroud of the war to avoid being asked questions such as this one, “Had the war not occurred, are you sure you would be able to implement your policies?” So, I believe that we understand each other now. The point that I am trying to make is that a political strategy was adopted in this country which shifted the agricultural policy in favor of peasants. The policy was designed to value the efforts and knowledge of peasants, restructure the state sector, privatize the state sector in agricultural areas, and stimulate private enterprises by Mozambicans. This policy came into effect in 1984. The war lasted until 1992 and paralyzed the whole process. However, I notice that there are new changes with the emergence of Mozambican enterprises; in the rural areas, it is more difficult to see new changes because the situation is much more complex.

But, what it is more important to know is that I defined my agricultural strategy for the rural areas at the IV Congress of FRELIMO and it was because of my speech that I was appointed minister of agriculture. I was the only minister who was appointed on the basis of a program presented at a congress.

Was there any specific manifestation of Samora’s support of that new agricultural approach?

The most visible manifestation of Samora’s support was my appointment as minister of agriculture few days after my speech.

Did Samora follow the implementation of your strategy closely? Did you talk with him about your agricultural policy?

He followed it. (Laughs) I don’t know what you are trying to get at?

Certainly, when Samora nominated you, he explained to you why he nominated you.

Samora sometimes had a very succinct way of speaking; he just said, “Look, now, you go and do what you said you would do.” During all the time that Samora was alive, I worked within the framework of my program which was my speech presented at IV Congress of FRELIMO. If it is of historical interest to know what Samora thought about the great changes in the social and political policies of Mozambique, it is good to get that speech. That speech clearly states the role of peasants in building this society.

About the Production Operation?

The Production Operation doesn’t fit here. (Laughs) The Production Operation is an event… The ruling party, the local authorities in Cabo Delgado, and I as the Provincial Director of Agriculture in the province, we organized the lives of one million and two hundred thousand people (1,200,000) in Cabo Delgado in three years. We placed dispersed people in villages north of River Messalo and to the south of the River Messalo
we reorganized the strategic hamlets (aldeamentos) built by the Portuguese colonial forces to give more space for the population. We also built latrines, water wells, health units, and organized communal villages. We provided seminars for people. If you ask me, “Were there mistakes?” I can say that there were mistakes.

I would like to know how you organized and built the communal villages. Did you take into account the rivers? It is a question on which I would be happy to have Samora Machel’s answer.

This subject was discussed at Gapa in Cabo Delgado in 1976 when Samora went to visit this province. During his visit, the local population complained before Samora that the process of building communal villages had some distortions.

My question has to do with the preoccupations surrounding the communal villages. There were many discussions about communal villages, particularly regarding the settlement of people. What were your preoccupations with regards to the communal villages? How did the economy function inside the communal villages?

As I said, in 1976 Samora Machel went to Cabo Delgado. In a meeting at Gapa, an area located north of Mueda, the local population complained about the process of building and organizing the communal villages. In that meeting, Samora Machel outlined the methodology and framework for building the communal villages which were not always respected. Don’t confuse the lack of respect for the methodology and framework outlined by Samora with his own vision. He suggested that communal villages should not be built without the involvement of the population. He also recommended seminars with the local population in order to involve them in selecting the appropriate sites for habitation, areas with easy access to water; areas for agriculture production. Samora urged the local authorities to work closely with the local population to choose the best sites for building communal villages that had easy access to roads. It was only after the local population had been involved in selecting the suitable sites for communal villages that the government could intervene. This was extremely important; however some people might say, “This was so obvious;” is it so obvious? I don’t think it is so obvious as it seems. You should never forget that the process started the same way in China and when a radical faction took over the Chinese Communist Party they accelerated the process of building and organizing cooperatives in China which resulted in one of the most severe economic crises. It was precisely what Samora Machel was trying to avoid. He didn’t want to see the process of building communal villages move too fast, but he wanted to build the communal villages over the years and at a slow pace, not as a “storm operation.”

This was not always possible, but this was his intention. I tell you that this way of looking at things is not very simple; you don’t reach such conclusions in a very simple way. This is very important; the strategy [communal villages] was also very important because a small digression from this line of thought can cause enormous disaster. You end up putting people in trucks. Why so? He had seen the experience of Ujaamas in Tanzania. Many people want to identify the communal villages in Mozambique with the
experience of Ujaamas in Tanzania. Communal villages didn’t have anything to do with the Ujaamas. We watched the unfolding of the Ujaama experience; soldiers put people on trucks and they took them to new sites. It was like a strategic hamlet (aldeamento). So, Samora directly observed the unfolding of the Ujaama experience and realized that it was not the right thing to do. But it is not easy to change people’s lifestyles because culturally there were many problems. Just to give you some examples, it was decided that everybody would help each other to build houses in the villages; so, we had conflicts where the population refused to build a second house for the second wife of a polygamous husband. We also came to realize that the construction of a single wall to separate two houses to the north of Messalo was well received by the local population, but to the south of Messalo we observed that people refused to have a single wall separating their houses for cultural reasons. We had to build two walls to separate two houses placed next to each other. All these questions seem to be easy, but they were very big cultural conflicts in some areas. Some of these conflicts emerged as a result of the lack of experience of the local authorities in the process of building communal villages. However, sooner or later, we are going to realize that it is not possible to provide electricity, education, and health units in the rural areas without having some form of human concentrations by whichever name we can call it. Perhaps we will be forced to find a new name for such human concentrations because of the shame or embarrassment over our recent past. However, we will eventually get there.

We know Samora through images. He knew the impact of his image on the population. However, in the meetings of the Council of Ministers where he was not filmed and his image was not publicized, did he have the same behavior? How did he direct those meetings?

No. Samora didn’t have two personalities; there were not two Samorases. There was only one Samora.

Are you saying that Samora didn’t understand the impact of his image on TV and in the media? Are you suggesting that Samora didn’t pose purposefully on camera? We work with cameras and images and we tend to think that Samora didn’t work very well with the cameras.

No. Samora had similar reactions in identical [different] situations. His reactions were the same in identical [different] situations.

I have another question which is more personal. Do you think that Samora revealed any personal crisis as a result of the situation of the country? Did he show signs of anxiety as a result of the political situation in the country where Mozambique was under external threat? Did he show concern for his own personal life since he was under threat? Did you notice any changes in his personality?

We became accustomed to look at Samora with confidence. Samora inspired tremendous confidence in the people. There was a symbiosis between Samora as a politician and Samora as a citizen. Samora as a politician had a deep understanding of his role as the
head of state. He knew very well that when Mozambicans looked at him, and thought about him, they were thinking about their lives. No one ever imagined that Samora would die. Truly speaking, there is no one who thought that Samora would die. If someone says the opposite, that person is lying. It is only when Samora died that people really realized that Samora could die one day; it was at that historical moment that people discovered that Samora would die in one way or another. But before his death, no one really contemplated the possibility that Samora could die. People were living euphoric and hopeful moments that he had instilled in the people throughout the country. People were enjoying a “dizziness” of life and not of despair. I am not saying that he never felt any frustration with certain things in the country, but he never allowed himself to show any signs of frustration and despair. Unless there is somebody who saw him in moments of despair or frustration, but I personally never saw him in such situations. I never saw Samora in despair or frustration. I was with Samora in a meeting with other cabinet members 24 hours before he died, and he was full of convictions and projects for the future. He was not a man of despair.

Were you the Minister of Agriculture of Samora Machel?

Yes, I was.

Do you consider yourself as his minister?

Yes

During the time you served as minister of agriculture, did you have any conflicts with Samora? Did you have any personal clashes?

With Samora? I was appointed minister in 1983 and I enjoyed what can be referred to as three years of good grace. Samora gave me those three years. [This was designed to give him time to restructure the agriculture sector.] Unfortunately, Samora died suddenly in 1986 and I was still in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture. I didn’t have any problems with Samora; never. Don’t forget that my administration in the Ministry of Agriculture was a continuation of the previous administrations and it was also an expansion of my activities beyond what I was doing as the Secretary of State for Cotton. I had five years of experience and I had shown the way forward in terms of agricultural development in this country. I had demonstrated with good results what could be done in terms of agricultural development. When I became a minister, I had to implement my policies and ideas for the development of rural areas. I didn’t have any conflicts with Samora. Samora and I had in fact different perspectives between 1976 and 1979, a period when there was so much emphasis on the state sector in the process of socialization of the rural areas. But, I was working in a province where I couldn’t implement or impose that kind of socialism because I didn’t have any state enterprises in Cabo Delgado. Portuguese colonialism did not leave companies behind in Cabo Delgado that could be transformed into huge state enterprises as happened in Zambézia province, Angónia [Tete Province], Chókwè [Gaza Province], and Manica. I had to work with what was left there. There were 1,200,000 peasant families in Cabo Delgado.
What was the project of 450,000 hectares? Can you talk about this project?

I didn’t invent or conceive the Project of 450,000 hectares. I was part of the team that conceived the project.

You look visibly uneasy with this question.

If history had to reveal the truth, you would see that I am not guilty of anything. No one can look at me and say I am guilty because of this project. It is not my fault when someone with power or a little bit of power insists on saying that the Earth is a square when it is round. The project of 450,000 hectares was a collective project of the Mozambican government designed to develop the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado and Niassa. The Romanians had experience with state enterprises. The first document that the Romanians presented to us revealed that the conception of the project was entirely state centered with tremendous emphasis on cooperatives. Their document came under criticism and it was questioned. The document was discussed, reformulated and we transformed it into an integrated project of rural development.

During the discussions did you meet with Samora?

Yes, sir. During this process the person responsible for the joint mission of the project at the political level and representing the Mozambican government was Joaquim Alberto Chissano. I was the president of the joint mission with Romania and we transformed the Romanians’ project into an integrated rural development project which included the electrification of district centers; organization of schools; improvement of health units; camps for trial of seeds designed to improve peasant production; and creation of some commercial enterprises. There is so much ignorance about this project of 450,000 hectares and it is necessary to discuss and demystify this. We need to talk about it one of these days not because it affects me, but because it affects an entire [generation of] leadership. We didn’t commit a sin, but we are already condemned. People talk about 450,000 hectares and this is the same as saying that the government of Mozambique was crazy because it had a project of developing two million hectares of land corresponding to the whole peasant agricultural economy in Mozambique. (Laughs) The project was designed to be implemented in different stages with the improvement of roads, creating water wells, building hospitals, health centers at different levels, and schools. This was the kind of development that we wanted to make in the southern part of Cabo Delgado to include Cuamba, Mandinga and Lichinga [Niassa Province].

What kind of assistance did Samora provide you during the conception and implementation of the project?

Samora completely approved our conception of the integrated rural development project for those regions of the country. When problems with the Romanians emerged at my level--because they had a totally state centered form of running the economy--Samora traveled to Romania and with the local leadership it was decided to have a member of the political group on the Mozambican side, and another member of the political group on
the Romanian side to find a political equilibrium. It was also to prevent the Romanians from thinking that we were in a movement against them, which was not the case. So, I take advantage of this opportunity to say that Samora agreed with the 450,000 hectares. As you can imagine, we would not take decisions with the Romanians against the Samorian strategy for the development of Mozambique.

I am sorry; I would not like to be inopportune….

Say….

You mentioned that there were some tensions between Samora and you from 1976 and 1979. What kind of tensions were they?

No. During this period, the FRELIMO party believed in a centralized economy and I didn’t agree with them. I didn’t believe in a centrally planned economy; I never believed in that and everybody knew that I didn’t believe in that. I had seen other experiences in other parts of the world, I had seen how disastrous they were and I said, “This is a disaster.” So, I disagreed with the way they were running the economy and I ended up going to Cabo Delgado where I didn’t upset anyone and I had peasants as my friends. It was a very good experience.

In the Samorian philosophy, there is a particular preoccupation with the development of Cabo Delgado and Niassa. They were the least developed provinces and he wanted to change that situation. In fact, after independence and under Samora’s presidency, there were many initiatives to develop those areas. Do you agree with this assessment? Do you think it was his concern?

It was his personal concern. Perhaps, since we haven’t found [a strategy] to develop those two provinces up to the present. But, the answer to your questions can be found in two points: either the leadership did not find the right strategy to develop those regions or the level of development of the productive forces was extremely low and it was difficult to find what is normally called the managers of their own region. Up until today, in some regions of Mozambique, there is a crucial problem which is the lack of ability to manage the local resources. Those with knowledge go to the provinces, visit the local areas and return. They don’t sleep there. We don’t have engineers--sons of the old people in the villages--who live in the villages. I am raising questions that I am not supposed to raise here. Perhaps, and unconsciously, the way we lead this country, including the time when I was in the government--and I also take some responsibility for that--contributes to the exodus of cadres from the rural to urban areas. Although we had good intentions at heart, we never realized that our policies and methods contributed to this kind of internal migration. It is only now that a new awareness is emerging again that encourages industrial schools; this is a great perception and a good step to solve this problem which was surreptitiously happening. We send children to schools and they study grade seven and eight in the localities and when they finish this level of education they go to the district capital or provincial capital to attend classes at grade nine. Then, they receive a scholarship to study in Maputo, Beira and Nampula. These young pupils may visit their
families and relatives but they are not going to improve their families. They send some money monthly to their families, but they are not going to creatively transform their regions. These are problems that we need to think about.

In your personal relationship with Samora, how did you perceive him? You have mentioned some aspects, but in general, how did you look at him?

Look, I am going to tell you a story before I speak about Samora. It is a story from somebody that I admired so much in every aspect and this person is Aquino de Bragança. Aquino de Bragança went to Cuba in 1967 to attend the International Conference of Journalists. There was a meeting with Fidel Castro and the journalists started to move about and they surrounded Fidel Castro. It was Castro’s habit of appearing everywhere. So, Aquino wanted to approach Fidel Castro and his bodyguard was refusing to let Aquino approach. Fidel recognized Aquino in the crowd of journalists and said, “Let Aquino pass” and Aquino approached Fidel who asked, “So, Aquino, what’s up?” – Fidel’s way of greeting people- and Aquino touched Fidel’s forearm and said, “After all, you are not God.” This shows Aquino’s intellectual courage and it is this kind of courage that we need; to say the same thing about Samora; after all he was not God. He fulfilled his historical mission and we must be able to recognize and value his role in this country. The phases which will follow cannot be compared with the previous one. It is the same when a son becomes orphan of a father and his mother marries another man who is referred to as stepfather. The child will respect the stepfather but he will always love his deceased father. We belong to the generation of Samora and we lived most of our lives with him. It is very natural that we develop a personal relationship with a personality that we socialized with for ten and fifteen years. If I socialize with a new personality for three or four years, I cannot use the same elements of analysis to compare with the previous one. It is not fair and honest to do that because the second personality will never be the same as the first one. The third personality will also never be the same as the second. We will never have anybody like Samora and to use an expression of Lenin’s, “those repetitions are pale caricatures.” Many people are looking for a pale caricature; it would be lack of respect if any leader started to imitate Samora--it would just be buffoonery. What we allowed Samora to do, we would not allow anybody else to do. And I ask a question—was Samora authoritarian? He was. So, did you like him? Yes, I did. So, if a new authoritarian leader emerges, would you want him? I don’t want him. I don’t want a repetition, and I have the right to refuse a repetition. I want to keep my happy and sad moments with Samora with Samora; I don’t want to repeat those moments. Our generation is almost committing a sin, a crime of not having died with Samora. We spend all our lives thinking about Samora. No, we must talk about him; we must value him. My presence here is a small effort to talk about this personality, but with the purpose of saying, “this man was a Man; he was not God.” Let’s love him as a human being with his limitations in his life. Now, those conversations like, “Ah, if Samora could resuscitate …” when I listen to these conversations “if Samora could resuscitate...” I notice quickly that the person who is talking doesn’t know what he/she is talking about. He/she wants to take advantage of the picture hanging on the wall for other monstrous objectives.
Don’t you think that it is natural that people still remember Samora’s image? I mean Samora is no longer Samora. It’s a personality who is like a walking-stick for some people to fight for their everyday survival. Don’t you think this is normal? I don’t think those who celebrate the image of Samora are opportunists. I think it is natural for people to do that; I don’t think they are recreating Samora; it’s what Samora was intellectually and philosophically which is expressed in his image… isn’t it?

João Ferreira: Do you know what Nijinsky [Vaslav Fomich Nijinsky] said? He was one the best [ballet] dancers in the world and he said “I have been told that I am crazy; I thought I was living.” I can’t say anything else.

END OF INTERVIEW