

Graça Samo Oral History Content Summary

Track 1 [duration: 1:22:39] [Session one: 8 March 2013]

[00:00] Graça Samo [GS], born Inhambane, Mozambique, 1968, eighth daughter of 13 children. Mother farmer, father school teacher. Mentions father's first job in mine used for arms storage, South Africa during World War II, to raise money for marriage. Describes mother as beautiful woman from family of Methodist Church faith, father's and GS's own Catholic education, both parents very religious. Describes leaving family home for one year age six to travel with father teaching far away, cooking for him. Explanation of commitment by liberation movement, Frelimo, on country's independence, to spread education throughout communities. Mentions elder sister teaching in another community.

[05:15] Describes tradition of older sisters taking youngest to accompany them when leaving home, and GS leaving many times in this role. Describes living with father in housing built for teachers around the school building. Story about being scared while cooking outside in the dark. Remarks on parents' commitment to education as unusual. Story about mother's intelligence being noted by Methodist Church keen to send her to United States of America (USA) for training to educate others. Cultural myth that studying caused madness and grandfather's pursuit of a suitor instead.

[10:18] Background of parents' marriage, mother age 16. Story about mother being renamed name of husband's deceased previous wife.

[16:24] Talks about eldest brother, now 60 who was sent away to become priest. Remarks that parents must have made pact with God as wanted children to become priests and nuns. Discusses education challenging everything, parents' disappointment at failed effort believing religious ordinance better alternative to marriage, absolute investment in education and belief that marriage not beneficial to women. Mentions hard letter received from father on leaving convent.

[19:22] Story about accompanying elder sister to capital city on marriage, describes feeling that she herself was getting married and never coming back. Describes reluctance to buy first pair of shoes age 10, never worn before, in preparation for city. Comments that all girls in family married when fell in love, and family influence was not to marry, unusual attitude in community and culture.

[23:46] Describes both grandmothers as widows, paternal grandmother living in family home, maternal grandmother very autonomous, self-confident and beautiful, amusing anecdote about her cooking; maternal grandmother very stylish. Remarks that age of elders guessed by events talked about.

[29:06] Describes father as very strict, grandmother protecting GS and siblings from beatings. Describes father teaching them Portuguese, national language taught in school, but mother tongue Xitsua and grandmother's curiosity to learn from children. Describes difficulty of visiting home from the city, financial cost and danger with start of civil war after Mozambique's independence, 1975. Describes rebels recruiting from community, father sending brothers to live in the city.

[34:27] Describes rebels coming to homes asking for food, family home featuring large water tank, asking mother to cook for them, after a time asking for father who had been their teacher, and getting angry. Story about rebels demanding to take GS's younger sister with them, mother fleeing home that night.

[40:35] Describes war spreading, people running to the sea and drowning, displacement of people attempting to re-organise their farms, more killing, parents spending several years in new village, continual migration. Remarks on part of their story left behind in each place. Comments on the countryside feeding the city, so end of farms meant no food. Describes Mozambique's support of African National Congress (ANC) against apartheid in South Africa and consequence of no access to neighbouring country, onset of hunger.

[46:32] Describes parents' new start. Reflects on relationship between mother and father, father writing mother's name in sand, talking long into night. Remarks on marital infidelity common in Mozambique. Describes father's strong values, principled, but open, caring person. Comments on parents' deep understanding of each of children. Remarks on males signifying continuity of family, therefore more privileges given, but GS feeling equal investment, protection and interest.

[54:44] Describes first experience of life being different as a girl when sent as domestic support for sister and her husband. Discusses norm of bride living with husband's family and performing housekeeping duties for extended family. Reflects on own dependent and subservient position in sister's marital home. Mentions briefly living with older brother and wife. Reflects on expectation of helping after school while others working. Discusses household dynamics, culture of acceptance instilled by parents to enable education. Remarks that never cried as a child, crying now as adult because never had chance before.

[1:04:20] Describes going to live with another sister and her husband. Mentions brother in law working for large cigarette company. Describes scarcity of resources, Soviet Union's financial support in Mozambique gaining independence and government adopting socialist and communist principles, centralised control of food supply. Describes system according to number of household members, distribution of rice, oil, sugar, long queues on first of month, food running out on 15th day.

[1:08:25] Describes children sent to queue, GS sleeping in queue for surplus of shop inventory. Reflects on commitment to women's rights stemming from such experiences not understood as struggle at time. Describes being molested by sister's husband as child, sister's dismissal.

[1:15:53] Describes being consumed by responsibility of queuing in early hours and waking in the night to go on days when not on. Traumatic account of rape of GS by police officer.

Track 2 [duration: 38:42] [Session one: 8 March 2013]

[00:00] Translates message received from sister that morning comparing GS to Graça Machel on International Women's day. Describes relationship with sister. Discusses schooling after country's independence and lack of exposure to books in early years, reading in adulthood.

[06:19] Describes school book themes of revolution, independence and education on struggles of racism and discrimination during colonisation. Mentions Luís Bernardo Honwana 'We Killed Mangy Dog'. Comments on importance of quietly persistent activists fighting new forms of colonisation today.

[10:00] Describes school outing to see the National Dance Company and GS's interest in joining, sister forbidding, fearing lapse in education. Mentions wanting to learn to ride bicycle. Describes working as child minder for family enabling food and shelter and continuing education, cleaning rice before school, caring for children in afternoon. Story about realisation that housemaid.

[14:57] Describes background of going to convent school to become nun, age 17, GS's advanced education and nuns' decision to give role as cook for 14 girls. Describes childhood when church too far to attend, exposure to traditional rituals, father's communication with ancestors before sunrise, asking for blessings surrounded by GS and family sitting around tree. Compares to Catholic teachings about angels and saints, linking saviour from worse fates in family to protection from ancestors.

[23:06] Describes anger and disappointment from experience at convent as driving force behind work for women's rights. Details of discrimination witnessed and experienced. Story about Pope John Paul II's visit to Mozambique 1988 triggering departure from convent.

[31:28] Describes becoming more active at church and being selected as General Secretary of the Catholic Youth in the Archbishop. Story about being selected for trip to Poland to meet Pope, first time flying, first time abroad. Story about pregnancy and abortion without anesthetic before leaving Mozambique, and carrying weight of Catholicism, seeking priest for confession in Poland. Frustration of confession and resolve to engage with God directly. Discusses church theme of caring for others. [interrupted]

Track 3 [duration: 50:47] [Session one: 8 March 2013]

[00:00] Describes start of more formal social work on leaving school, administrative work for international non-governmental organization (NGO), then being sent to Angola during civil war as English language interpreter. Describes first encounter with English at school and determination to understand. Mentions inspiration from Irish people working in Mozambique with little or no Portuguese language. Describes immediate transfer to the field and becoming a nurse, working with malnourished children. Story about saving baby when other nurse sick with malaria. Describes

mothers taking food for babies and feeding other family members from desperation. Recognizes as pivotal moment for wanting to work to save lives.

[07:18] Describes raw experience of war in Angola and scenes that never leave mind. Return to Mozambique and resolve to settle there, buying house.

[13:10] Story about meeting husband. Describes cultural expectation when man meets bride's family. Scandal in family of living with husband before marriage, and eventual marriage during pregnancy.

[19:07] Describes hardship of new life in Brazil and loss of independence. Discusses social taboo of woman owning her own house, GS's choice to save and go without food and luxuries to achieve, challenge for husband to live in house owned by wife.

[23:48] Experience of domestic violence within marriage and account of separation from husband, making biscuits to survive, gradual repair of relationship.

[30:23] Return to Mozambique, offer of position in the Administrative Court, unwillingness to work for state institution. Describes start of work for Fórum Mulher and women's rights. Describes previous work with Promundo Institute, in favelas of Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia, Brazil. Remarks on character of engaging fully with tasks. Describes major struggle as passing Domestic Violence Bill before 2009 elections, detail of scenario and campaign, progress of bill from submission in 2006. Describes mobilization through murder case, street demonstrations, media engagement, challenging parliament.

[39:18] Describes reaction from Parliament and expectation of consensus among all groups, GS's presentation of reality of diverse perspectives. Describes response from men coming forward to claim violence from women. Discusses dynamics of domestic violence against women.

[43:30] Describes ongoing campaign for Abortion Law and obstacles. Describes issues of early marriage, early pregnancy, parental rape. Issue of trafficking discussed at Commission on Status of Women (CSW), 2013, discusses relevance to Mozambique. Describes poor public services for women, maternal mortality.

[47:12] Discusses difficulty in prioritising focus. Discusses impact of mining industry and loss of land, displacement, prostitution. Describes control of state by political parties and electorate's understanding of roles. Compares to United States of America (USA) history, mentioning California Gold Rush. Mentions Isabelle Allende. Comments on slavery to multinationals.

Track 4 [duration: 1:01:36] [Session two, 4 October 2014]

[00:00] Mentions Peace Day in Mozambique, forthcoming elections, October 15th, women's representation in Parliament. Describes application of 1886 penal codes to women's lives and process of reform. Mentions current female chair of Parliament. Discussion of laws regarding rape and abortion.

[05:04] Describes start of awareness campaign, 2006, to educate organisations on impact of criminalisation of abortion, sexual and reproductive rights, lobbying parliament, national and international campaigns. Mentions Amnesty International and international pressure. Describes use of theatre to emphasize issue during march, drawing attention of ordinary citizens, persistence of campaign and eventual success. Describes new laws on abortion. Discusses ongoing pressure in community from culture and tradition to limit girls' access to rights. Describes working with community leaders, health institutions.

[10:24] Discusses importance of political education in building female identity, women's capacity to analyze context and challenge. Discusses impact of oppression and colonialism in Africa. Discussion on investment from large corporations as new form of colonialism, displacing communities, impact on nationals, 80% living in rural areas, women living from land. Comments on governments serving interests of political parties representing interests of elite, not state. Discusses elitism as linked to country's liberators, dynamics of private and public when state has no power.

[15:32] Gives example of Brazilian mining company, Vale, displacement of Mozambicans for carbon, destruction of land. Discusses misplaced social responsibility with building of schools where damage is done, corruption and gap in taxation, financial impact on citizens, rise in prostitution and exploitation of women. Related issue of HIV and AIDS, early pregnancies and popular education.

[21:40] Explanation of work on political training and popular education for women, high level of illiteracy, exchange of experience through story telling. Discusses significance of space created for women to express where culturally not possible. Story about woman severely beaten by husband at time of march against penal code and powerful impact on GS, importance of living by example and representing common experience.

[29:40] Organisational make-up of Fórum Mulher and membership, affiliated organisations. Mentions World March of Women and election of Fórum Mulher as host of international secretariat, GS as International Coordinator.

[33:52] Describes all female staff of Fórum Mulher when joined, employing men, attitudes and challenges. Describes leadership style.

[37:18] Reflection on past ten years of directorship, political climate, reassessment of ideology, radical engagement, transformative feminist approach, more people-oriented organisation, no longer responsive to government. Describes constituency of grass roots women and girls, accommodating heterogeneity.

[42:05] Discusses country context, high number of refugees, work in provinces and explanation of power balance, local influences and limitations, local capacity relating to religion, literacy, access to information, impact of political education. Remarks on need to focus on provinces where capitalism at work, most often in areas of illiteracy and influence of Islam, therefore more resistant. Working to train key leaders in each community. Story about impact of women's leadership and political participation

training given, direct results with women become agents of change in their communities.

[48:20] Description of donor support and strategy developed for core funding. Mentions Swedish, Norwegian Dutch, Swiss donors, Oxfam Novib, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Catalan government, Flanders government. Describes donor trust in organisation's performance and significance of work carried out. Gives example of compromise made in accepting HIV related project from Global Fund for AIDS.

[53:45] Perspective on change in donor landscape since economic crisis. Discusses focus on corporations not civil society, resources channelled to private sector, growth of agribusiness projects, use of genetically modified cements risk to humans and environment. Mentions The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Japanese government, Brazilian government. Describes projects presented with the guise of beneficial community outcomes, organization invited to integrate gender in projects. Remarks that amounts to humanisation of capitalism, tea with the devil.

[1:00:07] Describes first encounter with Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). Mentions Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2012 [Rio+20], Brazilian organisation, Cidadania, Estudo, Pesquisa, Informaco e Acao (CEPIA)

Track 5 [duration: 39:10] [Session two: 4 October 2014]

[00:00] Attendance of Rio+20 as part of organizing committee of the People's Summit for Social and Environmental Justice, taking place alongside Rio+20, by invitation of World March of Women. Describes congregation of diverse social movements, focus and discussion. Mentions strong representation from labour movement.

[04:45] Discusses agenda of green economy, commodification of nature by corporations with state support. Describes feeling of empowerment witnessing mobilisation of women. Describes march organised, 80,000 people on streets of Rio de Janeiro. Discusses people power. Remarks that politicians could govern people with people's power. Mentions La Via Campesina.

[09:31] Chosen to give speech on behalf of women's movement. Describes experience of addressing 80,000 people and content of speech. Observations on solidarity, importance of empathy and place of women in shared agendas regarding capitalism and patriarchy.

[14:12] Attendance of training with CEPIA. Observations on Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) manuals, on leadership and political participation and evolving concepts of leadership.

[18:45] Reflections on achievements for women and thoughts on future, setbacks in own life. Story about being threatened by politicians because of work, 2013.

[27:30] Reflects on changes witnessed over time in women's movement, position in society, relationship with husband, raising two boys. Remarks on raising sons providing opportunity to rethink and reframe own views.

[32:35] Story about domestic violence and importance of involving police. Discusses proudest achievement as organization and women involved assuming feminist stance, 2009, difference made, importance of strong political identity.