



Maurine Sogo Hamse interviewed by Koni Benson, Crossroads, Sept. 9, 2005

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Mama Weziwe Sogo-Hamse, interviewed by Koni Benson, translation Nomakhwezi Dlaba,

September 9 2005, Old Crossroads

[This interview was done between customers at the soup kitchen she was running outside the Crossroad's clinic]

Hamse: I came to Cape Town to visit my youngest brothers.

Koni: Where did you come from?

Hamse: Eastern Cape.

Koni: When were you born?

Hamse: In the Eastern Cape. In Mantsholobe area in Centane.

Koni: What was it like growing up there?

Hamse: Life there is advanced because here you just know only one side of life. When you are in the Eastern Cape we have got tones of holidays going to the East London, the nearest town from our areas. We used to be there because our parents worked there. So you both know the city life and local (or rural) life.

Koni: So what was it like for you growing up as a girl and what were some of the things you used to do?

Hamse: Like what?

Koni: I would like to know how it was different growing up for both girls and boys.

Hamse: Girls were working with their mothers at home while boys used to take live stock out to the field and look after it. Some of them were looking after the goats and donkeys.

Koni: Where did you meet your husband?

Hamse: My husband was a sports man and I was a sports girl.

Koni: What sport?

Hamse: I was playing net ball and he was playing soccer.

Koni: At school?

Hamse: Both at school and in the township?

Koni: Where have you met? How old were you when you met?

Hamse: I think I was eighteen years old.

Koni: When did he come to Cape Town?

Hamse: I met him when he was working in Cape Town but he used to play soccer on holidays. He was in a team there?

Koni: What was the name of the soccer team?

Hamse: It was Naskates.

Koni: So then you would come to visit and that's when you met him.

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: So then you got married there?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: And you stayed with your mother still?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: And he came back?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: What was he doing?

Hamse: He was working.

Koni: What kind of work?

Hamse: He was doing tea work at Harbour.

Koni: For how long between the time that you've seen him he would come to visit you, how long it will be before you see him?

Hamse: I would see him once a year.

Koni: Did you have children there?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: How many children?

Hamse: Four.

Koni: Were they all born there?

Hamse: Two of them were born in the Eastern but the rest were born in Cape Town.

Koni: Why did you decide to come to Cape Town?

Hamse: I had a heart problem.

Koni: Couldn't you see a doctor there?

Hamse: We do have doctors in the Eastern Cape but the problem is the scarcity of transports and the town is also far from the township. The roads are also not in a good condition. Moreover, it's difficult to go to town when its raining and you can die when you are sick.

Koni: So did you come to Cape Town with your children?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: Where was your husband staying?

Hamse: He was staying at the male squatter camp in Harbour and women were not permitted to stay there. So if you come and visit they tell you that the houses are for men so you must go and look for a place to stay in the location. You are allowed to see your husbands only on weekends.

Koni: That's what you did?

Hamse: No. I asked, "Where is your wife?" "Why are you asking where my wife is she's home?" "Why can't you allow me to be with my husband because you go home after work?"

Koni: So what did they do?

Hamse: So I have just arrived from the Eastern Cape with a big truck. So I told the owner of the bakkie that I'm not going because I have come to fetch my husband. I just asked the security to move away from the gate because I have come to fetch my husband. In my husband's room there was a small bed, a chair made out of wood. So I asked from and other man where Raymond's square it. When I got to the room I took the bed spread, a rag and his clothes. When I was on my way out the boss came shouting that these premises are not for women but only for man. The man I spoke to earlier begged me to put my husband's clothes back because I was going to put them in trouble. I said to him that I'm not going to do that because these are my husband's clothes. I was staying in 139.

Koni: Where?

Hamse: At the back of 180 in Gugulethu. I took those clothes to where I was staying. I told his boss that he lives with his wife and I am living alone for years in the Eastern Cape without my husband. I'm gonna live with my husband just like you living with your family. He was shaking afraid of losing his job. My husband was also afraid of making things on intention. I threaten to call his boss because I couldn't stand the fact that we were also going to be separated in Cape Town.

Koni: Did he lose his job?

Hamse: No. I prepared for supper. My brother in-law who was staying with his girlfriend said that my husband is going to lose his job because of me. He said I can work for myself for something to eat. I do not depend on those Boers.

Koni: So what did you do?

Hamse: I started a sheebeen and sold liquor. I moved to Langa at Zone 16 after seeing that I have many customers. I also had two boys from Kofimvaba who helped me to sell Smiley (a sheep's head). We cleaned the smiley's and cooked them. His bosses asked if he had met me from Ciskei because I have a lot of politics and asked too many questions. We stayed in

Langa until my husband's job finished then he went to Transkei.

Koni: When was that?

Hamse: It was in 1979.

Koni: So how long were you in Langa?

Hamse: I stayed for a long time in Langa.

Koni: When did you come to Cape Town?

Hamse: In 1975 on February.

Koni: For how long have you stayed in Gugulethu?

Hamse: I stayed in Gugulethu from 1975 to 1977. And I stayed in Langa in 1977.

Koni: And you went back to Transkei in 1979?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: What was it like going back?

Hamse: We had to go because my husband's work was coming to an end. From home we moved to East London and he worked at Bester at ... Then from there he left the job and went to Johannesburg where he became a mine policeman. So I came back to Cape Town. He was sick and he had to come to Cape Town because his sisters were here.

Koni: So you didn't go to Jo'Burg?

Hamse: No I didn't.

Koni: You stayed in East London?

Hamse: My mother/husband was staying in East London and I was working there.

Koni: What did you do for work?

Hamse: I was an operator harnessess at Volkswagen.

Koni: So how long was he in Jo'Burg for?

Hamse: He was there from 1979 to 1981.

Koni: And he got sick after two years?

Hamse: Yes. He was there and I was in East London.

Koni: Where did you move when you came back to Cape Town?

Hamse: I moved to Old Crossroad and I built my own shack.

Koni: What was Old Crossroad like?

Hamse: It was fine in the squatter camps although I have never been in a squatter camp before. Life was different because I had to adapt myself to a bucket system, carrying a bucket of water from the tap.

Koni: Was it difficult?

Hamse: It was nice because everyone was doing it. It was not difficult.

Koni: How did you decide to build your own shack?

Hamse: There were headmen at that time. You were to consult a headman if you needed a site and he will refer you to a committee, which will find you one.

Koni: Who was the headman?

Hamse: It was Mr. Mangolwana.

Koni: Who was on the committee who took you to look for a site?

Hamse: Mr. Stuurman.

Koni: Where was it?

Hamse: In Section 1 in Old Crossroad.

Koni: What was Section 1 like?

Hamse: It was a nice and a cool area. It was nearby Noxolo School and there was not a lot of robbery at that time.

Koni: How did it compare to the other sections.

Hamse: I do not know other areas. I only know section 1.

Koni: Did you know the people living around you?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: From before or you just met them just there?

Hamse: No it was the first time. I've just met them there.

Koni: Were your children in school at that time?

Hamse: Yes and there was a nearby clinic.

Koni: How did things change? Where did you stay and how did you end up getting here?

Hamse: It's a long story. I moved there the time there was a lot of violence. People were burning other people's houses. I was selling meat on the street near Ngxobongwana's house. People segregated. Some went to Kraaifontein because there was no lower Crossroad at that time. It was just a forest and some of us were going to stay in the Unathi houses. But rumours say that the leader, Mr. Nongwe did not want people to stay in those houses because it was not a plan. Some people moved to those houses but some did not because they were afraid. Then we moved to those houses and we left that area and the rest who were there were told by Mr. Nongwe that they should go to Lower Crossroad because he is going to upgrade that area so that he could build houses for them. But it was not like that because some moved while others did not want to.

Koni: Who told them to move to Lower Crossroad?

Hamse: No one. He wanted to develop that area so that he could build them houses but it didn't happen. When the councillors told people to move to another place they did not stick to their words instead they sold the houses to other people. So the people of Crossroad are aware of that and once you order them to move they will tell you something you will never forget.

Koni: What is it like in Unathi?

Hamse: Unathi have big houses and big yards but there is a lot of robbery even though it's a small area.

Koni: Once you moved here you weren't bothered because some people say don't move there and then you moved.

Hamse: People started burning throwing stones at the houses.

Koni: So do you know people whose houses were burnt.

Hamse: No but the houses in Klipontien road were demolished and the bedroom suits and the clothes inside to the squatter camp by unknown people.

Koni: Till to this day or was it just by an unknown person.

Hamse: No, not now only at that time.

Koni: What about this women's power group? Did you hear about it?

Hamse: Yes I did.

Koni: What was it?

Hamse: Mama Ngozi can tell you about that because she was a member of the group and I was a member of the women's peace movement. We launched that organisation at Mfesane with Mr. Desmond Tutu and Mrs. Leya. I know nothing about the women's power but I know that it existed.

Koni: Does she stay around here?

Hamse: She is the lady who sent you here last week.

Koni: At that time what was the women's power doing?

Hamse: It was part of women who worked at the Municipality but at that time we worked as a women's league. We planned to go to the municipality offices but unfortunately I was not involved because my child was sick. She was at Red Cross but I was the leader of the women's league although I was not involved in decision making because my child was in hospital that time. Some of the people who were against that used to say that the women of the women's power who were lead by Morine Hamse are occupying the municipal offices. Women who went there told me that there are women of the women's power who were there before. We met them there and we had the same problem although they have separate housing issues.

Koni: So you were in the ANC women's league and they were going to the same place to talk about the same issues.

Hamse: They met them there not knowing that there are other women but the problem is that the office is one. So people would say people of the women's power who were are led by Mama Sogo were there and I was not there I was at Red Cross that time. But the people I led were with the Women's Power...I was not part of the women's power but of the Women's League.

Nomakhwezi: So they confused that on the papers?

Hamse: Yes and they were doing that on purpose.

Koni: But why?

Hamse: I'm sure they were doing it on purpose. When we are working together there must always be differences but the comrades never accepted that we must solve the problem. They used the name which they know that...

N: They put your name to say whatever they wanted.

Hamse: Something like that.

Koni: But the problem with the comrades was that they never bother to bring forward the person who wrote the article about you. This gave people a chance to blacklist one another.

Koni: So you had a bad experience with your name associated with the Women's Power?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: But why? What was the Women's Power doing?

Hamse: They don't like the Women's Power because they say that it is against politics. People in this area know nothing about politics and they associate politics with violence because there was violence in this area. They didn't have workshops to make people know what politics is. If you try to create another organisation, which will unite people the ANC, UDF, National Party to know how to resolve the area. They will take you like someone who is against their politics. The

problem is that they didn't know what politics are and the organisation, which combines these other organisations. They only believe in the ANC and not in another organisation.

Koni: Until today?

Hamse: Until today. There is another man in the dispensary who I warned that he is going to be in trouble if he form the Youth Forum because they are going to realise that he is making a difference in our politics. Skhwatsha does not ask people's problems although he is a man of a higher profile. In fact, he does not have a good approach on people. If he has a problem with you he would come straight to you and tells you what he wants you to do.

Koni: So people were afraid of the Women's Power that it was something to divide people?

Hamse: No, the leaders think that the Women's Power is going to oppose the other organisations.

Koni: Is that what they were trying to do?

Hamse: I don't know that is why I'm advising you to go to Mrs. Ngozi because they used to go to the meetings. But I can tell you about the Women's Peace Organisation if you don't mind.

Koni: What was it about?

Hamse: I will tell you why there was a surge of violence around here even in Lower Crossroad. Many people died and I had to go to Lower Crossroad because I used to live with some of them here in Section 1. We separated because of the forced removals. I asked the Black Sash to interfere when we had problems then Mrs. Ngunwayo, Skoti and Vaal Christie used to attend the meetings. Some of the houses were burnt and they approached Red Cross to supply them with food and clothes. We used to have some meetings to get them to be part of the organisation so that we can try to create peace amongst women. So we used to hold meeting with women of Crossroad at the Nyanga Presbyterian Church. Then we asked another guy from called Roman from Eastern Cape to have some workshops with us. We used to have some workshops at Mfesane [Boys Town squatter camp in Crossroads] and the aim of the workshops was to unite people because the houses by that time were demolished by people from the squatter camp. So violence was still brewing at that time. We approached women from Lower Crossroad and people from Boys Town to have a training of a First Aid. This was our first step because we wanted them to overcome the problem. Women have a spirit of resolving problems. They received First Aid certificates and after that we had meetings at Mfesane. The aims of the workshops was for women to have pre-schools, gardens and some must be involved in sewing. Pre-schools started the workshops. Mama Mene, Khangela and I started pre-schools.

Koni: Did you started pre-schools at your house?

Hamse: I started mine at my house for three months then after that I got a structure from a woman who had a pre-school. That building was set on fire then after the article that was written on the Cape Argus. That is why I'm saying that the person who wrote the story, wrote it on purpose because I heard that they sent kids to set my pre-school on fire. I met one of them and he told my child everything but he was not aware that it was my pre-school. We chose leaders in our area.

Koni: When was the creche set on fire?

Hamse: In October 1999.

Koni: So what did you do since then?

Hamse: I already applied for this one and I was still a member of the Women' League but they refute that statement saying that I'm a Nationalist Party. They called me some names.

Koni: You were part of the Women's League.

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: Who said you were part of the National Party?

Hamse: The members of the ANC the people that I'm still working with. So to persuade people not to follow me and not to listen to what she is saying is the best way of deceiving people. The best way for was to label me with names so that people could stop paying attention to what I was saying. But after that violence erupted and I stopped going to the meetings and now they've been running after my back urging me to help them because they don't know what to do. I have refused.

Koni: So you never were part of the NP?

Hamse: No.

Koni: Are you still part of the ANC?

Hamse: I am still part of the Women's League.

Koni: Do you still go to meetings as a leader?

Hamse: When I have a chance.

Koni: How did you start this container and how did you get it? What do you call it?

Hamse: I call it the container but it is under Warmer.

Koni: What is that?

Hamse: It's an organisation.

Koni: Are you part of the organisation?

Hamse: I'm a member of it.

Koni: So people come and you are here everyday?

Hamse: Everyday you'll find me here. I'm a kitchen operator and not a kitchen practitioner anymore.

Koni: Is it good to work here?

Hamse: No.

Koni: Why?

Hamse: Because I like money. I was earning a lot from the place I was working at and the problem with this one is that there's no money.

Koni: Do you get people paid to have food?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: A little bit.

Hamse: Yes because it's a project I can't charge them higher prices.

Koni: What made the women's movement just be all women not women and men?

Hamse: It was just a name because we ended up collecting ministries to get together and work with this Women's Peace Movement because it was about the peace in community. So we had to collect all the ministries around the area and form the organisation because we can't work without them. Their role is to organise peaceful movements in times violence. So if we didn't organise these ministries the campaign would not have been successful....

Koni: Did the peace movements help? Is there less violence and how has it changed?

Hamse: The violence came to the end.

Koni: What were the factors that brought the violence to the end? What else changed to make that violence reduced?

Hamse: People from Unathi didn't have a chance of coming to Section 4. The same also applied with Section 4 residences. The people of Unathi were killed by people of Section 4. Even this violence erupted amongst the youngsters. They killed each other in the dam. So after the campaign was launched the violence came to a halt. We went to the Goldstone Commission and laid the problem on the table and we had a march around Crossroad with Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu.

Koni: When was that?

Hamse: It was in 1993 if I'm not mistaken but you can get this information because I was working with them. It was NIM and Niemack [UMAC?] (NGOs).

Koni: And this woman Anne Greenwell?

Hamse: I have not seen her.

Koni: Your children are sons and daughter?

Hamse: Yes.

Koni: So how is life different for your daughters?

Hamse: There was no problem but people would say bad things to my children. The strangest thing was that they never said anything to me. They backbite me.

Koni: Even now?

Hamse: Yes. This container was operating next to the Klipfontein road because people were moving out there. Then I had to attend a funeral at home and my daughter got a message from someone who said that I should move the container because we don't know how she got there...

Koni: Did it happen in the container?

Hamse: Yes. I went to the shop and greet them. It's part of life and I'm happy to experience these problems because they keep me strong.

Koni: Do you know who your friends are?

Hamse: No and I don't think people like but I'm always refuting thought that people hate me. There are people who love me but for the sake of this areas' politics.

Nomakhwezi: They don't want to be seen with you.

Hamse: No because they believe in me claiming that I'm intelligent. They say that I think I'm clever and I can't do anything without them. But I do what I want to do like now I have applied for a site. Those who are working in the council have blocked me from getting the site and have given it to the Anglican Church. When they apply for the plumbing to the City Council they were told to come with Mrs. Soga from Themba lethu because we can't just permit you to do plumbing. My kids are afraid and sometimes when I want to inquire or pursue a matter they just told me to leave it. I also don't want my daughter to be a targeted. She's a policeman at Elsie's.

Nomakhwezi: Are they creating a conflict between you and the Anglican Church?

Hamse: I don't have the attitude to burn.

N: The same thing she was talking about is the church....

Hamse: I asked the guy why he was taking time to approve the site I have applied for. These things change my attitude and I don't want to be elected because I'm direct with people. My life is better when I'm in my house. I don't want to mix with other people. If I can be there...

Koni: You will be able to open that box...

Hamse: But women now are sick and tired and want me to be part of them because there's a lot of difference amongst them.

Koni: So what are some of the most important things about the history of this place? Am I forgetting to ask you something important? Is there something you want to add more?

Hamse: No. What is the time now because I'm going to my child's grant.