



Interview with Maria Domingo

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Interview with Maria Domingo

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Interviewee: Maria Domingo

Place: Unit H Chitungwiza

Date: December 23, 2003

Can you start off by telling me your name?

Me? My actual name? The one that I was given at birth?

Yes.

I am Maria.

Maria who?

Maria Domingo.

Where were you born?

In Moza. (Mozambique)

Where in Mozambique?

Right in Tete.

Who was your headman?

Chingaona Dzatya. We came here in 1944.

You were born in Mozambique?

I was born in Mozambique.

Did you come here when you were an adult?

I had one child.

So you were coming to join your husband?

I was coming to visit my husband and I also wanted to come and work in Harare (laughter.) Trouble started in our country. People were being caught chibharo (forced labor) way and send to mtarato (forced labor). They were supposed to spend six months there and all that time the wife was alone. So when my husband came to visit and they wanted him to go to mtarato but he refused. He said, "I cannot go to mtarato. I have just arrived from Harare." So he told me to pack our things so that we could come back to Rhodesia together. So we told our relatives that we were going to Harare. We could not stay in Mozambique where there was all that madness. That was when we came here.

How did you get to Zimbabwe?

We walked.

You walked all the way?

We walked until we got to Nyamunyaruka.

How did you get there?

Urere transport. Those free trucks. So we were on urere until Mtoko and then we got our zvitupa (identity cards).

How long were you at Mtoko waiting for zvitupa?

We were there for two days.

Were women also supposed to get zvitupa?

No. Just men. When a man was given a chitupa the wife was there also.

Okay, you mean your name was also on the husband's chitupa?

Yes. Your husband's parents as well as the wife's parents were written down on that chitupa. Headman too.

What kind of economic activities did you do at home before you came here?

We grew crops.

Which crops?

In our area we grow mhunga, cassava we have, maize, roundnuts.

Is your home close to Mtoko?

No. We are inside Mozambique. Way inside.

What is your province?

Tete. We are right inside Mozambique. If you get onto Mazowe tarred road, that will get you to our home. Our heaman is Buro and our boma Changara. That was where we paid the taxes. Even those men who were taken for mtarato they had to go to Changara.

Were women also recruited for chibharo?

No. Just men.

What were the other problems that you faced in Mozambique?

The sipai (Mozambican police)? They were trouble. You know the sipai? They are the Mozambican policemen. They were called sipai.

What language did you speak at home?

The one that I am speaking right now. It's called Chikunda. I am a Chikunda. Ufuna riini? Ndinoda kupika nzima ndije nzima. (Wha do you want to do? I want to cook and eat sadza.)

You say nzima like those people in Malawi?

Yes. Plate we call it palato. And those dishes that are made from trees we called them ndiro (just like the Shona in Zimbabwe).

Did you go to school while you were in Mozambique?

We did not go to school. There was no school.

There was no mission close by?

No. Nothing. Nobody of my age went to school. We just stayed at home and farmed. I do not even know when I was born.

How many days did it take you from Mozambique to Mtoko?

It took us two days and we were sleeping on the way and on the third day we arrived at Nyamuyaruka.

We were you walking during the day only?

Yes. We arrived at Nyamuyaruka and stayed there for some days. You know there is an office there that gives food to people. That is where we went to get some food to cook. It was free food. We got beans, nyemba (a type of beans) and a place to sleep. Then urere came and carried us to Nyasaland.

You had to go to Malawi first?

We had to go to Malawi. From Malawi the urere brought us here. We arrived at Nyamuyaruka and we went to see Jona (white official who manned the labor recruitment office at Nyamakura). He was the one who gave us food. He gave us vegetables and everything else. From Jona's we arrived at Mtoko. When we arrived at Mtoko we stayed there for a bit. Urere took us to Mtoko and then we got our zvitupa. From there we went to farms where we stayed.

So where did you go from Mtoko?

Onto the farms.

Where were you working?

The first farm that we worked on was called Mazambani.

Was that in Mrewa?

No. In Mtoko. You know a place called Nyadire?

Yes, I do.

Yes, it's close to Nyadire. So it's in that area. So we stayed there for a long time. I gave birth to all my children there.

Did you also go to work?

Yes.

What was your job?

Tobacco.

What exactly?

Harvesting the tobacco and tying the leaves into bundles. Right now I am sick. I think I have asthma. It's terrible.

Did you get that from the tobacco?

No. It's just a disease that started on its own. It's from God.

Did you also grade the tobacco?

Yes, we graded the tobacco and then tied the leaves into bundles. (Kusunga madhuku.) That was done some time in June. Around this time it would be time for weeding.

You did that too?

Of course. We were given (mugwazo) piece work.

Women were also given piece work, I thought that was just for men?

Just for men? Are you kidding me? We would get lines that were very long. From here to there (about 150 metres). Each one of us would get 10 lines.

Did you finish them?

We had to finish them and then go home. You could only go home once you had finished them.

What were you eating while you were in the fields?

We brought food from home. We brought mahewu, mupotohai (corn bread) mutakura (boiled maize) or bread. We ate that at work so that we did not have to waste time going back home to cook the afternoon meal.

Were you on the ticket (a permanent laborer)?

Yes. We were on the ticket. A woman was earning a dollar while a man earned pondo. Women did not earn much.

So was your money given to you or to your husband?

It was given mine and my husband was given his.

So what did you use yours for?

I bought clothes. I also bought pots and plates.

Did you have a school on that farm?

No. There was no school.

So where did your children go to for school?

They went to Chituwa.

Where was that?

That was where a big school was. They used to walk from the farm where we were working to that school.

So did the war start while you were working on that farm?

I was on that farm. The first war was that of Banda (the liberation struggle in Malawi). Those days everybody used to talk about Banda, Banda, Banda. Then came Samora (the liberation war in Mozambique). Then when the war was over in our country, this country was next. We came here and helped each other. So we were on the farms all that time. We lived on the farms for a very long time. Then we were chased away around this time.

You mean around this hour (7 pm)?

No. December.

In December? Who chased you away?

The comrades.

Why?

They burned down our houses in the compound.

Why?

Go away, leave. Do not stay here. Go. Go to the reserves.

Did you tell them that you were not Rhodesians?

We told them that we came from Mozambique so we did not have reserves. They insisted that we should leave. Go and live in the reserves. Why are you working for the white people? Don't you see that we are fighting to take this country away from them? You will only come back when we have freed the country and the land is yours instead of just being workers who are poorly paid. Leave. So went to the reserve. But when we got there the war became hot.

You actually went to the reserves?

Yes. What choice did we have? We saw the war while we were in the reserves.

Where exactly were you living in the reserve?

Under the sabhuku (headman).

Which sabhuku?

We were under under Kakwidzo.

In Mrewa?

Yes in mrewa.

How did you get a stand on which to stay?

We just went there and he gave us a stand to build our home.

Were you with the comrades?

Yes. And they told the sabhuku that he should give us a place to stay. They gave us a home and some fields. But did we ever stay there? We ran away. But my husband died there.

In that village?

No. He died on the farm.

On the farm?

Yes.

Was he sick?

Yes. When the war started he was already sick

So you raised the children all by yourself?

Yes. I raised the children by myself.

You never remarried?

No, I did not. Up to now I did not remarry. Why would I marry again? I was an old woman by then. What would I need from a man?

How many children did you have?

I had sons, now three have passed away so I am left with three. I also had two three girls. I had a total of nine children and now I am left with six.

So when you went to Mrewa you went with all your children?

No. They had their own houses there.

They had married?

They had long been married.

So what did you do when you told to leave the farm?

We packed our things and went to the reserves. But we did not even stay there for more than a month before the war followed us in Mrewa. War started. There was gun fire.

When war started in Mrewa it was the soldiers and the comrades who were fighting. There was a lot of gun exchange. It was quite scary. I was really afraid for my life and therefore I decided to flee, you know leave Mrewa altogether.

Where did you go to?

We were coming here. Yes, to Harare. We came to live here but some people decided to remain there in Mrewa despite the war. So we left Kakwidzo.

Where is that?

In Mrewa. That was where we had gone when the war came to the farms and the comrades forced us to leave the farms. Then the war followed us there and again we fled to here (Harare). In that battle that we ran away from there were six comrades who were killed. I am not talking about the recent war (invasion of farms) but the Chimurenga war. People used to go to the band where they brought the comrades some food and also sang and danced. So the soldiers and the police men came and dropped a bomb and six of them were killed.

Which band are you talking about?

Where the comrades lived.

Oh you mean the bases?

Yes the bases.

So how did you get in touch with the Red Cross?

We heard that the Red Cross was giving houses to the displaced people and we had our names registered.

Where were you when you heard about that?

We were living at Chirambahuyo (another squatter camp just outside Harare. This was where most of the squatters who were living at Mbare Musika were sent to because the Municipality did not want to have the responsibility of providing amenities for the refugees/squatters at Mbare Musika.)

Did you ever live at Mbare Musika?

No. I never lived at Musika.

Where did you go to when you arrived in Harare after leaving Kakwidzo's village?

I went to Zengeza (Chirambahuyo).

Did you go straight to Chirambahuyo?

Yes.

You never slept at Mbare Musika?

No. So we heard that people were registering for houses and we wondered whether we would ever get our own house. So I went and had my name written down and God gave us the house. So I was given a house. My sons were not yet married so we lived together in that house.

How many of children had not yet married?

Three. Three of them were not yet married. I was also living with my grandchildren. So we stayed here until the war was over while other people were out there in the rural areas. When the war was over we could not go back there because we did not have a home.

How about the home that you had built in Mrewa?

That was not our home. It was just a place of refuge. Besides why did we have to go back to the rural areas when we now had a home in town? We would never have thought that we, people from Mozambique, would end up having a house in a town in a country like Zimbabwe. But here we are. We had not gone to Mrewa to stay for good. The comrades had forced us to go and stay there and the sabhuku had given us a small piece of land for our stand. We were also afraid that when the owners of the stand on which we stayed came back we would be left without a home again so staying in Harare was definitely a better idea. But life was tough there. Going to the bases and all that. We were there the whole night. Pungwe!

Did you cook for them?

No, we did not cook for them. The problem is we had lived on the farms for too long.

Were the comrades coming to the farms, I mean before you left the farms for Mrewa?

They used to come without the knowledge of the murungu. They also burned down the murungu in his house.

Did you say good bye to the farm owner?

You think you would have time to say good bye under the circumstances. The murungu had a house which was underground. So when the comrades came they came to the compound and woke us up. Get up, get up. We have killed your murungu.

He had already been killed?

Not yet. We have killed your murungu. But the truth of the matter was that they had not killed him. They had fired shots at his house and they automatically thought they had killed him. He had gone down to his underground house. Wake up, let's go. "Where are we going?" "Just wake and get moving." Our murungu had given us a lot of meat for Christmas and beer too. We just left them there.

You had received that from the murungu?

Yes. That was our Christmas present from the murungu. All that meat was eaten by the dogs. (laughter). Guns were being fired all the time. Do you know that if you triggered off a bazooka here the bullet will go as far as Makoni (about 5 km away). It was hard. Even here they shot at each at Zengeza 4. The ZANLA and ZIPRA forces, Nkomo's army, they were fighting against each other, right here in Chitungwiza. We never thought we would survive that gun fire exchange. God has power.

Did you ever go back to the farm where you had been working before the war?

No. How could we go back when the murungu was sent away by the comrades.

So he eventually came out of his underground house?

He did. We were all brought together by the comrades. There were many of us. Some carried dogs while they left their babies in the house. My grandchild died in the house you know. The house in which he was sleeping was burned down before we could get him out.

Oh, I am so sorry. Couldn't you take him out?

He was with his mother. He was in the house. You see our murungu had told us to build underground houses. So when darkness was approaching The child told his mother that he wanted to sleep and she told him to go and sleep downstairs. And he went down there to sleep. Then when all the people had been taken out of the houses (by the comrades) they burned down, with that child still in the room underground. So he died. When she was running away she just remembered the child that she was still suckling and totally forgot that one who had gone underground to sleep. Then after running a little while she remembered her son and started weeping, "My child, oh my child," but it was too late. The fires were now roaring. When the fire eventually died down, she went back and found out that her son had been burned to black soot. That was at the farm. So when the comrades had left, the murungu called the police and they came and he told them that his people (workers) had been forced to leave. Soon afterwards there was a fighter plane in the air. The comrades began to say that they were going to shoot it. All the time the murungu was talking with the soldiers and telling them that they should not shoot his people. If you see any group of people huddled together, they are my people please do not kill them. He was afraid that the soldiers in the aeroplane would drop bombs on us and have us killed. So he pleaded, "Please please, do not kill my people. They are my people and they are coming from my farm. Do not fire or drop a bomb, please I beg you. So that aeroplane came and went around where we were. For sure that plane came. Yes, it came. It went round and round. They threw a search light and saw that we were just civilians and so they did not kill us. So that was how we left our murungu and went to the reserve. He was good to us. When we got there we were asked to go to the mountain where there was the comrades' base. That was the pungwe where we were singing. My son was a driver. He was one of the murungu's drivers. So my husbands was a foreman, he was a manager at that farm.

He was still alive?

No. he had died long back. He had died long back. We told them the farm was a white man's so may be the comrades were there looking for relish (they used to kill white farmers' cattle for

relish.) And now they were after my son because he was now the driver. But people defended him. They told him that he was the son of the former foreman and that he had been a very nice foreman. So they did not kill him. He lived very well with the rest of the community. So the other workers begged the comrades to not kill him. Let him go. But they told him that if he went back to work for the murungu they would kill him. He should leave and go and live in the reserve with his mother. So that was the war.

Thank you very much.