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TRANSCRIPTION

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	This is an interview with Caroline Mhlanga who has agreed to be interviewed as part of the Zenzo Nkobi Photographic Archive Project. The interview is being conducted by Mary Ndlovu and Zephaniah Nkomo on behalf of SAHA and Mafela Trust. This interview is being conducted on December 4, 2010 at Bulawayo.
MN	Carol, the first thing we wanted to ask you is just to tell us a bit about yourself, how you got into the struggle and what you were doing when you met Zenzo.
CM	I joined the struggle in 1976. It's when I came to Zambia. I met Zenzo that year when he was coming from Germany on holiday. In 1977 I went to Germany to train as a photo laboratory I.. I joined Zenzo there; he was in Germany then. That time he was doing his masters degree in photography. So from there then .. we worked together and he used to help us you know with our projects, in training whatever we didn't know, we would ask him, he was a very good helper and he made ... myself especially he made me understand photography better. I came to like it, you know, so that each time you know I saw a project I was looking at it as a picture, through him, and each time he saw whatever even passing animals or anything, he would remind you that that is a picture, that is an object. So ... that time the photography it wasn't as easy as it is now where we have these you know ama-automatic ... we used to do everything manually, but my training really wasn't in photography as such it was in photo laboratory, but we had to learn how to shoot at least. So Zenzo was very good in photography and he liked his work very much.



Speaker	Dialogue
MN	O.K. Can can you go back a little bit and tell us about his life, how he grew up, where he came from, how he came to to be in Germany
CM	That part I'm not very sure exactly, but what I... I know is that he was born in Dombodema, in Plumtree and I came to know about that really when we were back home. That's when I came to know his mother a MaDube and uZenzo was the first child of MaDube and Thomas Nkobi so ..
MN	Where did his father come from?
CM	He came from Dombodema.
MN	He was from there.
CM	He was from Plumtree. But then he left and went to South Africa and joined the ANC there. By the time I knew him he was the National Treasurer of the ANC. U Zenzo was with us in ZAPU
MN	OK So ..so Zenzo grew up in Zimbabwe, Rhodesia as it was then.
CM	Yes I should think so, because he did all his schooling here in Zimbabwe and he was a teacher here before he left for Zambia.
MN	Oh, he was a teacher.
CM	Yes, before he left for Zambia. I am not very sure when he ...and how he went to Zambia, but in Zambia he was in the publicity department.
MN	Of ..
CM	Of ZAPU
MN	O.K. And then how did he go to Germany?
CM	He should have got a scholarship through ZAPU because he was in Germany through ZAPU
MN	O.K. And that was East Germany, GDR
CM	That was East Germany, it was East Germany
ZN	Who did you meet there in Germany
CM	In 77
ZN	Who did you meet in Germany? The people that you met there in Germany.
CM	You mean ...
ZN	Either Zimbabweans or internationals.
CM	Quite a number. It's like you know, we used to go there as groups and when we left Zambia we were in a group of ten so there were five guys and five ladies; the five guys were going for work in the [inaudible]....section and we were going for this laboratory assistant, and there were other organizations like uSWAPO, you know, Umkhonto we



Speaker	Dialogue
	Sizwe, there were just a lot of us.
MN	You were together.
CM	Yes, we were together.
MN	And and but then you said you met Zenzo in Zambia, before you went to Germany
CM	That was before I went to Germany. That's when I first knew him
MN	So he used to come back to Zambia sometimes from Germany
CM	It was ...I think it was on a holiday. I don't know if he had an assignment to come and do in Zambia but he was there for a few weeks and he went back.
MN	O.K. so you ...then he went back and you found him there.
CM	I found him there yes
MN	OK did he, what was he doing then ... through the late 70's he was he coming and going to Germany or was there a time when he came to stay in Zambia?
CM	He had been staying in Zambia before he went to Germany.
MN	Right.
CM	So ... he had gone there for training. After training he came back and stayed in Zambia
MN	Do you know when that was?
CM	I think that was ... that should have been around 1979
MN	OK So before that he was going back and ...
CM	Before then he ...he..was completing his masters degree in photography.
ZN	What.. what other activities did you get involved together while you were at the publicity in Zambia?
CM	That was photography only
MN	So when did you ...
CM	We were specializing in photography. I was doing the printing part of it, you know we'd develop the negatives, print the pictures
MN	OK, so you developed some of these photographs?
CM	Yes we were developing
MN	So when did you come back to Zambia?
CM	I came in 1980.
MN	OK. So where were you working together then. When you say you were working



Speaker	Dialogue
	together with him ...
CM	In 1980 before we came to Zimbabwe. Our destination was Lusaka. From Germany we came back to Lusaka. But that was a few days after Independence
MN	O K. So the ZAPU printing was still going on
CM	People were being repatriated, so they had to have their documents, you know, prepared and they had these photographs you know stuck on their documents, their repatriation forms. So we were involved in
MN	So Zenzo was still there in Zambia
CM	Zenzo was still there in Zambia
MN	O.K.
CM	And the likes of ... this guy uMaphosa
ZN	Ben Maphosa
CM	Ben Maphosa and there was uLovett
MN	They were all working in the printing.
CM	They were all working in the printing. There were other girls you we met when we were back from Zambia like uIvy... they were being taught by uMaphosa to do the processes
MN	Oh, O.k. So whatever he print... whatever he photographed there was a capacity to actually develop and print it there within the ZAPU publicity
CM	In ZAPU publicity, there was, yes
MN	Allright
ZN	How closely did they work with Saul ¹ ?
CM	I'm not very sure of the working relationship because Saul was more of a journalist than a photographer as such, but we were all in the publicity department
MN	How were the photographs ...you`ve talked about the photographs of individuals when they were coming home they needed their photographs, but what about the other photographs of the struggle and of some of the leaders and so on ...how were they used by ZAPU?
CM	No it we used to have.... there was this magazine what did they call itZimbabwe News [prompted by ZN] Zimbabwe Review, yes, there was this magazine that was printed... was it on a monthly basis or weekly basis I can't remember, so some of the photographs were used ...

¹ Reference here is to Saul Gwakuba Ndlovu



Speaker	Dialogue
MN	They were included
CM	They were included in that magazine, yes
MN	O K. And who was that magazine targeted at? Was it targeted for people within ZAPU or for the international community or ...
CM	For the international ... for the international world
MN	O.K. So it was Zenzo's photographs that were telling the story
CM	Yes, that were telling the story
MN	To the rest of the world.
ZN	Do you have some photographs that capture scenes in the ... in the fighting front. Did you have in the publicity department people sent out to capture photographs
CM	I'm not very sure but there should have been some people who were doing that I'm not very sure. But I think that each each each group of guerrillas were coming to the front they would be having all the departments, medical department, publicity, [inadible]so I think there were photographers as well
MN	But these photographs were all taken by Zenzo himself, except for obviously those which have him in them. Or there were other photographers who were also under his instruction?
CM	I don't really know, I'm not very sure about that. But I don't think he he himself came to the front to take photographs
MN	Oh. Not in the frontline
CM	Not in the frontline, but maybe there were guys who were instructed to do that by him. He was the chief photographer
MN	Was that his title, or was that just an understanding, that he was the senior
CM	It was the understanding was it a title?
ZN	So you received photographs from various photographers that were coming in from freedom fighters assigned
CM	In my case really I didn't receive anything.
MN	By the time you were there they had gone home
CM	By the time I was there they were not there
MN	O K What can you tell us about Zenzo's family?
CM	Zenzo's family
MN	His wife and his children ..



Speaker	Dialogue
CM	Yah When Zenzo came back home, that is after Independence, his wife and the children were left back in Germany until after some time when arrangements were made for them to come to Zimbabwe.
MN	So his wife was from Germany
CM	Yes she was from Germany ...
MN	... and his children
CM	At that time uZenzo in 1980 opened himself a photographic studio and invited me to join him so we used to work together from 1980 to 1987. That's when I came to know him better ... he was very close to his people really ... All the people from Plumtree I came to know them more through Zenzo because they used to visit him a lot you know they used to visit him a lot, and he was very very helpful to his family and his home people, very very helpful and so they always came to him for advice
MN	When did he when did he move to this house in this photograph? ² [1A-02-33]
CM	That was when ...
MN	Was this immediately after independence?
CM	Newtonwest. Was this before? I'm not very sure when it was but I ... was it '80 ...? I'm not very very sure of ... but before he moved to the house he was staying in a flat in town in Manley Court ... before they bought this house
MN	They bought this house with the wife?
CM	Yah With the wife yes
MN	Edelgard?
CM	Yes
MN	And how many children did they have?
CM	They had two
MN	Just the two
CM	Two yes, Jaqueline and Tina
MN	And they lived together in this house.
CM	They lived together in this house, yes
MN	Until he died there. What year did he die, do you remember?
CM	I can't remember. By then I had left himI can't remember ... when did he die

² It was later discovered that this photograph was wrongly identified as Zenzo Nkobi's house. It belonged to someone else.



Speaker	Dialogue
MN	It was mid 90's I think, 94, 95
CM	Maybe something there ...
ZN	In the 90's?
CM	In the 90's, yes.
MN	OK this, this photograph of Zenzo, is it a good photograph? [1E-32-08] We don't know who took it I suppose, but do you think it shows him as he was?
CM	Yes, it shows him as he was... this is the Zenzo himself
MN	He looks very serious. Is that how he was, a serious person?
CM	Ah no Zenzo was ... can I say he was... he liked joking you know, he had that sense of humour you know, he used to joke you know and tease you know. I remember one time I think he was passing this joke: they were at church... the pastor was preaching and telling them to repent from their sins, otherwise they'll die and they'll go to hell and there'll be this crying and gnashing of teeth so this lady says "alas to those who have teeth", because she was very old (laughter) she got [inaudible] ... so Zenzo was somebody who would just pass such jokes
MN	And here there's a photograph of him in action. Can you just describe what he would have been doing here. Where this picture was taken.[2A-71-14]
CM	I'm not very very sure where this picture would have been taken. But the guy behind him, it's Mr Lloyd Maphosa, it's like he was carrying the equipment for Mr Zenzo who was shooting this movie, movie film.
MN	So when when was Lloyd working with him. Was this when he was in Zambia?
CM	This would have been in Zambia, this really should have been in Zambia not here, it's before independence
MN	OK So it would be in one of the camps then?
CM	I'm not very sure whether it was a camp or maybe because at times there would be some meetings with the Zimbabweans resident in Zambia maybe it ...
MN	Although this looks like a class
CM	Maybe it was.. I'm not very very sure
MN	So he was also making movie film, not just taking stills
CM	Not just taking ... Actually I didn't see him making any movies I only realize it from here because he was always carrying his camera around his neck wherever he was going.
MN	But this one it's not the same kind of camera



Speaker	Dialogue
CM	No it's not the same kind. I didn't see him any time using this one.
MN	You didn't see any film that he took, a movie film, because I was going to ask you where would they be now
CM	I didn't see any
MN	You didn't see any
MN	And then after independence, You said after independence he established a lab, a photo lab, what was he doing there?
CM	It was just a photographic studio
MN	A studio, for people coming to ...
CM	For people coming to get their photographs. It was a business they would pay for the services, and he would be invited maybe to weddings, birthday parties, graduation parties, so ... other such functions.
MN	Yah, it's clear from the photographs, we just selected a couple here that he was also doing ... no attending some public events and photographing because this one there it's at a school
CM	Yes at times he would be invited to to go and attend
MN	Was he registered as a photojournalist then?
CM	At times you know because he was so much interested in photography he would never leave his camera behind. So that maybe he would have been just invited as a guest and then seeing the scene ... and then he just took the pictures
MN	OK, but some of these, like this one, it's like an official thing with Mugabe visiting a school, the prime minister as he was then
CM	Yah, it's like you know at times like I'm saying these functions like Hillside Teacher College, every year they had their graduation ceremonies it was Zenzo, who would go there to take their photographs; he would be the official photographer
MN	So this may have been the case, at this school, they might have invited him [1C-15-01]
CM	Yes It should have been one of such things
MN	Allright, o.k. and then football, there were also some photographs of football. Did he go to football a lot [1E-26-17]
CM	Yes that time 1980 Highlanders was ... was the best team in Bulawayo so each Monday we'd be talking about football.
MN	Because he would go to the



Speaker	Dialogue
CM	Zenzo would always go you know to the ground, to take ...just for interest sake
MN	Just for interest ...He didn't act for the newspaper; he wasn't taking for the newspaper
CM	Just taking for interest sake.
MN	Just for himself. OK So he wasn't selling these photographs to anyone.
CM	No, not to anyone. At times we would complain "You're wasting money printing these pictures when there's no one going to buy" ... "Ah no it's just for interest sake; this is history"
MN	So photography was ... became his whole life
ZN	He had a vision about photography
CM	Then if he ... It's like ... even myself, each time there was a function at home I would just see myself buying a film and taking some photographs ... just in the people's, you know, it's in the blood we enjoy it you know. Even now if I look at some pictures I ask "Why did I take those pictures; now I'm so old, this time I was so young but at least you know it's history.
ZN	So do you think Zenzo by ... through these photographs he has managed to tell a story?
CM	Yes. he has told us stories, really
ZN	Better stories than others
CM	I haven't seen others' pictures
ZN	No I mean other stories. I'm talking about other stories. It's a better story really because it takes us really back to the liberation struggle
CM	Back to the liberation struggle, how everything was
MN	What.. did he continue with that laboratory, that studio, until he died or what..
CM	Because when.. I left him before he died but by then ...he had closed before he died
MN	He closed
CM	Yah, He closed
MN	And do you know what he was doing?
CM	Business was bad, yah business was bad. Really business needs management. If you are not good in business management, things go wrong.
MN	Photographers are artists; would you say he was an artist.
CM	It's ... it's a different field, yes



Speaker	Dialogue
MN	But would you describe him as an artist? With his photographs?
CM	Yes, I would, like I'm saying, you know, that is art you know; if I look at that ... if I look at that what, I don't know what I can call it ... I see a picture, a very nice picture
MN	Like this one... that's artistic ... because I know for a fact he went to teach at
CM	One time he taught at Polytech for a short time because .. teaching photography.
MN	Yes, I think he was there when he died
CM	Ok Yah, yah that time he had closed the shop.
ZN	Also while he was in Germany with Ndindah, I understand they did conduct some lectureship there
CM	Yah, I'm not very sure but I should think so because UNdindah also was really interested in photography ... like Zenzo the time I was always around
MN	Do you know what he did his Masters on. What was his particular interest for his Masters
CM	UZenzo?
MN	Yes, you said he was studying for his Masters when you got to know him in Germany. You don't know what his topic was?
CM	I only know it was photography. I don't know what in particular
MN	O.K. Anything else you want to say about Zenzo and his photography and his contribution to the struggle?
CM	I'd say you know from these pictures he left us something to look at ... the history really we are able to rewind and go back to the 1970`s when we were in Zambia
ZN	He even brings a lot of other photographs about the later years after Independence, very recent developments in the country
CM	Even during the the ... this ceasefire he used to have some pictures when Nkomo was touring these assembly points.
MN	They`re not in this collection, we didn't find them
CM	Yes, there are quite a lot of them in the assembly points ... I remember printing quite a lot of them
MN	Really. So you were doing the printing for him at his studio. Nobody was paying him to do those.
CM	Only for interest sake just to keep them because he used to have files and files of negatives and so he would just pick from any file and print as many pictures as he



Speaker	Dialogue
	would like
MN	What did he do with those when they were printed then?
CM	At times he would just distribute them to friends, because when they saw them they liked them but really he never sold them as such.
MN	So there must be quite a lot of people still keeping those photographs.
CM	You know some people they they don't value such things as such. They like the thing for now, only tomorrow they want to change; and if I want to change that picture I just throw it away and put another there
MN	Well it's fortunate that we have as much as we do of those photographs.
ZN	so we remember Zenzo for what he has left behind
CM	Very much.
MN	Thank you very much.
CM	You're welcome.



So photography became his I only know it was photography.