



Interview with Jenet Karekedu

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Interview with Jenet Karekedu

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Interviewee Jenet Karekedu

Place Seke Unit A

Date October 22, 2003

Can you start off by telling me your name?

I am Jenet Karekedu.

When did you first come to Harare?

1962.

1962 Okay where did you live?

To Msasa.

Were there many women at that time?

They were very few because women were supposed to stay in the country growing crops. Men were the ones who were supposed to stay in urban areas.

Why?

That was just the culture at that time.

Can you tell me how people lived in Harare at that time?

People had very good lives at that time. When your husband was working he actually could eat sadza and meat at work. He was also given meat to carry home together with some mealie-meal, coal and other things. You did not have to pay for electricity no rent or water bills. A bus ride from Msasa to town cost just 5 cents.

So if the worker was not paying the rent who was?

They were not paid. (Most companies paid rent for their workers and that is probably why she thinks they lived for free. Those who lived on farms and company premises stayed for free since the land belonged to the employer unlike in Harare where the house and land belonged to the Harare City Council.)

You just stayed for free?

Yes.

What about food?

They ate lunch at work and then in the morning you got a teapot of tea and some bread at work.

Were they getting rations?

They got breakfast – tea and then in the afternoon they were given sadza and some meat. They ate their supper at home.

Did they get rations like those who worked on the farm did?

No. But they gave us meat. Every Wednesday. We the wives went to get that meat.

Was Msasa a location?

No. It was a tobacco company.

What was it called?

ITC. Imperial Tobacco Company.

Was it a compound?

It was just a mission station. You know a mission station like Mt St Mary's Mission. So the people lived there. The houses were actually much better than those you would find on a farm or mine compound. The houses were made from bricks and some of them were actually painted in the interior as well as outside. On side was where those without wives stayed and the other was for married men.

What was the criteria used for assigning men a married quarter?

You had to bring your marriage certificate. You had to go to the district administrator and get married.

Were there many young children?

They were few. If you went into the city there were places where you met just white people only. Places like First Street. Manica Road and others.

So the women who lived in the married quarters did not live with their children?

They did. Some women were actually bearing children right there. There was a school. There was also a hospital and some churches. It was quite a big place.

So where did the children go to school?

At the school within the Company premises.

Just about anyone was allowed into that school?

No. It was just for the children of those who were working there.

So they requested evidence?

No. It was well known. It was just like Mt St Mary's Mission where for instance everyone would know the children of Teacher so and so.

Was it possible that you could bring your relatives' children and pass them as yours and send them to school?

I never heard that anybody did that. They wanted children whose parents lived there.

Did you see any squatters who were just lying around the city at the time that you came to Harare?

Squatters were started by the war. That was when people started running away from the rural areas and they came to stay at Mbare Musika. Some had been accused of being witches and they were meant to be killed. Some were sell outs and so they had to run away lest they be killed. That was when the squatters started during the war. They started in the 1970s until the end of the war in the 1980.

So when you came in 1962 there were no squatters?

They were very few if they were there. I never saw them though.

What did Katsekera do when there were squatters?

They burned the squatter camp. They declared a state of emergency and then they brought their dogs and tear gas at night. Soldiers also came. So that place was destroyed. The way they did it was brutal. They burned their shelters but they did not touch anybody's property.

So they asked people to remove their things?

Yes and once their belongings were outside then they burned the shelters. But if the people resisted then they just burned the shelters while their property was still in.

Were the squatters who were caught arrested?

No. The police burned their shelters so as to force them to leave. So they were told to leave. But most did not leave because they did not have anywhere to go. If you passed by in the afternoon you would find them cooking in the sun.

What was life like in the locations?

It was very tough. The state of emergency was also applied in the locations whenever the government wanted. They used to catch people. If they decided that today they are surrounding the hostels that was what they did. Once they surrounded a hostel they then went door to door and asked to see the house card and then they read out the names on the card to see if they corresponded with the number of people who were in the house. Those whose names were not on the list were arrested and taken to the police station where they were supposed to pay a fine.

When did this start?

It was in place by the time I arrived.

Even in the 1960s?

Yes. There was what they called a state of emergency.

Were they still doing that in the 1970s?

Yes. It was stopped after some time. It was usually done in the flats and in some companies.

Was it also done in Majubheki (J'oburg Lines)?

I don't know about Majubheki but certainly in Old Bricks. That was where the inspection took place. There were too many people living there. People lived with their relatives and that was not allowed.

Why?

I do not know. They had to pay a fine when they were arrested. Those who did not have money for the fine were imprisoned and the fine was \$2.

Did the men whose wives stayed in the country ever have their wives visit them in town?

They came but on very few occasions and then they went back. They came during chirimo in the dry season after they had finished harvesting.

So how did they get money to buy other needs when they were in the rural areas?

Like what?

Things like sugar and other needs?

There were no big groceries that were bought by the people who lived in the rural areas at the time. They only needed to buy some soap and they bought it back there in the rural areas. Or the husband had to take it with him when he visited.

So the husband used to visit the rural areas every month?

Not really. He went whenever he was able to go. Some preferred to send groceries and money with anyone who was going to their area or they asked the bus conductor of buses that plied their areas to deliver the parcel.

Was it possible that a husband spend 6 months without visiting his wife?

Maybe not. 6 months was a little too much. But back then people did not buy much of groceries. What was needed in the rural areas was soap and salt.

Was the wife allowed to stay with the husband when she visited?

She was allowed if her house card showed the name of the wife and children. Those who were not wanted were the other relatives. But if her husband did not have a house, you know the married accommodation, then she did not have anywhere to stay.

What happened to those who did not have a married house? Those who had married traditionally? Could they get a house?

No.

So what did they do?

Their wives lived at home. The husband was the one who used to go and see his family. The husband would go and live with his relatives and if he was caught he then paid \$2 (as fine). But women stayed in the rural areas.

So what did they do when they visited their husbands in the dry season?

Nothing.

So they just stayed at home in the countryside?

Yes. Sometimes men could ask a relative or a friend to house their wives when they visited. That way the wife did not have to stay in the hostels where the husband lived.

It was dangerous to have their wives in the hostels because police could raid the hostels anytime and also men shared the hostels sometimes up to six in one room. So there was always fear that the wife could get sexual advances from the room mates or from any other man staying in the hostels. But for those whose husbands had houses in the married quarter section they could just stay. It was no problem. But when they come for the brief periods during the dry season they spend the day home doing "nothing." There were no jobs for women. Most women did not work. Women started working in the 1970s. Whenever men saw any married woman who went to work they called her a prostitute. They wanted married women to stay at home. Most white employers did not want to employ women even as nannies or cooks.

Why were men against women's employment?

I don't know. But they were totally against married women who worked. She was called a prostitute simply because she was going to work to support her family.

Just because she was going to work?

Yes.

But did most fathers in the countryside give their daughter permission to work in the urban centers?

There were fathers, brothers, husbands chiefs and many other groups of men who were against the presence of women at work places.

What about those women who had not yet been married?

Those were the ones who went to work. Also those women who had been divorced or widowed. They went to work to look after their children. What could their fathers and brothers say when they said they were going to work so that they could send their children to school? If they said no then she would just say give me the money then. And they did not have the money to give her.

What kind of jobs did they do?

They worked in flats and some worked in stores in town while some worked in the suburbs.

What jobs did they have in stores?

They sold stuff in the stores. Whatever was sold there. They also swept in the stores and packed the clothes on the shelves.

Did women have to come to Harare during school holidays?

They just came during the dry season and went back. Usually the husband went to see his family during the Christmas break because they got about two weeks off work until New Year. It was also not possible for the wives to go to Harare then because there was work in the fields. The crops needed weeding in December so it did not make sense to go to town.

Did they stay for long during the dry season?

For a short while. If the husband did not have a house the wife simply stayed at home. She did not come to Harare at all.

Where there people who unlawfully lived with their relatives in areas like Majubheki and Old Bricks?

Yes and they were arrested. The other area was Mabvuku (Location). I heard about the state of emergency being applied in Mabvuku.

What happened?

They were arrested in the middle of night. Some people had to sleep in the bush to avoid being arrested.

Why?

Once they had heard that the inspection is starting from that side of Mabvuku they spent up to a month sleeping in the bush. They had to carry their blankets out to the bush and sleep there. They then came back when it was daylight.

Why did people want to stay with their relatives? Why didn't they stay on their own?

Because they did not have houses. Places like Old Tafara and New Mabvuku were given to people freely as long as they had marriage certificates. Once houses were built they were given out to people. But they were never enough. There were way too many people already for the houses that were being built. Demand could never be met. The other thing was that many people who were new in town were coming to look for a job and therefore they did not have the money to pay rent even for a room. Most people started off staying with a relation and they stayed on for two or three months after getting a job so that they can save money to buy their own blankets, a bed and other things like pots and plates. Some relatives who had space wanted to stay with such relatives because it reduced the burden of paying rent as they shared it with the newcomer.

Was the Musika already there when you arrived in 1962?

It was already there.

Was that where buses ended?

Yes.

Was it built like it is now?

No. It was not built. It was dust all over. The whole place was not paved. There was grass and huge trees. It was not as nice as it is today. The road was not tarred.

What about the musika (market)?

The market was there.

Was it as big as it is now?

No. Now there are too many areas of specialty at the Musika. For instance there is that area called varimi (farmers) where lorried from the producers off load the produce. Those stop selling at 10 am. They are the ones who sell to vendors. But all those places were not there. They are a recent development. People in the countryside did not grow crops as much as they do now and not that many people were eating all those traditional foodstuffs from the countryside because bread was still cheap.

So what was Musika used for?

It was just a bus stop. There was very little selling.

Did people eat vegetables?

Yes, but they were not much.

Where did you get them?

People just bought them from each other. There was not yet a system whereby people went to Musika to order vegetables for sale. There were no places where selling took place.

So where did people get vegetables for sale?

People just grew the vegetables and sold them. If I had more than enough then I sold the vegetables to others. Even in areas like Majubheki and National they grew their own vegetables.

When did the sale of vegetables begin?

As time went on. Recently actually. But that was before the end of the war.

So when did Makoronyera (literary those who cheat. It was another section of the Mbare Musika market) begin?

I do not remember the exact time but that was before the end of the war.

Why was it given that name?

It was because there were many tsotsis who were operating from that area. The growers usually did not have the power to determine the price. The makoronyera wanted to buy the vegetables on their own terms.

Who gave the place that name?

I think that there was one person who started it and then it became the name.

I was wondering because when I was reading City Council records that name is there.

Yes, it was there.

What about the varimi area?

That was established after independence.

What was there before independence?

It think it was just a bus stop. There was no tarred road.

Why is it called varimi?

It's because lorries go there from Mtoko, Mrewa and other areas to off load buckets of tomatoes, and vegetables. That is where vendors go to buy vegetables and other produce for sale.

What do they do at Makoronyera?

They just sell but you do not get good prices for your produce. They cheat farmers. There are three places there. Makoronyera, Varimi and Musika. Musika is that area you see as you get into that space as you are coming from the bus stop.

What about that area where there are carvings and clay pots and other hand made and traditional things?

That is another musika. That is where the Musika started actually. That was where they sold vegetables. Then they built the one where there is makoronyera and those vegetable vendors were moved to that place.

Did people grow crops along the Mukuvisi River before the war?

Yes they did. They only stopped when Sunningdale was built.

When was Sunningdale built?

I do not remember but they began building in the 1980s.

So people grew crops along the Mukuvisi?

Yes.

Was that allowed?

No. It was illegal and most of the time the crops were destroyed by the City Council but people never stopped growing. Sometimes they were lucky and the City Council did not destroy the crops and so they were able to harvest their crops sometimes even earing corn on the cobs without having to buy it.

Did the people continue growing crops during the war?

Yes.

Wasn't that problematic because of the squatters since they could steal the crops?

Squatters were largely right at Musika. At that time there were no bus shelters like there are today. Even close to the Dairy there was no bus terminus. But right now all that area is a bus terminus.

Where is the Dairy?

It's down there, as you look towards the East, towards the Hostels. So what these people did was that they just got off the bus and then they made sure that the spot that they had chosen was not on the road for buses and they stayed there. During the day they pulled it down and folded their plastic and then in the evening they pulled the plastic up again. They always stayed right by their property. So all their property was out in the open during the day. It was a lot of work pitching up the chikweshe in the evening and then pulling it down in the morning every day!

Didn't these people have relatives?

They had come from their homes and so they did not have relatives.

But some went and stayed with relatives?

I am not sure about that. I only know those who went to stay at Mbare Musika and then later on the City Council took them to Chirambahuyo where they gave them stands. At that time it was still Salisbury City Council. Then at Chikwanha they were told to build more permanent shelters. They were then given house numbers just so that it would be easy when the time came to give them houses. They also had toilets which were built by the City Council. But they were told not to build too permanent houses because they were not going to stay there for good. When they got there they were told to build their houses in plastic, pole and dagga. However some of the people ignored the instructions and built very beautiful houses anyway. I think they spent about two years there while houses were being built at Seke Units O, N and P.

The two-roomed houses were built in the 1970s?

I can't remember the exact year but it was during the war. All the houses were built at the same time and when they finished the squatters just took their number and looked for a house with the same number. When people moved into those houses the toilets at Chirambahuyo were destroyed and the bathroom and water taps were pulled out.

Did the people grow crops at Chirambahuyo?

They did but to a very small extent. It was just so that they would get corn on the cob but not for mealie-meal. They had to buy mealie-meal.

Where did they get the money since they were not working?

I do not know really. I don't know how they survived. Even up to this day the people in that area do not work. So what they then did was build a line of rooms on their stands and they are renting

out the rooms. So they are surviving from renting out those rooms. Those who could not extend their houses could not afford town life and so they sold their houses and went back home.

So these people had their homes and when the war was over they did not want to go back?

Some ran away because they had been sell outs. They could not go back to face the families of the people who were killed because of them. They could go back to face very angry people who wanted to kill them. If they wanted to go to the rural areas they looked for resettlement areas elsewhere.

So where all the people at Mbare Musika sent to Chirambahuyo?

The thing is that they never really finished taking them all to Chirambahuyo. Some refused to go or they were taken there but came back the very same day. Thing is up to this day people still stay at Mbare. When some were removed new ones came. Some had built tangwenas (shacks) at Churu Farm.

Where were they coming from?

From all over Harare. People had this mentality that people who had been squatters during the war ended up getting houses because they had been squatters. So some men would leave their wives here while they went to be squatters at Churu Farm. Some of the people had houses already but they hoped to get a second house by doing that. That was just a way of getting free houses. These were different from those who lived at Mbare Musika during the war. People had seen that the government was in the habit of giving houses to people who lived in tangwenas and that is why they went to live at Churu Farm.

Who gave these structure that name – tangwena?

I do not know.

Did it mean just one shack or a place where so many such shacks were?

I think it is a name given to one shack.

Did people who had children but lived in tangwenas send their children to school?

I do not think so. They just sat at home. Many people were killed. You could be walking and someone just stabbed you at Mbare Musika. That happened without provocation.

Why?

I do not know. But I think one of the factors was beer. Such a place with so many people would obviously end up with people brewing bad beer like kachasu and chikokiyana (illegal home distilled spirits with up to 70% alcohol content). Where there are so many people they end up brewing that beer. Or they would play njuga (cards for money). The one who was beaten would follow the winner and kill him to get his money back. Njuga was not allowed. If they had been caught by the police playing njuga they could have been arrested. If you beat a group of people you were playing with at the card game they followed you home afterwards intending to rob you along the way. You know many men would not let themselves robbed without putting up a fight.

In the process you got killed. Sometimes the intention was not kill you but when they resisted they might end up getting killed.

What did the police do?

They just picked up the body and buried it.

Why did the Smith government allow so many people to stay at Musika when they did not allow squatters in the first place?

They did not allow them as such. There was nothing they could do and that is why they build houses for those people.

Did the Smith government build houses for the squatters?

I do not know those but it is possible that they did.

Do you have any idea where the New Lines were built?

The New Lines? Those houses in the durawall? Those were built by the time that I got there. Those were the houses that were built after the Old Bricks had been pulled down. All that area between the Musika and the Hostels was where the Old Bricks were. They were later destroyed.

Why?

They were not nice houses. There was also a big problem of bed bugs. One room had four beds. But then it was not just four people who slept there. You and your husband would sleep on the bed and your sister and her husband under the bed. Because there so many people per room it was so easy to spread bed bugs.

All those couples slept in one room?

Yes. And you would use the space in between the beds to cook. After cooking you pushed your pots under the bed. Then beds were actually bumping into each other. When you got off the bed you almost could not get a place to put ypur feet as you wanted to go to the toilet because other people were sleeping on the floor. They saw that people might die of disease and so they built Mufakose Township. The people who were removed from Old Bricks were then taken to Mufakose. A few people found housing in Majubheki and they remained there. Most of the people in Mufakose came from the Old Bricks.

So how did squatters survive?

There was very little of selling going so I am not really sure what people survived on.

Were there any donors who helped these people?

I have no idea.

Where were you living at that time, I mean in the 1970s?

I was living in Msasa. I lived in Msasa until 1972.

So there were a lot of squatters living at Musika when you were now living in Mbare?

No. I lived in Mabvuku.

You once stayed in Mabvuku?

Yes. I was living there when I was working in the suburbs.

Was your murungu paying your rent?

No. I paid on my own.

Whom were you renting from?

Just other people.

Where were you working?

In Greendale.

Were you a cook?

No. I was the housekeeper.

Was the murungu good to you?

Back then we cannot really say that things were bad. Because if you earned \$14 and then also received meat 3 times a week, and then 20 kg of mealie-meal, a tin of jam every week. Mealie-meal was 20 kg per week. Then you got your pay and food you ate from that house. It was a lot such that we gave our relatives some of the food.

When exactly did many women start working?

In the 1980s. There was high increase in the 1980s but jobs were hard to come by. By then many men were not so much against the presence of women in towns. Many people were working in the flats and suburbs at that time. In the 1970s there were few women working. Women were against the idea of working. One person could work for 7 people because the varungu could not find workers. Women refused to go and work. Even those who were not yet married did not want to go and work.

When did you start living in Majubheki?

In 1976.

By then there were many squatters at Mbare Musika?

Yes. They occupied all that Musika area up to the soccer ground along the Mukuvisi. River. With time there were many more squatters. They kept coming

Did they get along with people who lived in Mbare?

There was a lot of fighting and many people died.

Was that against people who lived in the Mbare residential area?

I am not too sure, it could be, it could also be amongst the squatters themselves. We just used to hear people fighting while we were sleeping at night. Then we would also hear that the police picked a dead body the following day.

So they just buried him without knowing who he was?

Sometimes he was identified by his relatives and then buried after that. But they would not know who killed him.

So there was no bad blood between the squatters and those who lived in Mbare?

Not really. But it is bad for a town to have squatters. Squatters are not good people. They are short tempered and they fight a lot. But it was largely men who fought, not women. Women began to increase in Harare recently (during the war) because women stayed in the rural areas. The Zezuru especially believed their wives should stay at home. The Zezuru also did not think about having a house in town. It was only those people from Malawi who had houses in town. If you found a Zezuru with a house, they lived in hostels and yet there were no visitors allowed in the hostels. Nobody could knock on those doors (to the hostels rooms) because no visitors were allowed in. For instance the majority of house owners in Kambuzuma and Mufakose residential areas are from Malawi. That's true. Mbare has the highest number of immigrant house owners. In Kambuzuma and Mufakose people refused to get houses there [probably because it was too far from work and workers would have to pay for buses. Most people know that many house owners in Mbare are from Malawi but few know that the same is with Kambuzuma and Mufakose. All the matanyeras (men who cleaned the toilets) who worked for the City Council, the street sweepers, and those who worked at the Railways were all from Malawi and they got houses there.

The war was what made the Zezuru like houses, or allow their wives to live, in Harare. Those who ended up living in Mufakose and Kambuzuma also came from the Old Bricks. People like my brother in-law, the one who married my sister, lived in Old Bricks in the late 1960s. They had their first two children in the Old Brick and then when it was pulled down they moved to Majubheki while the rest of the people were resettled in Mufakose and Kambuzuma.

Did he refuse to go to Mufakose?

No. He was lucky to get a house in Majubheki.

Did he go to look for it himself?

No. He was told to go and live there. The City Council would approach you and tell you that you should go and live there because that is where your house now is. When all the people were moved the houses were pulled down and the place was leveled out. Up to this day that place doesn't have any houses built in that area.

So it was the war that made many women come to live in Harare?

Yes and children too. Once they got used to living here they do not want to go back home again. Those who lived at Mbare Musika and then were later given houses in Chitungwiza never went back home. People are now so used to town life. People were given travel warrants to pay for

their fares home but they refused. They were now used to staying in town. It was during those days when squatters were living at Mbare Musika that people started vending as the squatters were thinking of ways of making their families survive.

Who were they selling to?

People from Majubheki who had come to Musika to buy vegetables and also people who were boarding buses to rural areas. And then lorries started coming from Mtoko and Mrewa bringing mangoes, tomatoes and other crops. It was especially mango that many residents wanted because many could grow vegetables on their stands. From there onwards vending was on the increase.

What did married men whose husbands did not have accommodation do when their wives ran away from the war torn country?

Those were some of the people who ended up living at Musika. The husband sometimes ended up leaving their rented premises and went to stay at Musika with his family. So the wife would spend the day looking after their belongings at Mbare Musika. The good thing about this was that it made it possible for them to get houses. They got houses in Units N, O and P. The men usually had to leave the houses where they rented rooms and go and live at Musika because the landlords did not allow the men to bring their families as the people were too many. But when they became squatters they never anticipated that they would ever get houses. They were squatters because of the war situation. But when other people who worked in Harare but did not have houses saw that they decided to become squatters at Churu Farm in the 1980s. They were hoping that they would get houses just like the war-time squatters.

When did people go to occupy Churu Farm?

I do not quite remember. That was Sithole's farm. Those people in Hatcliffe came from Churu Farm.

Where was Churu Farm?

It was close to Glen View. You went past Glen View a little bit and that where it was. I know where it is because I once went there and I actually got a stand of my own. That was in the 1990s. At that time my husband and I were renting a room in Unit A, Chitungwiza. I went to Churu Farm and I got my own stand and we used to pay rent I also had a toilet dug out. Some had actually built tangwenas there and they were living there with their relatives. But the thing is that you were supposed to found there by the 'state of emergency' and then they burned the tangwena and told you where your new house was going to be. So there was nobody on my stand, just a toilet hole. So I did not get a house. The other people I had been with were the ones who told me after a week. They asked me where I had been hiding when other people were being given stands and I told them that I had been home. So people were moved into four-roomed houses that were made from planks. It was those four rooms which were later pulled down as people built proper houses. But I am sure that those who could not afford still have those louver houses.

How long did you stay at Churu Farm?

By the time I went to get a stand there, there were people who had already spend one year there.

Who was giving the stands?

We went to Sithole and our names were written down and we paid a rent of \$30 per month.

Did you pay for the whole year?

No. Just that dry season. Some people had been paying for a longer time though. When I got the stand I paid rent for two months and had a pit toilet dug. So I was just waiting to have my tangwena made and once it was up I would have gone to stay there. I wanted the 'state of emergency' to be implemented with me already there so that I would get a room number. But when I was away the tangwenas were burned and people got house numbers and went to live in Hatcliffe. So my friend, who had invited me to go to Churu Farm was the one who came back and told me that their tangwenas had been burned and that they had been given four-roomed plank louver houses by the government in Hatcliffe. She told me that when they came to my stand they asked where the owner was and they were told that I was away and so I did not get a house number.

Who built those houses?

By the time they went to remove them from Churu they had had a meeting and decided that they wanted to remove the squatters. So they built four-roomed plank louver houses as they were faster and cheaper to build so that the government would remove the squatters who were living there illegally. They were seen as a health hazard and also that it was going to be embarrassing in the event that some people from other countries came to visit and found people living in tangwenas in an independent country. They would wonder what was going on. So that was how people got houses in Hatcliffe.

When you were living in Mbare in the 1970s were there any people who were looking after relatives who ran away from the war?

There must have been because I know my sister who lived in Majubheki was looking after her husband's relatives, two girls who had ran away from the war.

So did they do anything to help the host family raise money for food since there were so many people?

They bought apples, oranges and other fruits and sold them. They also sold sadza in the industries from 1972.

Was that allowed?

They were never stopped from selling. They just carried their dishes of sadza on their heads, walked to the industries and sold the sadza to the workers.

Where was it cooked?

At home.

Did they stay there until the war was over?

Yes. They never went back to their rural homes even after the war. While they were staying in Harare they met some men and fell in love with them and they were married right here in Harare. So when they went back to their rural home it was just to visit their parents.

Why did they run away?

The auxiliaries wanted to abduct them. To take them away so that they become Muzorewa's soldiers.

Was there any call-up in Mbare? Do you know what call-up is?

No. What was it?

It was whereby Smith's government forced young men over the age of 18 to join the Rhodesian army.

I heard some stories with reference to that. Many young men were told to join the army in 1977, 78 and 1979. There was a young man who lived in Mbare who was called-up. He is now living in Mutare. He was forced to join the army and he became a soldier for at least a year. They went for training and after training they were sent out to the war front for about six to eight months where they were fighting. After that they came home. If you were unfortunate you could be asked to go again. I don't know why they wanted young men who were educated or employed when there so many young people idling around who would gladly have joined the military.

Why did they have to do a call-up when there were so many people who were unemployed?

Call-up was for people who had just finished school or some course. So they could not recruit just about anyone. The government made it in such a way that no company could employ you before you had done the call-up. It was crazy.

Do you think that there were any squatters who were called for call-up?

I don't think so unless it was somebody who had been at school (secondary school) or something like that. But most of the squatters were people who were coming from the rural areas and were, therefore, not recruited. I guess they wanted people who could read. But who needs education to hold a gun?

Was that Smith's or Muzorewa's army? When was that?

I am not sure but in the 1970s. I think it was about 1977 or 1978. There were other young women who were taken by the guerillas. So both sides were doing that. I know one girl who was a neighbor to my sister's. She was recruited to join the ZANLA guerillas.

Where did they get her?

In Mbare. They used to go from house to house recruiting people for the war. So she was told to pack her bags and they would come and get her the following evening at Marowa shopping center. She, however, ran away because she did not want to go. So the people who were recruiting for ZANU came and asked her mother where her daughters were and she told them that she did not know.

So comrades also got into town?

Nothing could stop them. If they wanted to go into town they got somebody else's identity card and then they went around with a false identity and calling themselves by the name on that identity card. The identity cards did not have pictures back then. They could actually come across the police and greet each other without them ever knowing. They could go anywhere in town.

Did they get in with their guns?

No they hid their guns before going into town. There were a lot of kids that left for training when we were living in Msasa (Harare). They were going for training in Mozambique. We do not know where some people were waiting for them so that they would take them to the training camp in Mozambique. They used to leave at night. They went and trained and came back to fight and some of them came back when the war was over. Some of them left at their own free will because they wanted to liberate the country while some were forced to go. On the one hand some went because they wanted to revenge their fathers or some other relative who had been killed by the government's soldiers while on the other hand some joined the government forces because their family had been killed by the comrades.

So they (comrades) did not recruit among the squatters?

No. Squatters were fathers, mothers and largely young children. Those were not recruited for fighting. The young ones among the squatters were not recruited either. Even if they had tried recruiting from among the squatter youth I don't think that they would have gone because they had seen the war and they ran away from it. Even for those who were in the houses they had a certain way of communicating because when a son disappeared nobody really knew when and where. They never used to knock and ask for permission to take the son with them. He just went missing. It was a secret. I don't know how they conducted each other. But they went to fight and they were later seen during the ceasefire when the war was over.

Where were you when the BP Shell petroleum tanks burned in Harare?

I was living in Mbare.

What really happened?

Everybody was asleep I think it was around 9 pm. Then we heard a huge sound and everybody got out to see what was going on. We thought that the war was now in Harare. Where were the people going to run to now? When we went outside we saw a huge ball of fire which was so frightening. Many of the houses in National were covered in smoke. It burned for three days. But I don't think that the petrol tanks were bombed but just the oil.

Did people eventually know what had happened?

We just thought that the tanks had been bombed. Maybe someone who was on a hill shot at the tanks.

Did people know what happened? Was it on the news?

They did not have to say it on the news. We could see for ourselves. People started walking away from Mbare going in the Chitungwiza direction. We walked and crossed Mukuvisi River. Many people were running away some of the children were carried on bicycles. No-one thought of getting blankets or anything like that, but just getting children and running away. Nobody wants to die. The whole area was lighted by the fire coming from the burning oil. All those houses along Beatrice Road became dark with soot from the burning oil and all that area in Nazareth too. Even those squatters at Musika must also have run away. There were different kinds of people among the squatters. Some ran away from home because they wanted to be killed. They would be warned that they were on 'death row' for that night and they left that evening and walked the whole night away from lion's jaw. By the time the comrades came to kill them that person or people at night they were already gone.

Didn't they then harass the relatives?

No. Even if it was you who was on 'death row' and you ran away, the issue did not spill over to your father and mother. If they didn't find you that was it. But if he had a son who was a policeman he was told to go and fetch him or else they killed him. Or a son who was a soldier. They wanted to kill such people because they were supporting the whites. Such people would end up running away. Then there were chimbwido girls. No-one could say she didn't want to be chimbwido. They killed you. But those who escaped were lucky. As for participation in the war there was no negotiation. You were just told you are going to do this and if you refused they killed you. If they came to your house and asked for blankets, you just gave them sometimes at your expense. You were left with no blankets for you or your family. If they said they said they wanted chickens you had to kill them and give them. If you didn't have any you had to go and buy them.

Where were you during the war?

I was here in Harare. But I used to go home and came back within a few days. I used to go home to check on my parents. But all the same we used to come across some fighting. I remember one day we went home and the following day we were on our way back because a battle had taken place close to our home. One day when we were going to the bus stop we ran into an army truck that was full of soldiers who were telling people to remove all the soil and stones that had been put into the dip tank so that it wouldn't function. I went to our rural home and the night we arrived the cattle-dip was covered. The following day the soldiers came and they told people to remove all the soil and stones from the dip. But we did not wait for that. We ran away. After they were done removing the soil they were beaten. They were beaten up by the soldiers for one week. During the war the soldiers could tell you to do something and when the comrades came they beat you up for doing it. Or the comrades would tell you to do something like disabling the dip tanks and when the soldiers came they beat you up for doing that. People did not know who to listen because either way they could be in trouble.

Do you know any young men or women who ran away from your village?

There was one boy called Shadreck who ran away early in the war. He was beaten by the soldiers and he ran away to Harare where he stayed with his mother who was now married to another man who had a house in town. The other person who ran away and became a refugee was Tecla. She never went back.

Where was she living?

She got employed at Machipisa's Nhekairo and she was living in National. Then she got married and went to live in Domboshava.

Who was she living with in National?

She was renting a room.

She just came from the rural areas and started renting a room?

No. Initially she lived at my sister's house for some weeks. At that time she could hardly sit.

Why was that?

She had been beaten by the soldiers. She had so many bruises and her legs had lines where blood had coagulated from soldiers' beatings.

Why was she beaten?

The soldiers came and told her that given her age she must be a chimbwido and therefore she should tell them where the magandanga were.

Where did they find her?

Close to the bus stop but in the bush where she was eating wild fruits. It was during the day. They called her and asked her to tell where the comrades were and she said she did not know and they started beating her. She could not walk. She had to go to the hospital. Soldiers were not good people. When they approached you they simply asked where they were without saying who "were" was referring to. Some of the white people often asked, "Upi lo gandanga" That was the little Ndebele that they had mastered and they used it even among the Shona.

So where did she get money for the bus fare?

Her father gave her. He was still alive. He wanted Tcla to run away. But she did not know anyone in town except my sister in Majubheki (Mbare). So that's where she headed. She went there simply because we knew each as we came from the same village. When she was feeling better she went to a certain businessman from Wedza who had stores at Mbare Musika. She told him that she came from Wedza and asked whether he could give her a job. That was how she got a job and later on she met her husband in Harare and got married. Then she moved to Chishawasha.

Who else came to town like that?

Some persevered. They stayed on in the rural areas and some died there. Mai Chisango and mai Munashe's children stayed on and they died. They were shot by the soldiers.

Were there no thieves among the squatters?

That was the reason why people ended up fighting. But I must say that they were not that many. It was the coming of the squatters that increased the number of thieves and they have been forever increasing since that time.

Before that there were no thieves?

No. Thieves came because of many people who were now living at Mbare and after that many people who were coming to board the buses.

What else was sold besides leafy greens and tomatoes?

Sugar cane and mangoes. People also used to sell chickens at Musika. I do not know whether they stopped. I think they are still selling.

Where did they get them during the war?

Some brought them from the rural areas. Up to this day, people still bring chickens from the rural areas and they sell to vendors at Musika.

What else was happening in the 1970s?

About squatters?

Or even other people's lives in general?

Life was good in those days.

Even though there were those night raids?

Yes. Those raids were bad. Most of the time the raids took place around 1 am. Suddenly the door was ajar. You did not even ask who it was because you knew from the way the door was opened. Forcefully. Then you looked for your clothes and got dressed and then opened the door. They got in with their police dogs. They looked everywhere.

They entered the house with the police dog?

Yes. But they were on a leash. You could not run away or else you would die. If you tried to run the dogs would be on you and they could maul a piece of flesh from your thigh and the police wouldn't care. He would just release the leash and will come after you because you would have tried to run away. So people did not run away. They went outside the house and left the police looking everywhere including under the sofas and the bed. When they did not find anybody hiding under furniture they asked for the card for the house and started reading out the names on the card. If your name was not on that card they took you in custody. The following your relative had to the police custody with a fine. If you did not have a fine they took that person to jail.

Were there any other ways that you could use just so that you could stay in the city even though you were not on the card?

In Msasa they gave you permission – 7 days. Once you had that letter you could stay.

They did not do that in Majubheki?

No.

So there were no 7 day permits in Majubheki?

They did not arrest people in Majubheki but in Mabvuku. They used to arrest people in the hostels, not in the houses. By the time I went to live in Mabvuku they were not arresting people any more. In the hostels they still did though. They were trying to stop women from entering the hostels as they were men only places.

Why did they stop women from entering when their husbands lived there?

It was for men only. They lived in large numbers in the same room. There could be 4 or 5 people in one room.

Were there any hostels for women?

It's still there today. It's called Paget House.

When was it built?

I don't know. I found it there.

When was that?

When I first came to Harare in 1962 it was already there but it was for women who were working. That is those who 'did not have husbands.' No children or men were allowed inside. It was just the tenant who was allowed in.

Does that mean that working women had trouble finding accommodation?

They stayed in that hostel. They were two women to a room. There was no accommodation for single women.

Was it full?

No. There were rooms which did not have people. Each one had a card with which she used to pay rent at the Municipality.

How much did you pay?

\$11 – in the 1980s. No-one who did not live there was allowed inside. Not even babies. If you had a baby you had to look for a place to breast feed him. There was a policeman who guarded the building. He stayed by the entrance making sure that no man got in. If a relative came for you, there were loudspeakers. Someone at the reception announced through those loudspeakers. So and so in Room number so and so you are wanted outside by this relative of yours. Then you came down. Sometimes you would go up there, it's storey building you know. So you went down the staircase and saw your relatives outside. If you wanted to cook some sadza they had to eat from the hall. You cooked the sadza and called them into the hall. After eating you would sit down and talk and thereafter they left. They did not sleep there. They did not enter the building. If you tried to sneak anybody in other people would report you.

So if you had relatives who ran away from the war you would not be able to look after them?

Nobody would even try to go there for accommodation. The kitchen is downstairs.

Did you keep your utensils in your room?

Yes. I also kept some of your staff there. But each person also had a compartment in the cupboard where you could keep some of your staff. That was where you left your mealie-meal, pots and other things but the rest you had to put them in the house.

Where there any churches that helped the squatters?

I do not know about that.

Where is St Peter?

It's close to the fottball ground. There is Old St Peters at Mbare and then new St Peters in National.

There are records that indicate that St Peters helped those squatters. Then there is also a hostel, I cannot remember its name which had a huge kitchen on the ground floor.

Isn't that Paget?

No its not. But it was a hostel with a kitchen on the ground floor.

Where is that?

I am not too sure about that history.

What were you saying about identity cards?

Tha magandangas could get anybody's identity card and used it to travel. They did not have a picture.

When did women begin to have identity cards?

Around 1976.

Was it possible f or the same person to have two identity cards?

Yes, that was possible. Even during ceasefire those who had two identity cards gave one to a gandanga who was living in his mother's house because not all the magandanga went to ceasefire when the war ended. They did not go to the assembly points. They were afraid that if they all went to the assembly points they could be attacked there and all of them would die without anybody to fight (for ZANU).

Did the identity cards have prints?

I don't remember all that. What I remember are the pictures.

So by then women had to move around with identity cards?

People never really went anywhere with them. Trouble came when you came across a road block. They asked for your identity cards and you would be in trouble if you did not have it. They could arrest you.

At the road block?

Yes. Your relatives had to bring the fine.

So even women were now required to have identity cards? It was largely because they suspected those without identity cards.

Thank you mama.