

CCAC interview with Thozama on 2023/02/21 at Thozama's house - transcript

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Project Name: Thozama

Date of interview: 21/02/2023

Location of interview: Thozama's home

Language/s of interview: English

Length of interview: 0:36:12

Interviewer name (and acronym): Thina Miya (NTM)

Interviewee name (and acronym): Thozama (T)

Name of translator, if applicable: Buntu Makhedama

Name of transcriber: Buntu Makhedama

Notes on access and use, if applicable: The English translation of each answer is written in **bold** under the vernacular version of the answer. If the phrase was said in English, the text is incorporated into the original vernacular text in ***bold italics***.

Mode of interview: In person

Number of recordings: 1

Audio file name(s) of interview: CCAC_Int_Thozama_Backup_20230221_otter_ai

List of acronyms: NTM (Thina Miya), HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), TB (Tuberculosis)

[START OF AUDIO RECORDING: 0:08:41]

NTM: Okay, uhm. Start of the interview. How did you start being a body mapping artist?

T: I fell pregnant in 2000 right?

NTM: Ah huh.

T: So, in 2001 I was pregnant and gave birth in...April. Then we attended the support group. So, there (in the support group) white people would come and give us something. So, another one came and told us about making body maps, and we did them. That is how we started in our support group.

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:09:30]

NTM: What was your support group called?

T: It did not have a name because it belonged to the clinic.

NTM: Oh okay.

T: Yes.

NTM: Thobani said their support group was called Mandela...Madiba.

T: Our group did not have a name. We would just go there and that's it.

NTM: Oh alright, please let me know why body maps were made. Why did you make your body map?

T: When we started making them they told us that we are making them just to keep ourselves busy. So that we are not always sitting at home and stressing all the time and so on. So, as time progressed they said... I think we made them in the right way. Or perhaps while we were in the middle of the process he realised that he can get us something with the body maps. So, when we were done, he told us that he would publish them, then sell them, so that we could also get money.

NTM: How does your work speak to, I guess how does it relate to HIV and AIDS in the 90's and the 2000's and now? When you look at it, how does it speak back to the way we look at HIV?

T: The work that I do to make a living or?

NTM: Well, both of them. But now we are starting with your body map and then you can let me know about the work you do currently.

T: I am not doing anything currently.

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:11:18]

NTM: Uhm, and this material? (Referring to sewing material)

T: *Ja.*

NTM: But you sew?

T: I do sew but now my machine does not have the power anymore, it is old.

NTM: Oh okay.

T: So, there is nothing sensible that I am doing.

NTM: Okay. .and then how does your body map speak back to HIV and AIDS?

T: Come again.

NTM: Your artwork, the body map, how does it relate to HIV and AIDS? Anyway it was part of the Bambanani support group, right?

T: Ah huh.

NTM: So, how did it come about the idea that you were going to make body maps for HIV, I guess?

T: How does it relate?

NTM: Yeah.

T: Uhm, I don't know if I hear you properly. You are asking me to explain, like how?

NTM: Let me try to explain it to you. So, the question reads as follows: How does this work speak to the HIV epidemic that started in the early 90s reached its height in the 2000s and it is continuous today? So, I guess, what we are trying to get is when you look at the state of HIV and AIDS as a whole and that it was a huge crisis in 2000, 1990 and today, what do you think your work does in relation to raising awareness to people out there?

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:13:06]

T: *Ja*, I can say that the body maps helped to open our minds, my mind especially. Maybe I should say it opened my mind.

NTM: Yah.

T: Because I became stronger as a person. Children were dying but I had a prayer that okay I pray that I can live so that I can raise my child. I had only one child then. I prayed to raise my child, but body maps came where we... wrote everything that is within you. Then you get the support from someone else, so yah.

NTM: Okay. Please tell us about the time you began with your treatment for HIV and AIDS and how did it help to improve your life?

T: Uhm, I started really late. I think I was 29 when I started taking them. No, I think perhaps I was able to (take treatment) but I had the second child then.

NTM: Okay.

T: I did not want it. However, I was not sick, just that my CD4 count was really low. I then thought to myself that okay, perhaps I should start using it. I won't lie it did not change anything because I did not have any symptoms, I did not have anything. I am still the same person I was before.

NTM: *Yho*, you are so lucky.

T: Truthfully, it did not.

NTM: *Yho*, you are so lucky. My sister changed rapidly. She also did not want to take the treatment.

T: Fast.

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:14:54]

NTM: Yeah. This means that you took good care of yourself.

T: But I started when there was now a single pill, you see? When they started there were like 3 pills, I think.

NTM: Yah. There were 3, now it's just one.

T: *Ja*, but I took them when there was now a single pill.

NTM: *Hawu!* This means you are healthy. You are a strong person in general.

T: Serious.

NTM: Okay, the next question is long and I am trying to translate it. Okay it reads as follows: While understanding that the 2002 Memory Box: Longlife project was focused at advocating for a wider access to antiretroviral treatment and nevirapine, it must have been a very personally revealing thing to do. Was there counseling involved during the process of making the artwork? How did you feel when making this artwork and did it help with your healing process?

NTM: Was there counseling? Who was your counselor?

T: *Yho* I do not remember now.

NTM: Was it not Jonathan? Jonathan is the white person that arrived first.

T: No, we received counseling from the clinic.

NTM: Okay.

T: So, Jonathan joined us later on.

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:16:24]

NTM: Okay, and then when you were making this artwork, do you think that it assisted you in some way to process things?

Silence.

NTM: This project, did it help you to look at HIV related stigma from your community in a different way? So, like you do not... how can I put it. You know how people always think of HIV and AIDS and think of death at the same time? Most people immediately associate it with death. So, did it help you to look at it (HIV and AIDS) in a different way?

T: When I first discovered it, I thought I was going to die. I did not think I would be alive today. So, that is how it changed. Even if a person speaks and says that I am positive, I do not mind.

NTM: Eh.

T: *Ja*, even though I wouldn't go out on the streets and tell everyone that I am positive. But if a person speaks while I am out there and they do not know how I contracted it, I do not confront them. I just walk up the road and walk away.

NTM: So, do you think people no longer think of it the way they did in the early 90's?

T: There are those who still hold on to that belief, especially old people. I think it is due to the fact that they are not educated about HIV. Because an old person tells the young ones (about the virus) while they are still growing but when they look at someone out there who is sick, they immediately conclude that they are sick with HIV. And they look at it as if it is not a humanly disease or maybe it is a humanly disease but for a person who is reckless.

NTM: Mmm.

T: It is like that.

NTM: Okay, so in 2011 you made other body maps, do you remember?

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:18:18]

T: Mmmh..

NTM: Of the Longer Life.

T: The body maps for Khayelitsha Hospital, right?

NTM: Ja, where is that Hospital anyway?

T: It is here in Khayelitsha next to the mall.

NTM: Okay. So uhm, with the body maps that you made for the Hospital, did you ever reflect on how you survived with HIV? And how the treatment worked for you today, and that it helped people who tested positive to learn how to take the treatment, isn't it? So, when you look at these two body maps, do you think the way that the treatment is now available changed from back then when you campaigned for it to be available? When you look at it now, do you think people have it better now to access it?

T: I think it is the same. In fact I do not see a difference. I do not know perhaps it is because I did not start taking it (treatment) at that time. Even in 2011 I had not started taking it so...

NTM: Yeah, you did mention it.

T: I do not know, people were... we once conducted a research, but I did not hear of anyone complaining about it. The research was about ARVs.

NTM: And its side effects?

T: Mmmh.

NTM: Okay, when you look at your stuff because it is in the book and it went to Paris. I mean your artworks are everywhere. In your perspective, how successful do you think sharing your stories was?

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:20:22]

T: Uhm, I do not know whether it is because we complain about the way people take our stories then neglect us. So, I do not know.

NTM: Please tell me about that in detail. So, now we are back to that question that I said I will include. So, please tell me in detail how you artists want to be supported.

T: When we started it was Jonathan in charge.

NTM: Yes.

T: So, Jonathan at least when he was in charge he would look after us like he would sell our stories and come back to us and give us money. So, after that he was gone. Then came uhm, Jane would come. But Jane would give us money while we were making body maps. Maybe she would give us little money that we complained about but since we understood that it is better than nothing we accepted it. After that it was quiet. Uhm, then came...oh Lord I wonder what's her name. I do not think you will know her but she was from London.

NTM: I think I have heard of her. Was it not Rachel?

T: Exactly! Then she came and made huge promises. She took videos. She also came to my house and took pictures of herself. It was like she will get us new houses, you know things like that. When she was done, everyone did not contact us. She only sent pictures we took together and that was it. I think they could have given us something even if it is not monetary. Perhaps they could have supported us, for example I knit and they could have supported us with a knitting machine. Bongwiwe stays with children and maybe they could have built her a creche because we are not working, we live here in the township, some of us. Some of us work but not all of us. It is something like that.

NTM: Did COVID affect you?

(Thozama shakes her head)

NTM: Yho, everyone of you did not get COVID. This means it was not rough on this side, right?

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:23:01]

T: The worst part for me is that my father died from it.

NTM: Yho.

T: And then, I went home. When I got there, in fact I heard about it while I was here. My sister usually comes down here during December holidays. Then when she arrived (home) my father was not okay. She took him to the hospital. When they were tested they discovered that my mother was negative and he was positive. So, even then I told myself that I will go home despite the situation. I knew that I am unwell, my immune system is not strong enough but I told myself that even if I die because at the end of the day that is my family and nothing should go on without me. I left the children and I went home. When I arrived home, my sister was not taken care of, people were afraid to come close to her. They do not help her with bathing her child - she has an 8 year old that is the same age as my last born. I wanted to enter her room so I prayed first.

NTM: Yes.

T: I prayed that God if it is your will that we should all die here, it is fine. I entered and helped her prepare other things. They did not give her food, nothing, while everyone was busy in the yard preparing for...

NTM: ..the funeral.

T: I entered and made everything for her, I bathed her child. I shared the same bed with her but nothing happened.

NTM: *lyho.*

T: *Tuu!*

NTM: The Lord is powerful.

T: Not even a fever or maybe flu.

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:24:28]

NTM: Mmmh. It did not affect me as well but it took a lot of old people. So, how did you feel about the way HIV was not given the same attention as covid? You see, during the time HIV started there were a lot of conflicts for it to be acknowledged and for treatment to be available. With covid the vaccine came instantly.

T: I think there was a time where HIV was given attention.

NTM: Yah.

T: Because they knew...when I first discovered it was, there was grant money because they said if you are HIV positive you register to receive grant money. So, I got it that way. But now, as time went by there was no money, I do not know. They said, no it should be people who are extremely ill who should receive it and those that are still fine should stop receiving it. I do not want to lie. I did not compare them (covid and HIV).

NTM: It was not a big deal for you. So, what do you think of the youth today and how they are not interested in the history of HIV and how big of an issue it was, and what do you think the youth should know about HIV and AIDS today?

T: I do not think HIV... I want to go back to that question of how I feel about the way covid was given more attention than HIV.

NTM: Given much attention.

T: I think HIV was not given attention or maybe people died because of fear, and a lot of people died at that time. Maybe people were afraid because there was a perception that it is not treatable, you see. And then now, young people became aware during the time when it was not killing a lot of people. Even us we do not give it much attention anymore. Even when you try to advise a young person that they shouldn't have too many partners, they must use a condom and they wouldn't mind you. I do not really know whether they end up using them in their private spaces but when you speak to them they appear as if they are not paying attention. So, they are not afraid. They drink and after getting drunk a person can sleep with men, like I heard a story while I was watching TV, they say she would drink and get drunk and sleep with men. She wouldn't know whether she slept with four men a day or more. So, do you think in that instance they care to put on a condom, do they use it?

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:27:36]

NTM: They do not use it. Obviously they do not use it.

T: Young people do not care.

NTM: *lyho. (Sighs)* When you look at your body map work, let's say, you see the copy that I have given you, right? I printed a picture for you to see it. When looking at it, what is it that you like about your artwork and how does it make you feel?

T: Uhm, *(chuckles)* I do not know but I love it. Another thing is that it was my first time drawing on that day and I did not think much of it, that it could be a big thing. We used to call them zombies in our group. I used to tell myself that white people love our zombies. They would say what were those zombies doing? But as time went by I realised that it has an impact because on this body map you see

what I have written. I have also included my scars and so on. I have written about everything, such as this happened here and that happened there, I have a baby on my tummy. I love it. So, I felt really good when I was creating it, even now if they would say we should do it again I wouldn't have a problem.

NTM: You would do it again. What is it that... you have answered this question but if there is something that you wish to add you can do so. It says what is it that you enjoyed the most about drawing and painting and what is it that you found to be easy or difficult?

T: At that time, since it was my first time... I mean it was not long since I discovered (my HIV status), so I was not free to write everything. I was not free to show my face and to write my full-names. It was not difficult for me. It was only difficult at the beginning, and it seemed like we were making a difficult thing. But as time went by I realised that it was not as difficult.

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:30:28]

NTM: So, did the Memory Box project of body mapping inspire you to continue to create other artworks?

T: I haven't done anything ever since that one stopped.

NTM: If you were given an opportunity to create, would you take it?

(Silence)

NTM: So, did you form a relationship with other Bambanani artists?

T: No.

NTM: You have no relationship with them at all? You are not even friends?

T: Mmmh.

NTM: Okay, did they let you know that the Constitutional Court bought your artworks?

T: The one in Paris?

NTM: The one from here, in 2008?

T: Oh yeah, mmm.

NTM: And then you receive a proof of payment?

T: Did we receive it? I do not remember.

NTM: Okay. How do you feel that your work is with the Constitutional Court?

T: I have no problem.

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:31:58]

NTM: And then, do you remember the first works that were bought by the Constitutional Court? It got ruined over a period of time because of the framing that was used which was not correct. So, now with the artists that passed on, their works are being treated but for you because you are still alive we reprinted them. So, we will ask that you sign the reprinted versions, you see? Eh, but we will frame them and store them in a glass and so on. Is there another way that you would like us to treat your work?

T: Nothing.

NTM: And then, uhm, is there another way that you would like us to present your work, like maybe a way in which we present your work and your story?

T: Come again.

NTM: Is there a way that you want us to present your story?

T: No, I do not have a problem with the way that is currently being done.

NTM: Okay. What were the questions that you wanted to add, it is the one of supporting artists and the work that you are currently doing, right? And the way you are living, perhaps you can tell me more about the way you live.

T: Oh, I won't lie to you, I am finding it difficult to live. Because I am not employed, even the father of this house is unemployed. He has been unemployed since the start of covid - that is when he lost his job. So, we survive off children's social grants, or when I find work because I also knit. It is too rare for me to find work like that, maybe I can go at least 6 months without finding a client. Then I stay once more without a job. Sometimes I can go for 3 years without work. However, since I can knit I sometimes get something but now it is difficult because my knitting machine broke. So, I turn my clients away and ask them to find someone else. I survive off my children's social grant which is the two young ones because the older one is 22 years old. *(Sighs)* So, life is difficult for me, a lot.

NTM: Are they in school?

[TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 0:34:30]

T: Two of them are in school. Then the other one is 22 years old and he is not in school. He is outside. He does not rob people but he likes to have fun - he drinks. He does not do anything and I do not have money to, perhaps... if it was by me I think if he could do something, anything to keep himself busy. I do not have money to make him do anything, so he does nothing.

NTM: There are no programs perhaps... is he done with school?

T: Huh?

NTM: Is he done with school?

T: He completed grade 12 but now, when he applies to other schools... they were young, I think he was 16 years old when he got into a case with his friend. His friend stabbed someone to death. So, because they were in a group, they were both taken. Then every time he makes himself available for other things, including work opportunities, that case appears.

NTM: Oh *eish*, it is really painful when it is like that. And then, the other two, how old are they?

T: He is 13 and the other one is 8 years old.

NTM: Are they boys?

T: Mmmh, It's boys.

NTM: Alright. Is there anything else that you wish I could include in the recording of the interview.

T: Mmmh.

NTM: Alright, thank you. I will end the recording and there is something more personal that I wish to ask you.

[END OF AUDIO RECORDING: 00:36:12]