

**Black Liberations Movement Mosaic**  
**Under the direction of:**  
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Oral History Interview  
with  
Miss. Nobulumko Bongco  
By Atandi Anyona  
King William's Town, South Africa  
August 16, 2008

Interview with Miss. Nobulumko Bongco

Interviewed on August 16, 2008

Location: Braai [Bar-B-Que] at the Jooste family residence, King William's Town, Eastern  
Cape, South Africa

Interviewer: Atandi Anyona

Transcriber: Ryan Koons

Translator: Thobeka Mheshe

Language: English

Black Liberation Movements Mosaic

Atandi Anyona: Just tell us your name and then you can tell us a little bit about maybe where the freedom songs came from and who sung them and maybe a little bit about why...

Nobulumko Bongco: I am Nobulumko Bongco, an ANC activist—I was a member of MK, so in the townships during the unrest we sung different freedom songs for different reasons and occasions. They differed because it depends on the situation where you find yourself in, so this one that I am going to sing is about when the youth of South Africa were being shot by the Boers in the townships, like on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March there was a massacre and also in the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, the '76 uprisings, so it goes like:

[Singing in Xhosa] On the 21st of March,

Students were shot like animals,

They were killed by the Afrikaners,  
 In my land, here in South Africa.  
 Mummy, let me go to war  
 because the heroes' blood is splattered.

On the 16th of June  
 Students died in Soweto,  
 They were killed by the Afrikaners,  
 In my land, here in Africa.  
 Mummy, let me go to war  
 because the students' blood is splattered.

It was a sad moment so you are not jovial because it's a sad moment because large numbers of the youth were killed when they did nothing, so in this song I am saying, "My mother, let me go and join them because their blood is spread out all over Africa." That one is the somber one. It was a sad moment. I am just thinking of the other one that I can sing you.

Atandi Anyona: And in terms of, when you, the people who you were, sometimes, when you sung, what impact did song have on you and to those who you were singing to?

Nobulumko Bongco: You sing in a gathering; trying to be strong, not to be weak, taking an oath that their blood is going to nourish the trees of freedom, as [incomprehensible; perhaps "Solomon Matlangu"] did when the Boers, when it was decided he was going to be hanged. Because when he was hanged, the [incomprehensible] was saying that, "I want all the youth of South Africa to see from you, thinking that we would move back, unaware that we will carry his

spear forward.” So, we would think of those people who laid their lives and decide to move forward to carry their spear and go forward. So, it makes you strong because, so that, you won’t let them down because they died for [what] you are singing. So you don’t want to betray them and it regroups us to really be strong because you begin to see now that you must fight; there is no turning back. So it has got that impact to move forward.

Atandi Anyona: What about to the people you are singing to, for example, let’s say you are singing to the police, what do they feel?

Nobulumko Bongco: You are engaging them in a fight, hence I’m saying that, for the sad one [referring to the song] we sing this sometimes where there are memorial services, but they differ. Those that we sing at the street when we are fighting with the police, is different from this one. Because, for instance, there is that *kubo kubo!* meaning you go forward. You are not turning back and you don’t have, we used not to have fire arms; we carry our stones but we will go forward, knowing very well that they’ve got live ammunition, they are going to shoot at us but we go there with our tactics of how to regroup. Most of the time we would win and then they would retreat with their arms. They would move back; then we would go forward to them, so we would strategize. There were strategies and tactics how are we going to approach, so they were different and they tend to work most of the time. Because our mission was that it is carelessness to be caught because the enemy mustn’t catch you, that was the main thing; that they enemy mustn’t find you, you must find the enemy. So it was carelessness if you were jailed.

Atandi Anyona: And this songs, where did they come from? Who composed them?

Nobulumko Bongco: Whoever thinks of composing. In a situation, there are many people who are composers—who were composing these songs. In different situations you would sit down even at prison because they were very silly that time. They would take the gangsters; the gangsters, they are not politician. So if there are political prisoners, they would mix us with the gangsters because they wanted they gangsters to treat us badly, because they know that we don't know that situation, but we would be clever enough, sit there and teach them—the gangsters—the reason why we are fighting and they must not behave like criminals. And they would change and they would see that—even themselves—they are being used. Hence at that time there was not much crime because the criminals, we were educating them and they started to know and they were hitting back at them. So, that was the idea.

Atandi Anyona: And today, are there people who still sing the freedom songs?

Nobulumko Bongco: Yes, we do still sing the freedom songs in situations like memorial services, and church generally. Hence I was so surprised when [South African President] Jacob Zuma was singing [incomprehensible] machine gun.... People tend to be funny to say, “There is no need for that.” But there is a need, although we are no longer fighting the enemy now, we are using another tool of fighting—engaging in dialogues. But we [are] still having the enemy, because there are those who don't want to change. So to say this thing that, no, this era we cannot sing the freedom songs. We cannot [incomprehensible... “get rid of them”] them anywhere because they are part of us; they are reminding us of who we are; where we are coming from.

Atandi Anyona: What about the younger generation, like your children? Do they still know the freedom songs or...?

Nobulumko Bongco: Not all of them know them, and they think that it's utopia that we were in that situation. They think that we were making stories, but some of them they can see that (deep sigh) because, you couldn't buy where the white people were buying—were separate. We had, even if it's one shop, they would be a boundary that would go (gesturing) [one] this side and [the other] this side. That is not there anymore. And it is our struggles that created that.

Atandi Anyona: And would you have any last comments that you'd want to tell us about the importance of song now and maybe in the future?

Nobulumko Bongco: You know, the song in our culture it is very important because when you are happy, you sing; when you are sad, you sing and it boosts the moral of any person. So, singing is part of us; when we sing, we sing dancing.

Atandi Anyona: Thank you very much for your many comments; I am sure they will help us. Thank you very much and thank you for singing for us outside there [with the rest of the women present at the Jooste braai].

[End of Tape]