

**Black Liberations Movement Mosaic**  
**Under the direction of:**  
**Professors Jeremy Ball, Kim Lacy Rogers, and Amy Wlodarski**  
**Community Studies Center**  
**Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA 17013**

Black Liberations Movement Mosaic  
Oral History Interview  
with  
Mr. Similo Grootboom  
By Corinthia Jacobs  
King William's Town, South Africa  
August 14, 2008

Interview with Mr. Similo Grootboom

Interviewed on August 14, 2008

Location: Department of Sport, Recreation, Art, and Culture, King William's Town,  
Eastern Cape, South Africa

Interviewer: Corinthia Jacobs

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Corinthia Jacobs: I'm Corinthia Jacobs, and today is August 14, 2008, and I am  
interviewing Mr. Similo Grootboom at his office in King Williams Town, South Africa.

Mr. Grootboom, is it okay for me to ask you a few questions today?

Similo Grootboom: Yes that is fine.

Corinthia Jacobs: Ok, great. Could you please state your name and that you are willing to  
be interviewed.

Similo Grootboom: Yes, My name is Similo Grootboom, I am Senior Manager for  
Museum and Heritage in the Department for Sport, Recreation, Art, and Culture. And I  
know in the US you call it 'sports.' We call the 'sport,' 'Recreation, Art, and Culture.'  
Yes I am willing to be interviewed by our guest from Dickinson College. I'm all yours.

Corinthia Jacobs: Thank you. Okay, let me start by asking you how long have you lived in King William's Town?

Similo Grootboom: Well, I've lived in King William's Town without ever moving anywhere else from 1981; that's when I started to live in this area. Of course, at the time I did not live in King William's Town, as in this town. I lived in the township; I'll probably have to explain the concept of a township and town.

Corinthia Jacobs: Yes, please.

Similo Grootboom: You know during the colonial times and the apartheid times, black people, by law were not allowed to live in towns; it was only white people that lived here. So I lived in Zwelitsha, a designated space only for [black] Africans. That is where I lived in 1981. I mean people... it's only with the advent of democracy that people of color were allowed to live in town, and that was in 1994.

Corinthia Jacobs: Okay, so you said you grew up in Zhayelitsha?

Similo Grootboom: I grew up in Port Elizabeth, actually. I was born and bred in Port Elizabeth. Which is about, what... 265 Kilometers. I know that you talk in miles in the US... 265 kilometers, but it is a three-hour drive from where we are. That's where I was born, that's where I grew up. I came here in 1981 really to finish my "12<sup>th</sup> grade," so to speak; we use to call it high school at my time.

Corinthia Jacobs: Okay, could you please tell us a little bit about your youth and how you grew up in Port Elizabeth?

Similo Grootboom: Yes. I was born to a family that just managed. It was not very poor, but it was not rich. Just managed to put food on the table. I am the only and the first in my family to go to college, and even have a degree. I am the first one to even own a car in my family. I grew up with no money like in any other African family, and then I passed my primary school, what we called today your, what, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I think. Then I went to another small town because of the riots at the time, you know? In 1974, the apartheid government introduced instruction through Afrikaans language, their own language, not English. We had been taught through English up to that point, and the only subject we were taught in the vernacular was Xhosa, which is my home language, and we were okay with that. But it was around the time instruction was still there up to grade 4, it was still there. But when in 1974, the nationally supported government introduced Afrikaans; then things began to change in the education arena of this country. Now there were riots all over, until that culminated in the 1976 riots. So that also caught up with me, student politics. So I had to leave Port Elizabeth, because my parents felt that I couldn't actually continue with my education there.... Port Elizabeth is the biggest city in the province. So, I had to go and continue with my studying in a small town called Somerset East. That town was named after "Lord Child Somerset East, Lord Child Somerset of England. That's where I passed my grade 10, standard 8. In fact, during the year 1977, when Steve Biko was killed, I was studying there, but we had to come by

busses to his funeral in King Williams Town. So, I came to King William's Town in 1977 to attend the funeral of Steve Biko. But, of course I had to go back to finish my grade ten. And then I also did the 11<sup>th</sup> grade then. And then I came to Zhayelitsha. Again in 1980, my student life had to be disturbed by student life, by politics, because people were just agitated against apartheid, and against the system of education for black people at the time. So I didn't graduate from grade 12 in 1980. That's why I had to do it again in 1981, that's when I passed my grade 12. In fact that very year, that's the year I met my wife. We were in the same school at the time.

Corinthia Jacobs: You spoke of a lot of political things around you growing up. I can imagine there were a lot of opportunities for you to leave school and to just go and follow the wrong path. But I'm just curious as to what kept you focused? Who inspired you? What values did your parents instill in you growing up?

Similo Grootboom: You see, my mother, whom I spent the most of my time with during my youth, use to say to me, "My child, the only inheritance that you can have in your life is education." Fortunately, by the grace of God, I was quite brilliant at school, if I am not blowing my own trumpet. So, that was also a plus sign for me. I knew that I would not waste any air. So my mother said, if you remain in school, and pass your grades, ultimately, you can change this country, through your own brilliance, in your own little way, you can make a contribution, rather than leaving school and following a wayward kind of course. That kept me motivated. Another thing was when I looked at the poverty levels around the areas that I lived. And I use to equate poverty with not being educated,

because I use to think that if you are educated, then you have better chances of looking well after your family, so those two things, the teachings of my mother, and my own observation in the surrounding kept me going.

Corinthia Jacobs: Where there any figures growing up who inspired you personally?

Similo Grootboom: Steve Biko was one. Steve Biko was one. The letters of [former South African President Nelson] Mandela... I never even saw Mandela's picture until he was released from prison in 1990. But the stories of Mandela and the ANC—all the anti apartheid groups across the country kept us going. But closer to me, I think my teachers were an inspiration to me. The teachers use to instill in us good values of life, and what we need to do as we were growing up. Those things kept me going.

Corinthia Jacobs: You mentioned that you went to Steve Biko's funeral; can you tell us about what that was like?

Similo Grootboom: Man, it was here at the Victoria grounds, just about... is it half a mile from where we are. The minister that officiated was, the Bishop [incomprehensible], Bishop Desmond Tutu. And there were a lot of people, there were a lot of people, all over the world. In fact, from where we stood, we couldn't actually see clearly what was happening on the stage, there was a lot of people. I remember, Bishop Tutu's passionate plea to the regime of the time, asking them passionately, "Why did you have to kill him? Why did you have to kill Steve Biko? He was not violent, he was unarmed, why did you

have to kill him?” So that was an eye opener. I was a young teenager, I was a teenager at the time. But it actually implanted in me the brutality of apartheid; and segregationist policies of the government of the time. But it was also good to see people, black and white... there where also white people there, black and white standing together to say apartheid is wrong. Apartheid is wrong. And it is wrong for the black man, it is wrong for the white man. It was a moving service. And of course we went to bury Steve Biko at the place where we were on the 4 of August.

Corinthia Jacobs: Why do you think people were so inspired by Steve Biko? What was it about Steve Biko—the man, or his practices—that drew people to him, and made them want to follow him?

Similo Grootboom: I think his philosophy, and the way he went about to practice it. Steve Biko was a people’s man. He stayed in Ginsberg [Township], he remained very humble, he knew exactly what he wanted for his own people, not for him as a person or for his family. He was very young—he died at the age of 30—but his passion for what he stood for inspired a lot of people he came into contact with.

Corinthia Jacobs: That’s interesting. Can you please tell us about your own activism during the anti-apartheid movement.

Similo Grootboom: My own activism actually was... interconnected with student politics at the time. I did not per say hold any leadership position in the student

movement, but I was very active during my school days because we were very much aware of what the regime wanted to do to us, what they were doing with us, and they were very productive. At one stage we were even arrested—not once. A couple of times as a group of students who would boycott classes, who would stand there and hand in memorandum to the authorities and we were arrested, we would be released on warnings because we were teenagers at the time. But it was very active. We never lost hope. We knew that one day this country would be free. If not in our generation, certainly in the next generation. And look what happened, we were free, during our own generation.

Corinthia Jacobs: I'm curious as to what events still affect you today. Where there any major events that you may have taken part of, or seen around that still affect you today, or that you still have a vivid memory of.

Similo Grootboom: You see, there was a lot of brutality by apartheid. I remember the killing of a student in Port Elizabeth.... I think this was in 1977. There was a march by all the high schools in Port Elizabeth, and the security forces opened fire, killing this lady...young lady, was doing grade 11 at the time. She was older than I was, but I remember vividly that incident. Sometimes...it was August in 1977, a few months after the Soweto [Township] Uprising, you know those kind of incidences sometimes come up, especially when there are marches around...I mean, marches now are more democratic, there is no fire being used, especially live fire. But every time that kind of thing happens, it kind of reminds you of that happening back then.



Corinthia Jacobs: You mentioned the Soweto Uprising, could you tell us a little bit about that?

Similo Grootboom: Yeah, you know the Soweto Uprising sparked off what was to be years of student uprisings against the authorities. **Morris Isaacson** was a high school in Soweto. That was the nucleus of student activism at the time. And, Soweto is the biggest township in South Africa. So, as they said in history in France, “When Paris sneezes, the rest of Europe catches cold.” And we use to say, ”When Soweto sneezed, the rest of South Africa, South African black townships caught cold.” So, we could hear...there was no TV in South Africa at the time, especially in the black areas, 1976. But we read newspapers, we listened to the news, although the news was censored very heavily by the apartheid regime, but you could pick up that there was movement of country; Soweto, students, and that kind of news filtered through to the other townships throughout the country, be it in Cape Town, Durban, and certainly in Port Elizabeth, where I was. That students are rising against the teaching instructions in Afrikaans... It was very difficult; we couldn't accept it because it was the way of the white minority regime of entrenching their own foothold on the young minds of South Africans. So we couldn't accept it, it was too much. So, Soweto rose up, and the rest of the country followed.

Corinthia Jacobs: That's interesting.

Similo Grootboom: I do have a movie at home, I hope you have seen it, guys. It's about **Sarafina**. It kind of touches on that aspect of the Soweto uprising in a very dramatic way.

Corinthia Jacobs: How are events like the Soweto Uprising remembered today?

Similo Grootboom: 16 June. Okay, let me start by saying. All the important events in this country, when the new government took over in '94, it took a few years, of course; it didn't take one month or one year, they discussed elaborately, how can you remember all the incidences that were mile stones in our history. And then they decided that 16 June must be Youth Day, and it is a public holiday throughout the country, [a] national public holiday in the calendar, to remember all the struggles of the young people, not only '76. There may have been struggles of youth before '76, but the panicle of the youth struggle was in 1976, so symbolically, lets take 16 June as a Youth Day. We'll remember the struggles of the young people for liberation in this country. So then, '76 is remembered every year, on 16 June. In fact, the government holds the rallies, and the leaders in the country address the people through those rallies on the 16 of June every year.

Corinthia Jacobs: That sounds fascinating, like a very big deal. What monuments particularly are your departments responsible for?

Similo Grootboom: Okay, well I'm senior manager for Museums and Heritage; in other words, all the museums and institutions that are state funded are under my direction as well as heritage. Now, when you talk monuments, when we took over as the new government in 1994, there was called "National Monuments Council." It was an apartheid structure, it only looked at white heritage, so we had to have a new look at the

commemoration at the countries heritage, and the people's heritages in plural. All the people of the country, not only a particular race group. And we were careful here, not to do apartheid in reverse, to make sure that we are inclusive in our approach, so we passed a law, the national resources heritage act in 1999 that empowers government to look after monuments in particular. So, what we did, we did an audit of the monuments that there were before we took over. And we graded them; Grade I sites are those sites, heritage sites that are looked after by the national government, the central government. And Grade II sites are those sites that are looked after by the provincial government, the state government in your language in the US. And of course we have Grade III sites that are looked after by the local councils. So I'm going to talk about the Grade II sites that we look after as a provincial government. We did an audit of those sites, and there are many of them, of course, the majority, if not all of them, actually looked after the white heritage. Now, we had to do a balance, to also because the where sides, long after the apartheid government was there that was deliberately neglected by the apartheid regime. So, we actually rediscovered that heritage, put it on a pedestal and said to the nation, "This is our heritage." And we have done a lot of those since our inception. I will mention a few to you. And in fact, we have got even criteria for such sites to make sure that we don't take any site and put it on the register; there has got to be a benchmark, there has got to be a clear-cut criteria. You see, we are to look at projects that provide retribution for neglected aspects of history and heritage. We are to redress the imbalance of the portrayal of history in the provinces. We are to promote nation building, and reconciliation. Because this is what the new government preached, that we have go to reconcile, we have to build the South African nation. And as government, we are doing

our part to do that. And we are to maximize the tourism benefits of such heritage sites, and of course we are to promote the educational benefit. The people are to be educated, and to know their history. You see? So those are some of the criteria that we had to put down, so that when we looked at a site, those are some of the pillars that we are to do to make sure that they answer those kinds of questions. Now, I want to talk about a few sites, to give you a picture of the sites that had been neglected by that government. First I want to talk about, the Ngquza, Ngquza Hill Massacre Memorial. This happened in “Flagstaff” about six hours drive from where we are in the Transki. You know the community there rose on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1960. They rose against the then-government, to say they wanted to be represented in the parliament in Cape Town. They don’t want the trusts. They wanted their own heritage and chieftainship to be recognized. Now, they rose up against government and there was a massacre—23 people actually—were hanged. I’m not talking about the people who were shot and killed on the spot; this is the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1960. So, that massacre was never recognized by the previous government. This department, when we came on in 1994, but the department itself came on in 1997, this is one of the projects that we undertook. We undertook with the community and the families, to build a memorial in honor of these heroes. It was the 23 people that were hanged in Pretoria; they were charged and convicted of high treason. So we undertook to exhume their bodies, do DNA testing, and rebury them with dignity. So that is what we did, that’s one of the sites we recognized. The second one is the reburial of the remains of Washington Bongco. Washington Bongco, is one of the conduces in the military wing of the ANC: operatives that was hanged in Pretoria in 1964. In fact his daughter is the lady [Miss. Nobulumko Bongco] that Tiffany stays with. Washington Bongo was her

father. When he died in 1964, Nobulumko Bongo was a toddler then, was very young. Probably you should ask her one or two questions about her late father; she will be able to tell you. This department, when the ANC actually recovered his remains, we took part in the reburial of Washington Bongo in Fort Beaufort. Another one is the Bulhoek Massacre site, near Queenstown [, Eastern Cape]. 1921, it was before apartheid. Apartheid came into being in 1948. But on the 24 of May in 1921, the then colonial government and the General Smutts opened fire on worshipers near Queenstown. We called that the Bulhoek Massacre. So, after we came into power, we actually recognized that heritage so that we could give it the profile it deserves. I am mentioning a few here. I want to mention the reburial of the remains of Prophetess Nontetha [Nkwenkwe]. Prophetess Nontetha came to the forefront in about 1918, in King William's Town area. And she prophesized that God is going to do this and that and that and that. It was now the apartheid government branded her insane. She was a woman, she had a large following, she started a church. They branded her insane and actually arrested her and took her to a mental hospital in Fort Beaufort. And after that they actually transferred her to Pretoria, where she died in 1935. Now, her church is still alive today; they are here. They approached the department to have her remains exhumed and reburied with her people. And that's what we did in 1998, in October. But... we didn't stop there. There is an Anglo- Boer war, the war between the English and the Boers—the Afrikaans—that took place at the turn of the century: 1899 to 1902. The history of the black participants in that war has never been told. We have a concentration camp in **AngoNor** with the graves of the black soldiers. And we highlighted this history and fenced that cemetery so that that heritage could be retold from the point of view from the black people. And I

think I am going to end there, those are just a few. I am going to give you this so that you can go home with it so that you could look at all these things we have done.

Corinthia Jacobs: That sounds absolutely fascinating. You mentioned a little bit about reburial. A couple of cases where you guys did some DNA testing, and properly reburied people. How often do you do this? Or can you just tell us a little bit about the process for reburials and the qualifications for who gets reburied?

Similo Grootboom: It's interesting you asked me that question because... I actually did a masters dissertation on that topic. I have given your professor, Professor [Jeremy] Ball, a copy of that. Exhumation and Reburial is the title of my, that is also the national policy in the country. But let me tell you about the practice. Africans believe that the people who die, a family member who dies, actually the spirits remains with the living. So, as a result, we call the people who died the living dead. They are dead, but their spirit lives on. So Africans believe that if you are a family member and you die, you must actually be buried close to where the family lives, so that these people can continue to communicate with you in some way. Through rituals—we communicate with the dead through rituals. And then we do a lot of rituals connected with the dead person. But there is no national policy in this country. So a lot of people, after the unbanning of the ANC and the coming to power of the new government, came with request to government. "I've got so and so who died in Lusaka in exile, who died in Lesotho, who died in Tanzania, who died in Niger, who died in Italy, who died in England, who died in USA. I would love to have his remains exhumed, transported to this country and reburied with

dignity. Some of the people disappeared without trace. Their graves were never known; they were buried as [incomprehensible] by the regime. Now there was a process of TRC—Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa—where there was an opportunity for people to come forward to say, "We abducted so and so, we buried him or her as a [incomprehensible]; this is his grave, or her grave," so that that person could actually be reburied with dignity. So, I am saying in my thesis, government has got to listen to the views of the people, and act according to those peoples' beliefs, and assist families for reburial and exhumation. Because it's very expensive, to go through all that process, its very expensive. Because, so far, government does that on an ad hoc basis, when the family approaches it. Because the ANC as a party actually, has got a stand now to say, "Families must take the lead, and approach their various political parties." Because it is not only ANC people who got killed or disappeared, also other political parties like the PAC, AZAPO, and others.

Corinthia Jacobs: I didn't know that. You mentioned before that the government breaks down monuments as far as into grades: Grade I, Grade II, and Grade III. How do they decide which monuments belong to which level?

Similo Grootboom: You see, we look at the properties for each monument, and the impact of that monument on the heritage, on the heritage of the people. If its qualities and properties are of such a nature that this person was only known, or had an influence locally, then obviously that is a Grade III monument. That is a Grade III heritage site. We actually don't call them monuments anymore, we call them "Heritage Sites."

Because some monuments are not a physically structure, they are a spirit, you see?

Because there are tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. So, we look at the particular properties and the characteristics of a monument, or heritage site, to determine at what level. For example, you can't make Steve Biko a Grade II or a Grade III heritage site; obviously his influence and his beliefs were national, some even believe international.

Corinthia Jacobs: Okay, does the grading system create a problem with ordering the importance of the historical site? So, if it's a Grade III monument, would that mean that it is not noted as important as a Grade I historical site?

Similo Grootboom: You see, we don't attach the importance. All heritage sites are important, but we look at the particular characteristics. Do they talk to the local community alone, or do those qualities talk to a wider audience than the local community? And experts—it's actually laid down in the act—there are actually experts who deal with that. They make a determination that, "No, no, no, no, no, I think these qualities actually go beyond just this community," so they would rather be a Grade II site or a Grade I site.

Corinthia Jacobs: But it doesn't affect the amount of funding or upkeep?



Similo Grootboom: No, no, no. Because all of them, government takes care of them.

Whether at the local level, at the provincial level, or at the national level, they qualify for government funding. Whatever level they are.

Corinthia Jacobs: What is the criteria for new historical sites, or monuments?

Similo Grootboom: That comes to the floor. You see, what we do, we publish in newspapers that communities... because, it could be, as I'm sitting here in King William's Town, there is a site elsewhere in the province that I've never heard anything about, but those communities know something about. So what we do, we publish in the press, and some people—especially the rural people—don't read newspapers, so we also make a point of going to the electronic medium: the radio. Because a lot of people listen the radio. It would say, "If you know of any site that is important to you as a family or to the community, please come forward." And as the government, we have got district offices which are closer to the people. So that those people can go to those offices to say, "I know of a site, somewhere." Then government officials go there, to do the determination and work with the community.

Corinthia Jacobs: How do they figure out the determination if this is something that needs to be remembered or not?

Similo Grootboom: Through holding meetings with the community, recording, making notes of what this site is about. Once they do that they have a "dozier." Then they

submit that dossier to us. And then what I do is, I call in the experts to call in the dossier to make a determination. We also make various visits to the very site that is spoken about.

Corinthia Jacobs: Are there any sites that ever proposed that are turned down? Or is that rare?

Similo Grootboom: It is rare. Sometimes people will come with family members; I have a letter here that I read two days ago. It is a four-page letter. This man said, he wants the government to erect a memorial in honor of his great grandfather. Because this man was a great man in his own belief. Now, anybody can do that, I can say that of my own father and my grandfather, but you must also distinguish between that to which is important to the family and what is important to the community. And we concern ourselves with the community here. If that person was a community builder, then it's a different case. But if his influence was only as far as the family's concern, then obviously we cannot get in there, so we turn those sites down. Respectfully, though.

Corinthia Jacobs: Right. How have monuments changed since the end of apartheid, or historical sites?

Similo Grootboom: You see, a lot of other sites that were not told, new stories that were not told have come up tremendously, since 1994, but the landscape is still skewed towards the colonial sites, and the apartheid sites. The balance is not there yet; we are

getting there. And also: funding. Funding is a problem, especially for heritage. Especially in a country like South Africa, where there are pressing priorities for the nation. Provision of clean water and sanitation, provision of housing, roads, HIV/ AIDs and other diseases: those are the priorities nationally. Now, if you come and say you want more funding for heritage, you are likely to hit a brick wall. But we are trying. We are trying to put it near the other priorities.

Corinthia Jacobs: For you personally, why is heritage remembrance important for the community?

Similo Grootboom: It's the soul of the nation. I've always believed, the guy who builds houses and roads, can build that road, and say to the people, "I have delivered," concretely. But for a heritage practitioner like me, it is very difficult and a challenge, to say at the end of 12 months, to say, "I have delivered." Because you are dealing with an intangible aspect of life, you are building with the soul of the nation, you are building the moral regeneration of the nation. You are building the history and reconciliation of the nation. It's a big challenge, but I think we are getting there.

Corinthia Jacobs: You were speaking a little bit about funding and other obstacles you have to face, but I was just curious as to what are some other challenges that you face when implementing changes to...?

Similo Grootboom: In the heritage sector. One other change is capacity. You know in this sector before we came to the scene, there were very few black people. In the province, I am one of the first few managers in the heritage sector from a black community. Because we were carefully kept away from this sector, because the heritage that was promoted at the time was white. So, capacity is one problem, except the funding. We need to train more heritage practitioners, we have made a significant breakthrough: there a lot of people now that are coming through, but I feel that it is still not enough. So, capacity is one such issue.

Corinthia Jacobs: So, capacity.

Similo Grootboom: Yeah, human resource capacity.

Corinthia Jacobs: Human resources. Okay, are there any plans for future historical sites?

Similo Grootboom: You see, there are plans afoot, to do an audit. We are doing an audit of erecting a “heroes acre” in the province. A “hero’s acre,” a heroes memorial, to say as a province, “Who do we look up to as heroes.” This is a contentious issue. Let me tell you where the problem will be, especially with the leaders and politicians. If you take, [incomprehensible], if you take Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela was born and grew up in this province, but as you know, he is claimed by the entire country, in fact by the entire world. Shall we include Mandela in our hero’s acre as a province, when his own influence is international? What do we do? I’m glad I do not have to take a position

there; it is our leaders and politicians that must take a decision there. Because we have produced leaders in this province that have actually made their influence in the national arena, so once we agree and we get guidance from our own leaders regarding the hero who get on that list, the next question would be where to place that hero's acre in the province, because I suppose there will be a competition where to put it. But I think that is the future plan to have a hero's acre, somewhere in the province, where all our hero's names will be inscribed and where all of us will pay homage to that kind of monument.

Corinthia Jacobs: That sounds very nice. What perceptions are there of the colonial monuments in King William's Town?

Similo Grootboom: You see, a lot of people, especially the black people, don't know much about that, because they have never been apart of that. For instance, the, what memorials here, you would see only the white former soldiers go there, place flowers on certain days of the year. But, the local council, they are now beginning to involve other people, because, see now, we've got black mayors to say, "Let us also be part of this heritage, in some way it is going to get to us, let us also be part of these commemorations." But up to now, there has not been vibe that included the majority of the people.

Corinthia Jacobs: For the people who do know about the colonial history, do you have any? I guess, could you imagine how they would feel about it? Do they want them destroyed, are they fine with them?

Similo Grootboom: No, you get a variety of views. As a heritage practitioner, I am of the firm view that you cannot destroy heritage, even if you don't agree with it. On a matter of principle. But if it happened, it happened. You can't destroy it; rather educate the nation of it. I am of that view. But I do know that there are people who have got radical views, who believe that, "Destroy it, don't remember it." I am opposed to that, I am opposed to that. Somebody has come to look for you. [Referring to the arrival of transportation for Corinthia]

Corinthia Jacobs: I just have a couple more questions. What monuments do you feel personally are important to the youth today?

Similo Grootboom: Well, I think monuments that actually depict the history and the struggle of the people of this country, I think those monuments have got to be preserved. And, of course, the monuments of their own heroes who actually contributed in a very positive way to where we are. It cannot be only politicians, by the way. I must stress that. It can also be mere community builders in their own community. Writers, singers, teachers, community builders, people who have built the communities in some way, not only politicians.

Corinthia Jacobs: Are there any historical.. heritage sites, excuse me, that you feel are important for the youth, and that the youth should actually play an active role in seeing or learning more about?

Similo Grootboom: Yeah, in the vicinity of King William's Town for example, I think those monuments that have got a bearing on the history on the struggle of the youth, they have got to be exposed to the youth so that they can learn something from those hero's. We've got massacres of children that were students in Zwelitsha is one of them, and other youth leaders, actually. **Batandu Dondo** in the province, another student leader who got killed in detention. Those are some of the memorials that the youth have got to learn more about so that they can actually take after those people and what they stood for.

Corinthia Jacobs: That's interesting. How have holidays changed since 1994?

Similo Grootboom: As I said earlier—I think I have alluded to that point earlier—I think the government sat down and said, “What holidays can we remember?” We kind of also clumped together a number of incidences into particular holidays. For example, all the struggles of the women were lumped together on the 9 of August, and that was called National Women's Day. We don't have a day that commemorates particularly Steve Biko on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September when he died. But we said, “Steve Biko is a part of our heritage, and many other people.” So let's have 24 of September as “Heritage Day,” the same month that Steve Biko died. So 24 of September is our National Heritage Day. For example, also Steve Biko: his rights were abused. Let's remember human rights, 21 March. It also coincides with the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, on the 21 of March. And we said 21 March, it's Human Rights Day in South Africa. So that's how holidays have been designated in my country.

Corinthia Jacobs: In the past, the majority of holidays commemorated the Afrikaans; do you feel that now holidays commemorate ANC leaders?

Similo Grootboom: Yeah, but if you follow the argument that I have said, we have kind of clumped together all those people who have played a part—irrespective of the political affiliation, irrespective of the color of their skin—all the people have played a part in the liberation, in the advancement of the struggles of their communities, where they have lived. Let's take the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, for example. 16 of December represents many things across the political spectrum. In 1838, on the 16 of December, the Afrikaners killed hundreds of Zulu's in Kwazulu Natal and that was called the Blood River Commemoration. And that day, the Afrikaners of the day said it's the day that they had made a covenant with God, so that God can give themselves to revenge themselves against the Zulus, and they killed many Zulus on that day, 16 of December. And the river to which they drew the bodies of the Zulus turned red with the blood of those people. And they renamed that river Blood River. Again, 16 of June is the day the military wing of the ANC was born. And the government said, "Whatever struggles there were of the people of South Africa, lets make 16 June Reconciliation Day, a day on which the nationalities reconcile." Not only across the political spectrum, also, the people must reconcile with themselves, must change the country, for what I am trying to say to you, we didn't look at only political affiliation when we made holidays.



Corinthia Jacobs: Okay, thank you for clearing that up. I just have a few more questions for you. What did Black Consciousness mean to you personally?

Similo Grootboom: For me personally, I think Black Consciousness, the way I view it, it kind of wanted to make sure that the black people particularly must stand for what they are, stand for who they are, and be counted among the nations of the world. For me that's what it means. Because we must remember, the aim of the apartheid regime was to subjugate the black people, to treat them as inferior. Black consciousness was saying, "No, no, no, you are not inferior." That is what it stands for me.

Corinthia Jacobs: Along with that, how do you think Black Consciousness affected the anti apartheid struggle?

Similo Grootboom: You see, I think in a sense, in a sense, it kind of gave importance and direction to the liberation movements in this country. To make sure that, also, the black people who happened to be the majority in this country stand in be counted for what they believed in. I think in that sense it kind of encouraged the liberation movements to push for equality for the races in this country. Not to say black people are even better than the white; no. To say that, let's believe in the equality of races.

Corinthia Jacobs: Definitely. Do you remember any liberation songs?

Similo Grootboom: Sorry?

Corinthia Jacobs: Do you remember any liberation songs?

Similo Grootboom: Liberation songs.... There are so many that I have sung. Now that you are asking me, I don't sing them anymore now; now that I am a bureaucrat, I am a family man, I am a father. But, yes when they are sung, I always carry on and sing them, but I can't remember them off head as I speak to you.

Corinthia Jacobs: Do you remember any particular line from one?

Similo Grootboom: Yes, yes, yes, I do. .... [Singing in Xhosa, while clapping hands].  
What it says, "Oliver Tambo, the former president of the ANC, you are our hero!" That's what it used to say. Remember, Oliver Tambo was in London [, United Kingdom]; he led the ANC from exile. But this is exactly what you were saying during those days.  
That, "Oliver Tambo, you're our hero."

Corinthia Jacobs: Thank You. What did you music mean to you and the struggle?

Similo Grootboom: Music was a powerful weapon to make your views known. And it had a rallying effect. As Africans, you know, we [incomprehensible] message only in a music. Once somebody starts [claps hands], we join in. And it had this powerful, powerful effect of rallying people together for a common cause. Especially in the struggle days.

Corinthia Jacobs: How do you feel about the changing of town names, and street names, and institution names since 1994?

Similo Grootboom: Well, it's one of my briefs as a Director for Heritage. I believe that you must not do a wholesale kind of change. It must be a consultative kind of process. You see, it is also about changing the heritage landscape. But, you must not change something if it does not need change. Those things that are offensive, yes, by all means change them so that you cannot offend any population group. I don't believe in the wholesale changing, you must only fix what needs to be fixed.

Corinthia Jacobs: That's interesting. Are there any heritage sites or museums that you would like to see built?

Similo Grootboom: Yes. One such site is a boxing museum. Eastern Cape is a Mecca of boxing. We have produced many world titleholders here. I believe that we have not paid much attention to that kind. We need to establish a museum that is going to look generally into sport, but particularly into boxing.

Corinthia Jacobs: Do you think that today's youth value the anti-apartheid struggle?

Similo Grootboom: You see, after our liberation in '94, a lot of youth were into that. But I think now, reality begins to say "[Groans], government is taking care of that. They are

focusing on other issues now, drugs, alcohol abuse, irresponsible sex, you know? It's a shame actually, but I feel that youth are not taking responsibly for the anti-apartheid struggle anymore now. They have left that to the political organizations and the government.

Corinthia Jacobs: That's interesting. Are you proud of where your country is today?

Similo Grootboom: Very proud! I believe as a country, we are developing; there are still more milestones that we are going to have. But I believe that we have covered a lot of ground. Now I can go anywhere, my dignity has been restored. I can go into any restaurant, I can live in any suburb, I am not going to be stopped by any cop on the street to demand my ID. To that extent, my dignity has been restored. But there's still a lot of ground to be covered. The economics is one; I think we need to work to make sure that the economic liberation is realized.

Corinthia Jacobs: Well, thank you very much for your time.

Similo Grootboom: Is that the end? [Laughs] No, actually I was very happy to talk to you.

Corinthia Jacobs: Thank you very much. It was great, I learned a lot of things. I just have a consent form, and an archives... I'm sorry, is there anything else that you want to tell us?

Similo Grootboom: Well guys, we were very happy to host you in my country, in particularly in my community; we trust that there is one or two things that you have learned about our own culture and how we live. There is a lot obviously that we have learned from you. We trust that we have built bridges by welcoming you into our homes. And we trust that the relationships that we have developed with you, those relationships are going to last a lifetime.

Corinthia Jacobs: Thank you. Is there anybody else that you think we could talk to or that would recommend?

Similo Grootboom: I don't know how many people you have talked to, but if there is anyone that I think of while you are here, I will certainly make an appointment. I know that I have made a few appointments for you already.

Corinthia Jacobs: Yes, you have, thank you very much.

[End of Tape]