

**Black Liberations Movement Mosaic**  
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Oral History Interview

with

Mr. Lamla Jack

By Ryan Koons

King William's Town, South Africa

August 16, 2008

Interview with Mr. Lamla Jack

Interviewed on August 16, 2008

Location: Home of Ms. Nobulumko Bongco, King William's Town, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Interviewer: Ryan Koons

Transcriber: Atandi Anyona

Language: English

Black Liberation Movements Mosaic

Ryan Koons: So, this is Ryan Koons on August 16, 2:45pm interviewing Lamla Jack. Could you please state your full name and your willingness to be part in this interview, just for the camera?

Lamla Jack: Alright, um, I'm Lamla Jack, from Ginsberg, down in King Williams Town, and I'm happy to be here today.

Ryan Koons: Alright, thank you so much. So, you are from Ginsberg? How did you end up teaching in the Transkei?

Lamla Jack: Eh, I received an opportunity to go and teach that side because, work this side, the situations are not the same. People that side are more uneducated and no teachers per se then I seized that opportunity and I went for it, because this side I didn't get a job.

Ryan Koons: And you teach music?

Lamla Jack: Partly, and arts and culture though.

Ryan Koons: Sorry, what was that?

Lamla Jack: Arts and culture. Yes.

Ryan Koons: And what does that mean?

Lamla Jack: Arts and Culture means, um, to reflect back to the indigenous methods and the willingness to fuse the indigenous ways of living and this new technological means of living, so as to come up with something new and viable to this time.

Ryan Koons: And what kind of new are you coming up with or teaching?

Lamla Jack: For instance, there's been a, under the old ways of dances, because back in the days, people were dancing without rhythms, instead not knowing that they are on rhythm, they are on the right beat and stuff. They were just doing it for the sake of doing. Now with this new technology, you are able to tell how many steps, how many beats in a bar, you know, and that makes the music, the indigenous music, to fuse together with this new ways of technology. Then, you have the drums, your orchestra, and now for instance, I was invited at Fort Hare (University) some time ago; they are launching their indigenous orchestra that involves the olden days ways of dancing and these new methods.

Ryan Koons: That's fascinating. During a teaching day, what do you do? Do you teach multiple classes or multiple subjects within the arts and culture heading, how does that work?

Lamla Jack: No, you have separate classes, then specifically, you have your arts and culture class whereby you stick to the dance, to the visual arts, to the drama and music. Then, because I am also a technology teacher, then, on my spare time I teach technology on the other classes; I teach technology, yes.

Ryan Koons: So, you are mixing all the arts and culture into one class period?

Lamla Jack: Yes. Arts and culture.

Ryan Koons: Ok. Now, what got you interested in teaching arts and culture?

Lamla Jack: Um, not necessarily that I was interested, at first, because I wanted to be a musician myself, because part of me I thought I know how to sing, maybe. But things didn't go that way, and when I got to Fort Hare, I discovered that actually, they are not doing it the way I was expecting. They are teaching music like, choral methodologies and what and what. So, I ended up getting in. So, we sing that spectrum; we fuse arts and cultures, the linguistics, and everything, inside.

Ryan Koons: That's fascinating. When you, were you teaching during the anti-apartheid era?

Lamla Jack: No. Maybe, I was born in 1975, actually, so.

Ryan Koons: So, growing up, how did living under the anti-apartheid rule affect your desire to go into music and arts and culture?

Lamla Jack: Yeah. The most, I would say, difficult part of was that I wasn't able to attend the schools I thought were the best school; because it was a fuller school in Joberg (Johannesburg), where everything was precise there and people were succeeding in their fields. So, being an African student, poor of the poorest, prevented me to go there. And there were no means. Unfortunately my mother was then a hawker, so I couldn't be able to go. So, in a way, it oppressed my vision up to this day, because landing up at teaching was not my priority. But here I am today. Yeah.

Ryan Koons: What was your priority?

Lamla Jack: Was to be a musician, actually.

Ryan Koons: A singer?

Lamla Jack: Yes.

Ryan Koons: Tenor?

Lamla Jack: Tenor for (unclear).

Ryan Koons: So, instead you ended up going to teaching?

Lamla Jack: Yes.

Ryan Koons: Ok, what was Fort Hare like as a music school? As an arts and culture school?

Lamla Jack: Yeah, Fort Hare, it was ok but it had its own problems in the sense that teachers were not, I would say they were not fully understanding us, because we started music later in our years, unlike the privileged Model C schools whereby students start their education at a lower level up until. So, I started my music at such a tertiary level and it was a situation for me because I had to struggle to understand even the notes, you know. And all those stuff, the marimbas, how to beat a drum, and it was a task but I managed to pull through though.

Ryan Koons: How involved were you in politics? When I say politics I mean expressing a dislike for the apartheid regime.

Lamla Jack: Come again?

Ryan Koons: Were you yourself vocal or did you participate in, with groups, lets say the ANC or the PAC, that expressed dissent for the apartheid government?

Lamla Jack: No, I didn't. Reason, I thought it served no purpose, because the only people who were benefitting to these situations were people who were involved, or if you are a relative to someone, then you benefit in those ways. For instance, in my case, at Ginsberg, those, these housing allowance something, poor of the poorest are being given some houses, but because you were not familiar with the people who were busy channeling all the stuff, you were then deprived the right to have your own house. And of such, that's what angered me to an extent that I felt, agh, at the end of the day, it's not for everyone, it for the ones, and if you cannot say- you go and bow to the higher power-, and then you are in a situation. So, I didn't like it. So part of me didn't always believe that, I always believe that politics is just a dirty game really, because if you don't become rude, I don't know, but you need to have that strength to say, I don't know how to put it, but to rather, ok, I don't have words. But you ought to have this way of operating or this way of working that is totally not you, you know. You've got to do something negative to get something positive, which at the end of the day makes you feel not happy. Because even if you want a tender, you must know someone from above; then if you don't know that someone, definitely you won't get the tenders around. So it's really depriving our rights because I believe that I've got to go and submit my CV (Curriculum Vitae) and you give me work according to my merits only not to struggle because I know you, I don't know the lady, you know. And at the end of the day I've got to bribe for, you know. So for me it really, I never involve myself because of those things, even though I have a brother who is vocal and what, and is also at Steve Biko foundation.

Ryan Koons: I think we met him actually.

Lamla Jack: is it?

Ryan Koons: What music did you listen to when you were growing up?

Lamla Jack: Part of my life, gospel. Because that's how I grew up, I grew up in a praying family.

Ryan Koons: Did gospel music, where did gospel music take place? Was it just in church?

Lamla Jack: Yeah, it was just in church.

Ryan Koons: And how did that work?

Lamla Jack: How?

Ryan Koons: Let me see whether I can make this make sense in my own head. Gospel music took place in church; would it be sung by the congregation, the choir, the preacher?

Lamla Jack: Yeah, in my church we have a choir, and then in the choir comes out this modern ensembles like trios, quartets, male voice and whatever. So I was within that.

Ryan Koons: So, who directs it or who directed?

Lamla Jack: It was Mr. Fox Nyati, yeah.



Ryan Koons: And he was specifically the music director?

Lamla Jack: Yes.

Ryan Koons: Ok, um, how important was gospel music to the congregation as a whole; to the worship?

Lamla Jack: Yeah, it brought, in fact even today it always bring comfort, because even if you hurt, you know, when you have a beautiful song comes to your mind, and it just eases your mind and sways away your pain or something. So, at least it is your healer I would say.

Ryan Koons: Do you feel that that has changed from then till now considering that the apartheid has gone?

Lamla Jack: Yes and no. Apartheid has not yet gone but, yeah, partly we are almost there because at least we are privileged, you have a right to go and worship with the so-called white people today, even though back in the days, like, when you come to the white church, they would like be stunned to see you and not want to associate themselves with you. So, today it's fine. Then part of the freedom its, yeah, but not actually because there are some roles that I fell they need to be corrected because, or the need to be clarified because they don't cater for all of us.

Ryan Koons: Did you personally ever experience white racism within the church setting?

Lamla Jack: No, I don't want to lie.

Ryan Koons: In other settings?

Lamla Jack: Not necessarily, yeah.

Ryan Koons: So not on a first person basis?

**LJ:** No. No.

Ryan Koons: Was gospel used in any other situation apart from the church, say at political rallies that you know of?

Lamla Jack: Yes, because I remember people back in the days, when they were still fighting for this liberation, what what, they would sing the *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* (God Bless Africa), so it was a prayer in its own way. So, you know, whenever you think of those gospel songs, you associate them, even though they are motive is political, but also it's gospel on a nutshell.

Ryan Koons: So the gospel becomes political?

Lamla Jack: Yes, in a way. And definitely because when you lose your loved one in a struggle, definitely the only comfort comes through gospel, you know, because people go there and sing the beautiful songs, you know, yeah.

Ryan Koons: What does gospel music mean to you personally?

Lamla Jack: Ah, to me, it means, it means a lot to me because it encompasses all, it takes my personal life, my social life, and it includes it. And, I don't know how to put it but if I'm heart, definitely I go to my CDs and watch Donnie McClurkin singing *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* and I know that this situation is just a minor, because of God's higher power. You know, even if I am happy, I know just where to check my CD and you know, always during my younger days, our path-finder teacher would teach us that keep a song in your heart so as to escape all the problems. And, as such, whenever I'm in a situation, I'm happy, the song just comes.

Ryan Koons: Your path-finder teacher?

Lamla Jack: No. My path-finder teacher taught me.

Ryan Koons: Sorry, what is a path-finder teacher?

Lamla Jack: A path finder is a sort of a scout in other sections; but in our church we call it path-finders.

Ryan Koons: Ok, thank you. Did you listen to other music beside gospel, or along with gospel?

Lamla Jack: Yes, but I'm not good. I don't have a good ear. Like what I enjoy partly is choral because, at school, at Fort Hare, I was taught choral conducting so that I suppose I'm trying to associate myself with choral.

Ryan Koons: So, you would prefer choral over instrumental or that is what you were taught?

Lamla Jack: I prefer?

Ryan Koons: Sorry, do you prefer choral over instrumental or?

Lamla Jack: Yeah, choral because you enjoy listening to different voices and actually understanding that how one uses his vocal chords, you know, some they squeeze their voices and what, so it becomes so interesting to actually understand the voices. So, I am more interested in voices.

Ryan Koons: Do you find that a singer when singing creates meaning through means other than the words they are singing?

Lamla Jack: I can't get you.

Ryan Koons: I explain badly, I am sorry. Would you think you would feel the same experience if the same singer sang a song with words and then sang a song without words? How important are the words?

Lamla Jack: Unfortunately I can't get your question, so I can't answer.

Ryan Koons: So, I am sorry. I think I will drop that question.

Lamla Jack: Right.

Ryan Koons: Your anti-apartheid experiences, how did they affect your teaching now?

Lamla Jack: Yes, because back in the days, we studied the Bantu education; the education that prevented us from knowing all sorts of education. Now as I am in the teaching field, they have introduced many things that were privileged back in the days. And during our teaching education period, you know, and there is such now it becomes a situation because it's as if you are a new learner. For instance, they are fusing in the integration, you integrate life orientation, technology, natural science, within science, so those learning outcomes, they count as a hindrance of actually getting the actual answer; the actual meaning of your teaching to an extent that you find it so difficult for you to, even when preparing a lesson, you've got to go to other learning areas in order to buttress your point. And as such it becomes so difficult. And I still feel that the government is still needs to get ways to try and put everyone in par with them, in that they know their, if I would say, their module. But, they keep the teachers a way, and as such when they

want to fill them in they take a course, a workshop, of two weeks which is nothing as compared to their preparing of a course of over a period of three years. Then it becomes a situation because during that two weeks they are sending someone like a facilitator over a period of over three to four hours. And as such, after that, we end up, all of you, not even understanding what he or she was saying. And as such it becomes a situation because, and when you go back to the school, the government expects you to have understood the facilitator, whereas in truth and in fact, you haven't.

Ryan Koons: As an arts and culture teacher, how important do you feel your subject is to the students; how do they react to it?

Lamla Jack: Um, even though still a new thing to them, but they are getting a long, steady though, but I'm sure they are coming alright. Because, arts and culture is more about presenting who you are in actual fact, trying to appreciate your culture, your values, and norms, and also take them to other cultures and try to understand that we are a diverse country therefore we do not react the same. And also you've got to learn to accept someone else and also not to judge because, um, there are some stereotypes that we grew up with like, a woman is not expected to wear some pants, you know, they are expected to wear long skirts, you know. So, when one was a long pant, a lady, it becomes a situation, you know, people are starting to talk about her and what not. So, when teaching arts and culture, you break that ground, you try to put everyone to understand that cultures are different and you've got to respect and accept different cultures. So, that's where actually is important.

Ryan Koons: How would you rate your successes in teaching that respect of different cultures?

Lamla Jack: Presently, yes I would say that I'm trying to do a good job in the sense that they have learned to accept that even, because, this western culture like, you know, we have introduced these Raps, RnB, as in what not, to the African culture. And the African culture, the learners, are no longer interested in their indigenous songs, you know, and stuff. But, teaching them that actually those people, even when tourists come, they don't expect to see their own outfits; they are expecting to see our own indigenous outfits. So that's what interests them mostly. So, I try to put back the value of respecting who you are and actually celebrating that you wouldn't change who you are even if can be in the stardom.

Ryan Koons: How important do you think diversity is within the classroom?

Lamla Jack: It is important because it opens up ones mind to actually learn to respect the one next to him or her, in the sense that learners tend to be so, I can't say it, but they tend to shy away one from their own way of living. And as such, by trying to fuse that together, and try to let them learn that for you to live a long life you have to learn to accept the changes within your life, because you wouldn't grow in your own world; you won't get to be in contact with other peoples. So, you ought to understand how they live, how they operate, how they behave, actually. And, by so doing, you are in a position to correct yourself and put yourself in their positions and go along because, life must go on.

Ryan Koons: You spoke earlier about teaching the students through arts and culture, almost their identity. Would you agree with that?

Lamla Jack: Yes.

Ryan Koons: How important is that?

Lamla Jack: It is important because if you don't know who you are, definitely there is a problem. Your origin, because our fore fathers were not literate back in the days, so, there was nothing written down. Everything was just a word of mouth. So, you ought to take that word of mouth and put it in practice because that's all we have as black people. So, respect in that, and understanding actually that even though they were not educated, they had their own values and norms. In fact, they actually lived longer than us, because, for instance, they believed in eating fresh food, fresh vegetables, fresh meat and unlike us today, we take frozen chicken for plus-minus three to four weeks, and eat it days down, whereas in actuality that's not healthy, you know. And when you look at that, when you look at those indigenous ways of preserving food, and our ways of preserving food, you find that we have invented some other way of, like, you put something in some, I don't know. If you would take a milling for instance, back in the days they would take a mealie (corn) and put it in a pit and they closed it for a season. Whereas in this generation, I don't know acidifiers or what, but something that we put in to make it stay a longer period. So, that mealie on the pit is natural mealie, whereas this one has got some preservative which becomes, you know. And today, we've got many illnesses whereas back in the days we were so strong, because they were eating natural resources.



Ryan Koons: Is this part of the curriculum with your classroom?

Lamla Jack: Yes.

Ryan Koons: And how do the students respond to that?

Lamla Jack: They are starting to see it. Actually, even our arts and culture books, in fact even they try to give us freedom as to choose which ways we think are the best; the olden days or these ones, the present ones.

Ryan Koons: You spoke of identity again. How did you and your family maintain your identity during the apartheid regime?

Lamla Jack: Um, unfortunately, we were a Christ based family and not believing in the African customs and what. So, for as long as I can remember, we hold our believes up to this day.

Ryan Koons: Was that difficult to do under the apartheid regime as a black person?

Lamla Jack: No, not at all because, yeah. It was, I think, because we were still young; if we experienced them, we were not aware of them until today.

Ryan Koons: Looking back in hindsight?

Lamla Jack: Yeah, in a way it prevented us because if I were to compare my birth days and today, I would find that we were supposed to have expressed how we operate, or who we are better than the ways they did, because you wouldn't go and say I am a Christian, you know, publicly. I don't know, you would just know it within the family, and don't disturb the neighbor. You know, that kind of thing.

Ryan Koons: Getting back to RnB and Rap, how important do you think both genres are important to today's youth in expressing their identity?

Lamla Jack: It is important even though, yeah. It is important, but I won't say that I'm not quite clear, but the rap, you can't hear the words, you know, so I don't bother myself listening to that. But, they just, their beat, you find it quite interesting, you follow the beat. RnB speaks to the soul sometimes, you know, it comes, yeah, it's alright.

Ryan Koons: And what is your opinion of both genres?

Lamla Jack: They are good because even though I may not be fully interested in them I know someone is interested in them, so, I would prefer them to flow and to open up the gates for other people because there are people who believe in them. But as for me, really, I am a Gospel freak.

Ryan Koons: Would you be willing to sing any gospel songs for us? No, pressure, I don't want to make you uncomfortable.

Lamla Jack: (Starts to sing a gospel song)

Ryan Koons: What does that song mean to you?

Lamla Jack: It means that wherever I go, I don't need a second hand; the higher power is with me. And, yeah, everything, my way is always paved with God's grace; that's it.

Ryan Koons: And what was that song called?

Lamla Jack: "I Am Not Alone."

Ryan Koons: Thank you. That was lovely.

Lamla Jack: Alright.

Ryan Koons: I'm not sure what I have told you about our project but....

Lamla Jack: You didn't.

Ryan Koons: I didn't, I'm sorry. There are eight students working in this group and we've divided into four groups; and you probably guessed that I am interested in the music aspect. But

the other groups have asked me to ask you some questions with respect to their research. What did the BCM mean to you personally?

Lamla Jack: BCM, I was never a political person, everything just comes and goes and I never took interest really. I suppose because of my Christianity based, not to involve myself with politics; so I was never involved. But I knew they had the good mission because they all wanted the black people to be liberated fully, not partly as it is today because, um, we are liberated, there are some, for instance, me I know that Biko's mission was to free every black student to have a better education, free education, but till this day, not everyone is allowed to get that. You know, especially in my area, there are so many students who are not studying and have passed their metric and what. They are staying there, and there education is a waste after metric, really, then one, all they do is just pregnant themselves. Yeah.

Ryan Koons: How do you think the anti-apartheid movement affected the anti-apartheid struggle?

Lamla Jack: Come again.

Ryan Koons: You think the anti-apartheid movement affected the anti-apartheid struggle?

Lamla Jack: It, I think it brought light in a way. Because I think if it was not for the BCM, part of me believes that we wouldn't be free today. But, their willingness to sacrifice even their lives

played an enormous role today because we are reaping their fruits this day. So, at least, even though it was not an easy road, but we managed through it.

Ryan Koons: How do you personally feel about the changing of street names, names, towns and institution names since 1994?

Lamla Jack: Um, on my side, I feel it is just a waste of money. The money that could have been saved or used to better education for those children that I am just talking about now, that are illiterate, that have no means. If you change the name of a street, what difference does it do? To me it doesn't make sense, but they have their own beliefs in that also, so, we may differ in thinking. Yeah.

Ryan Koons: Are there any monuments, or change names etcetera, that you would like to see build or destroyed?

Lamla Jack: No, but I would love to see the Ginsberg monument being bettered. Yeah, in that it holds the richness of our country, but unfortunately so, I'm sure so, many of us are unaware of it and even today I think that even the Ginsberg students are not aware that there is a monument there which could have been, or which could help them better their understanding. And actually, you know, not taking history as an old method, but because there are these new RNCS methods of teaching, you know, which I think they have deprived the right to know history well, which I think if the government could review that because history is so important, because it ground who you are, you know. Because, even us we struggled at some point to express ourselves because we

were not given the full opportunity to know our actual history, you know. That's why you find these mulatoes , if I could say today because they are just called now, this day, they are just called cheese girls and cheese boys, because they don't know who they really are; they are copy cats. So, if you know who you are, you won't be in apposition to go according to who you are and also to respect other cultures.

Ryan Koons: Do you think the youth of today value the anti-apartheid struggle?

Lamla Jack: Yes and no, because others feel that they are already liberated and they don't need to bother themselves about what happened back in the day, but some few are so concerned that they are doing enormous jobs to actually identify or associate themselves with the apartheid era. And also, I was impressed to have learned that my younger brother has already learned to accept, coz I was already telling him to go for this lectures; the Steve Biko lectures, the Enock Sontoga lectures. Those lectures they bring up our understanding of what happened and where are we, where are we going; our vision and stuff. So, many at times I would go to those lectures but he was like, I don't bother myself; I have nothing to do with that, you know. But now, he is almost, I am sure he is getting up which is good.

Ryan Koons: How old is this brother?

Lamla Jack: Um, I suppose 26 or 27.

Ryan Koons: And this is not Andile Jack?

Lamla Jack: No, my younger.

Ryan Koons: Are you proud of where your country is today?

Lamla Jack: Yes and no. Because we were supposed; I think what is dragging the progress is that people were so hungry for a long time such that whatever comes their way they want to grab it, not necessarily with one or two hands, holily, and as such forgetting that if you grab everything to yourself, then they next door neighbors are deprived. So, that's the only hindrance. If people could learn to share, and actually accept that the time has passed and what we have not had back in the days, what we wished for, try to make it or forget about it and try to build a new you a new you within the spectrum of trying to grow as a country. Not necessarily to pull someone down in order for you to come up, you know, then it becomes so painful. You can be easily vexed when you hear some things that are happening and try in fact, knowing that politics is really just a dirty game.

Ryan Koons: Well, that's all the questions I have; are there any questions you feel I should have asked or that you want to answer that I have not asked?

Lamla Jack: Um, no.

Ryan Koons: Are there any more songs you would like to sing?

Lamla Jack: Laughs and begins to sing *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Ryan Koons: That was very good; what does that mean to you?

Lamla Jack: It means that wherever and whatever I do, I know that God is so great. I may, you wish, for instance as a person you have your own interests, your own wishes; and even today, when I look at my age I know I am supposed to be somewhere but I am still struggling to be there, then even though He is not late, He is always on time. So, He is great, even though I may think that He is late, but I know He is on time.

Ryan Koons: And what was that called?

Lamla Jack: *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*

Ryan Koons: Ok, thank you so much.

Lamla Jack: Thank you.

[End of Tape]