

Black Liberations Movement Mosaic
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Black Liberations Movement Mosaic
Oral History Interview
with
Mrs. Thobeka Mheshe
By Tiffany Mane and Flosa Tejada
King William's Town, South Africa
August 14, 2008

Interview with Mrs. Thobeka Mheshe

Interviewed on August 14, 2008

Location: Mrs. Mheshe's Residence, King William's Town, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Interviewers: Tiffany Mane, Flosa Tejada

Transcriber: Unknown

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Black Liberation Movements Mosaic

Tiffany Mane: Hi, um so today. We're going to be interviewing you. If you could please state your name for the camera.

Thobeka Meshe: Oh um.. Thobeka Mheshe

Tiffany Mane: Okay. And can you tell me um what your occupation is?

Thobeka Mheshe: I'm a nurse [inaudible].

Tiffany Mane: Okay so you're a nurse currently?

Thobeka Mheshe: Yes I am a nurse currently.

Tiffany Mane: And um... how long have you been a nurse?

Thobeka Mheshe: Since thirty six years now.

Tiffany Mane: Okay so um... can you tell us a little bit about your job currently? Like what you do currently?

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay. In my career of specialty care, I'm a pediatric nurse, so to speak. I... I've done all other things. I've worked in the medical wards, in surgical wards but for the most part, I've worked with children. I specialize with kids, because I love children.

Tiffany Mane: Okay that's good. Um... so what years were you under training to be a nurse specifically?

Thobeka Mheshe: Between 1972 up to 1976.

Tiffany Mane: Okay.

Thobeka Mheshe: Yes.

Tiffany Mane: And where did that training take place?

Thobeka Mheshe: It took place in [name unclear] hospital in Port Elizabeth.

Tiffany Mane: In Port Elizabeth.

Thobeka Mheshe: [inaudible] eastern cape years.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and um... did you... did you aspire to work in a specific community or..?

Thobeka Mheshe: Yes, because then, we didn't have much choice. You had to work at a certain... you know there were hospitals where we wouldn't work. For example in Port Elizabeth, we had Provision hospital but I wouldn't even if I wanted to. I wouldn't work there. The conditions were such, so I was at [name unclear] hospital throughout my training and the better part of my working as a professional nurse.

Tiffany Mane: And so you said you couldn't work at one of the hospitals?

Thobeka Mheshe: Yes

Tiffany Mane: And why is that?

Thobeka Mheshe: Then that hospital, only admitted white and coloured nurses.

Tiffany Mane: Okay

Thobeka Mheshe: We as black nurses couldn't work there at Provision Hospital.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and how did you feel about that?

Thobeka Mheshe: It was bad. I was feeling very bad, you know we were feeling bad about it but you know we felt so helpless. There was nothing we could do because it was the legislation of apartheid.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm Okay. And so um... we understand that during your training, you actually had some contact with Dr. Ramphele?

Thobeka Mheshe: Oh yes I did.

Tiffany Mane: Oh okay, and so did you have a relationship with her or was it just sort of, you knew of her or...?

Thobeka Mheshe: You know, even before she came, to [name unclear] Hospital, I knew about her from reading you know. I knew about her. I knew about her involvement with the community. But, it was very exciting. Working with her was very very... it was.. you know it was exciting knowing that *I* was going to work with her even before she came there.

Tiffany Mane: And why is that?

Thobeka Mheshe: Because I knew that apart from the work part of nursing, I would have something else to talk to her about. You know in those days you would... um... have to select who you talk to about some things. For example, I had a story that I have longed to share with somebody. But I wouldn't trust anybody to share the story with. So when I knew that she was going to come to that hospital, and was going to work in the same ward as myself for that matter. So I was really excited because I knew that she would have an ear, she would listen to me she would... I knew there was nothing she would do about it. But somehow I felt that I would feel better if I tell her the story.

Tiffany Mane: And so you feel like she had such a presence in the community?

Thobeka Mheshe: Yeah. Exactly.

Tiffany Mane: And... I mean would you be comfortable sharing that story that you shared with her? Or was it very personal?

Thobeka Mheshe: No it's not very personal. But I'm not sure if it will have any impact in your... I mean you'd appreciate it as much as I knew that she would appreciate it. It was... it's a story about my grandfather. I don't know him, I've never met him. Even my mother doesn't know him. Because she was still...the story goes that she was still young when he died. But was very painful about it was that they never buried him. He died in a mine. And they were buried alive in a mine. And the sad

part about it was that my granny always told us that she heard from the other people from the village that who were there with my granddad that my granddad had died. The employers never took it to themselves to inform them, only to discover that they didn't even know him. They didn't know the names of their laborers. They only knew them by numbers. You know that really hurt. It really hurt. There was no compensation. Nothing whatsoever nothing, nothing. And you know if I tell somebody that story and that it hurt me you know people would go "Ahhh what a woman, what about it? You never saw him, and even your mother doesn't know him. I mean what's in it".

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: And that's my granddad.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so do you think that your grandfather's story has, I guess showed what, what society was like during his time.

Thobeka Mheshe: Yeah it does. It does. You know when I think of the fact that (clearing of throat) sorry, people were rich because of what my granddad was doing together with other people. So people got rich from that. But now the thing that really hurt most was the fact that they didn't even know his name.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm Hmm. Okay and so how did Dr. Ramphele respond to you telling her that story?

Thobeka Mheshe: I found that to her it was nothing new. She knew about those stories. Even with me, you remember that I was still even younger. With me it was as if it's something isolated, was an isolated case. But when I talked to her, I found that it was just one of those things. All she told me was that I should be proud that that happened to me. I know that my granddad died like that. I mean digging the gold from the soil. So, he's part of the riches of South Africa. You know.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: You know, even if they didn't pay his help, it's just to taste those riches that he is part of. You know he made me feel proud about him even though I never saw him and I knew that he was illiterate, he wouldn't even write, he wouldn't even write his name, you know? But it still made me feel proud to be his grandchild.

Tiffany Mane: Wow that's really powerful. Um... and so I mean ... what did the Black Consciousness Movement mean to you personally? I know that you just said that Dr. Ramphele, it didn't seem, it didn't faze her; it didn't seem like anything new. Um... but to you, you know, this was sort of an isolated thing and so um... how

did the Black Consciousness Movement sort of impact the way you viewed, not only that story but other things that were happening at the time?

Thobeka Mheshe: Hmmm Hmm, Well, you know to start with the fact that the Black Consciousness Movement made me to... realize, or even appreciate the fact that I am black. And that this is my country. Though I wasn't treated like somebody who is from this country, I was treated like an alien in my country. But the movement made me feel, you know have that fear of being black. Being proud to black and being proud to be South African for that matter.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: That's what it made me feel like. You know and it made me look at other people, you know you appreciate that Black Consciousness didn't actually, didn't actually make you as a black person undermine other colors of the other people, White, Coloured or Indians. It didn't make you undermine them, but it was the human part of it, the human part where it made you feel human. Because the regime of that time made you feel subhuman. But the Black Consciousness you know restored that humanity in people.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so um... how do you think that the Black Consciousness Movement affected the anti-apartheid struggle?

Thobeka Mheshe: I think they did a lot. I think they did a lot, even if they had to pay with their lives. But they did a lot. Because when this thing unfolded you know, this apartheid was coming to the end, you could see that even the white people, it was not the majority of them that embraced the apartheid system. It wasn't the majority of them. You could actually now make a distinction and see that this one was with or for the apartheid, and this one wasn't. But they were all quiet so at that time, it wouldn't make a difference between them.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so you as a woman and as a nurse, what do you think... how do you think that your gender um...affected not only you personally but the apartheid movement in general?

Thobeka Mheshe: Affected it?

Tiffany Mane: Yeah. How did... how did you being a woman sort of change things?
Yeah.

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay. Oh well, I don't know if I had tried to make any changes myself. But I'll tell you when I worked at [name of hospital unclear] with Dr. Ramphele, what she instilled in me, I think unconsciously of course, on her part, what she instilled was the worth of a human being, the worth of a human being. You know she would say. For example in the pediatric ward you are, we were expected to admit children up to the age of twelve. Anything above twelve was

not admitted there. But she would admit even a fourteen year old saying that this is still a child. If she goes to an adult ward, she'd be taught adult things like smoking or something, you know. And coming from my community, the black community

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: You know for one as women, we were treated like subhuman.

Subhuman. Our culture is rich, our culture is rich, our culture is got lots of respect but when you look at it deeply, you'll see that there is some degree of subhuman... um.... The way of thinking of men that women are, you know subhuman. In that for example, as a woman, there are things you are expected to do, whether you like it or not. If you're married, when you get married, there are things... you feel like you are the one who is the marriage, not the man. There are things that you are expected to do, that men... for example if your husband goes away for some time you don't know where he is, you're not supposed to ask him where he comes from. You know. So there is this regime that's oppressing you and there is thing about your culture that's oppressing as well. You know. We looked at oppression but when we are free we saw that no man this is nothing but culture. And it has got nothing but respect because really we are expected to be submissive and respect our husbands. But then, it felt like oppression from our husbands.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm Hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: So as a woman, I think um.... I just had to try to be above whatever came my way. Try to face it head on. And show the world out there that though I am a woman, I can do this, if it's anything that is within my strength of doing. You know. I think that's what I did, that's all I did. And teaching my children of course.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: Teaching my children to respect people and to respect their culture.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: To respect their culture.

Tiffany Mane: Okay

Thobeka Mheshe: And respecting God on top.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm okay so you speaking of your children, um.... So do you think that your... today's youth value the anti-apartheid struggle and what...you know... and the Black Consciousness Movement?

Thobeka Mheshe: I think they still do. I'll tell you we are fourteen years now in democracy.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: But there's still that degree of racism. There is still that degree of racism. Though it is not much but we find that most of... I mean our younger children; this is just a story to them. They are growing up in this era, where there is no apartheid thing, you know. It's just sporadic cases. So, I don't think they appreciate what has been done for them. Except for those that are bigger. Like those that are twenty something or thirty something. Those appreciate because even if they were young at least they know about, they understand. When the stories are told, they understand. But the younger ones just grew up when it was already like this. So...

Tiffany Mane: Okay, and so how do you... how do you think that we can teach the youth to appreciate you know, what happened in the past through BCM and the anti-apartheid struggle, so that they know better and so that it's not just a story to them. How do you think that we can sort of help that cause?

Thobeka Mheshe: Yeah, teach them. I think number one is that we should tell them. They should know what happened. They should know. If I sit here and I've got my

parents, for example I've got grandparents, I should tell them the stories. I should keep some things to show them, say some newspapers or whatever. But I think history is the best thing. They must know where they come from, for them to appreciate what they have now. And for them to look at what they have, look up to what they have, and to improve the future. I think the history is the best tool for them to know where they come from.

Tiffany Mane: Okay, and so one of the tools um of creating history is creating monuments.

Thobeka Mheshe: Yes.

Tiffany Mane: And so how do you feel about monuments that are currently up? Do you think any of them should be torn down, or do you feel that there should be new ones put up, or...anything like that?

Thobeka Mheshe: I think monuments are good, they are good tools. More should be put up if possible.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm Hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: More should be put up because there is this thing of, you'll appreciate that we are a very large, there's a large number of us and very different ethnic

groups amongst the black people and they were all affected by the apartheid regime. So, this is why I'm saying now, I think more of these monuments should be put up because I think there are stories that are not told. It's true that, I don't think that there would ever be a time where everybody was affected could have a chance of being known or talked about.

Tiffany Mane: Hmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: But I think it will be best if we had more monuments because a lot of, there's lots of unsung heroes, lots of them.

Tiffany Mane: Okay. And so um... one of the other things that's happening in South Africa is the changing of the street names that were originally um.. you know Afrikaans and sort of had sort of a negative connotation about apartheid.

Thobeka Mheshe: Yes

Tiffany Mane: And so do you think its okay for those to change or would you prefer that they stayed the same?

Thobeka Mheshe: I think it is okay for them to change.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: Because even those that were there, they had reasons to have them up.

They had reasons to have those, for example, Afrikaners streets. They had their own reasons. Our reason will be now teaching the young people that are growing up. You know when they see a name, they'll want to know, they will be curious to know "What did Albert Zizulo do"? Something like that. You know. So, what did Steve Biko do"? They will know the history, if the street names are changed [inaudible]. But now the government is always talking about money in doing it.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: It costs a lot of money. I'm not saying it doesn't, but it is, it will be best.

Tiffany Mane: Okay.

Thobeka Mheshe: Because as I said, there are even people that are not known, you know or there can't be a monument for so and so. You know. Maybe that person didn't do much, he was just killed, or whatever. But if there's a street is named after that person, it will okay, even for the family.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: To realize that their relative is appreciated, recognized.

Tiffany Mane: Okay. Um... and so going back to you know your job as a nurse

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay

Tiffany Mane: Um... you work at a hospital with children.

Thobeka Mheshe: Yes.

Tiffany Mane: Um and so what do you think are some of the health issues that youth are facing here in South Africa currently?

Thobeka Mheshe: Um... you know there used to be what you call Kwashioko [spelling unclear], which is a nutritional condition. But there isn't much of it now. I'm not sure if it is still there. And it used to hurt me you know; you would have doctors from other countries that would come here only to see a child with Kwashioko, because where they come from, there is nothing like Kwashioko. And Kwashioko is a nutritional disease, no child is supposed to suffer from Kwashioko, if the child gets nutritious food. The child is not supposed to suffer from Kwashioko. So it's conditions like those that I think young people should know about so that... though it is really it is not. I don't think it is there anymore. If it is, it is very rare that you see a child with Kwashioko. But now, what has rive is things like TB. TB

is very rive and our country is still struggling with containing TB. Very very very struggling with containing TB and babies are dying from these conditions pneumonias and TBs.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm so why do you, why do you think that's happening?

Thobeka Mheshe: There's this outbreak of these immune diseases like AIDS, HIV/AIDS.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: It is so rive too. There's lots of it. And TB is one of the opportunistic diseases, so more babies have got TB and their conditions of where they're staying, they stay in shacks.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: They don't get enough nutritious food, even if there is money, some, most mothers, especially young mothers are... do not know what is nutritious for their children. They'll just give whatever the child wants, even if it's just something sweet or what. So, they still need to be taught about nutrition you know. Just growing vegetables in a small garden,

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: They still need to be taught about those things. It is done in some areas but there are areas where it is not done anymore. Because people [inaudible]. You know there is lots of influx into the towns. People are coming to the towns, more than staying in the.... What's this now? Villages.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: Yea. More than staying there, where there is enough ground to grow up vegetables.

Tiffany Mane: Okay. And so that sort of brings, you know, speaking about rural areas, we visited the Zanempilo Clinic, which Dr. Ramphele helped found.

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay. Oh yes!

Tiffany Mane: And so we were wondering what you thought about, not only the clinic but its affect on the community where it is?

Thobeka Mheshe: Well, I think it's a very very, very good place. It's a very, it's very ideal to have a clinic at that place because it is far from the hospitals. The Bisho Hospital, which is not very far from there, is newly built. There was no hospital whatsoever. And people had to come from those rural areas downtown and when

they get here, there was Grey Hospital, that didn't admit Black people. So they had to move to Mount Coke, which is another rural area from here, far far from here. It was very ideal for them to put up that clinic there. Very, very ideal.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm. And so did Dr. Ramphele ever speak about that clinic with you?

Thobeka Mheshe: Oh yes, yes.

Tiffany Mane: Okay.

Thobeka Mheshe: She did. She spoke about the clinic and her working there. She spoke about it and you know, she used to tell me how, tell us, in fact as the group, how they struggled, number one to get the place to erect that clinic. And how they had to be undercover and not known from the start that they are behind it.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so how did they go about getting the land for the hospital?

Um...

Thobeka Mheshe: I can't make out now what she said you know. But all I know is that they didn't just come affront and said "Me, Dr. Ramphele, Steve Biko, we want..." No. they didn't. They didn't come up that way. They had to behind scenes you know

Tiffany Mane: Okay

Thobeka Mheshe: And just push it and it was funded from outside the country.

Tiffany Mane: So why did they have to stay behind the scenes? Was it sort of a... I guess a security reason? Or was it something else?

Thobeka Mheshe: I don't think they would ever have permission to erect that if their names were in front, just from there word. They would have never been permitted to do that. And number one, I'm sure it would be thought that they want to do something else, other than the clinic. You know there were then, the regime was so skeptical, even going to church. They didn't trust that we're going to church to get preached to. They would always think that it was a sort of political gathering.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: So they wouldn't have had it. They would have never been allowed.

Tiffany Mane: And so political gatherings were sort of a common thing, especially during BCM?

Thobeka Mheshe: Yeah. They were. They were common.

Tiffany Mane: Okay.

Thobeka Mheshe: But they had to be camouflaged with something else, say attending a funeral.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: It was a gathering.

Tiffany Mane: Okay.

Flosa Tejada: Mention Steve Biko. Ask her if she thinks Biko would be proud.

Tiffany Mane: So, do you think that um... Steve Biko would be proud of where the country is today if he were still alive or if he came back?

Thobeka Mheshe: If he's still alive. (Takes a deep breath). You know I always have mixed feelings about that. At times I feel he would but to a certain degree. But I don't think exactly, because what he fought for hasn't been totally reached.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: It hasn't been totally reached, you know. I think Steve Biko would love or wanted to see every black child educated. That was number one. He wanted every black child to be educated as well. You appreciate that there was a time where we could, where we would say that once we are able to write our names, that's enough, we should be out of school. There was such a time. So what they fought for, they wanted a black child to go to school. They are going to school but not every black child goes to school. And at times, it is not because the parents don't to take their child. In fact, I think all the time, it's because they can't afford to take their child to school. Which brings me to think that therefore, I'm sure he would want us to have free education if possible for certain individuals, those that cannot afford. But we don't have that yet.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm okay and so what do you think Dr. Ramphela thinks of the country right now, and what do you think her role in the country and the progress of the black people in South Africa is right now?

Thobeka Mheshe: I think she sees some progress. I don't know. But I think she sees some progress, especially where she is now. Because the university she's at now used never to have such a large number of black students you know. And I think she sees an improvement.

Tiffany Mane: Okay

Thobeka Mheshe: But I am sure not enough. Still not enough.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm. Okay and what um...what brought you into nursing?

Thobeka Mheshe: Brought me into nursing?

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: I always love when this is asked. My kids used to ask me this, “Why did you go into nursing? You’re only screening that now, you don’t get paid enough, you’re working long hours, this, this and that. Why did you take nursing in the first place”? You know, I took nursing because number one it was the only profession that would pay you while you were still on training.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm Okay.

Thobeka Mheshe: And I needed that money, to help in my family. So, I didn’t go into nursing because, most people used to say “I went into nursing because I love people.” That is not what pushed me. I wanted to go into nursing, I went to nursing because that time it was nursing or teaching that you could do as a black woman. You could go to nursing, or go to teaching. But with teaching, they didn’t pay you while you were on training. And with nursing, they paid you. That was

my reason, why I went for nursing. It was only when I was already in nursing that I started to love it the way I do now.

Tiffany Mane: Wow. Wow okay, that's really powerful actually. Um... and so what do you think of the government's role in sort of the funding of not only education, and nursing education but hospitals and health in general.

Thobeka Mheshe: The funding?

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm Hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: Well, I think, I don't know where the problem is, whether it is the government not funding, or the people who are handling the money not using it in the correct way. I don't know where the problem is, between the two. But the hospitals, our hospitals, our hospitals are under funded because now the implementation of the things that are supposed to be done are not done. So, I don't know where the problem is exactly, where the money. I don't know where the money gets stuck. Because you'll find that the things are not done for the public hospitals and then at the end of the term, you'll find that the, whoever is in charge, the MEC in charge of health department is said we have under spent. So many billions or millions going back under spent. This is why I'm saying, I don't think the government is not giving the money out, but it is the people that are supposed to distribute it.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: That are not doing their job.

Tiffany Mane: Okay

Thobeka Mheshe: Otherwise it's... our hospitals are not in a good state. Not at all.

Tiffany Mane: And so what are some of the things that are I guess missing from the health in general? Like some of the things that aren't addressed with illnesses or with patients, or things like that?

Thobeka Mheshe: In general. For example in the hospitals around here, where I am now, even man power is not enough. That is now the nurses and doctors, especially doctors. We don't have specialist doctors. We've got a pediatric ward but we don't have a pediatric doctor running the whole, the ward.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: That used never to be like that. We used to have pediatric doctors for pediatric wards, orthopedic doctors for orthopedic wards, but now, you just get a general practitioner, running a specialist ward.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: So that makes things, a bit difficult because he's got to transfer all the time, to certain hospitals outside this one. And yet even this hospital, we had specialist doctors then things would be better.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm Okay. Um and so on to lighter things.

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay.

Tiffany Mane: I just wanted to ask you a little bit about liberation music and I know that it plays a really big role in South African history, and I was wondering um, if you knew any of the liberation songs and if you'd be comfortable singing them?

Thobeka Mheshe: *Laughs*

Flosha Tejada: Just a little piece.

Tiffany Mane: A little bit.

Thobeka Mheshe: Awhh liberation songs, awhh they are lovely. They've got that drive, you know.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: When they are sung, you want to go on. You are not scared of the bullet when that song is sung. You are just not scared. You go and face whatever. I don't know, it just happened in you.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm hmm

Thobeka Mheshe: So they played a very big role, a very very big role because it was, you know, these liberation songs made it easier to mobilize people. You know, if they are sung, people will come and you have a large number of people. So if there is anybody who wants to address he's got a large audience to address.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: You know.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm okay.

Flosha Tejada: Was there any specific one, that sort of stayed with you, that you would want to sing a little piece for us.

Thobeka Mheshe: I'm not good at singing!

Flosha Tejada: Oh yes you are.

Thobeka Mheshe: I'm not good at singing! But um... there is this one that said "Baba Mandela." What was this thing now? Okay the one that really made one feel that he needs to go on was this one that goes like, "What's our sin? We are being killed, what have we done? Our sin is being black."

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: It is just the color of our skin. That one really got into you and made you feel that "Well, if he wants to kill me because I'm black, let him do it anyway."

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm okay. And so were you ever involved in any of the rallies or any of like the Black Consciousness Movement meetings or things like that at all?

Thobeka Mheshe: Rallies yes, and I remember at some stage because we are church people, we used never to be worried by this police or things, so, our places used to

be hideouts. For example, there were guys from [inaudible] Joburg [referring to Johannesburg] then that would come to a rally down here and then we would house them and when they are in your house it would be lovely. They would do their poetry reading and I was writing poems then of course.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: I writing poems. How I don't know but I was writing poems for them.

They would do poetry reading and they would go and do it in the hall or at the stadium, when they've got these rallies. It was so lovely.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: So I would go with them or if um... at times you go to a funeral and it turns into a rally. So...

Tiffany Mane: hmmm hmm wow. Um... and so you mentioned poetry. And so we were wondering what role poetry played in the movement itself?

Thobeka Mheshe: Oh it played a big role. It played a big role. It was another way of expressing how people felt. Because more than anything else, even with the songs, it was expressing our feelings. But you know, you wouldn't dare go there and express your feelings in front of whoever. But it was a way of expressing. I

think somehow it was therapeutic for us. It was healing us inside. It was expressing our feelings even with poetry. Poetry did that, you express, for example the poem, I remember the poem I wrote about my granddad. I am who I am. That is a poem I wrote.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm

Thobeka Mheshe: But don't ask me now to recite it, I don't remember it. But I know I write, I wrote it then. It, you know, it was to me it made me you know I express how I felt about what happened to me. So poetry was, played a very big role. And I think it still does.

Tiffany Mane: hmm

Thobeka Mheshe; It still does. Poetry does. It plays a big role.

Tiffany Mane: Wow. So was there a relationship between poetry and the liberation songs, were they sort of hand in hand?

Thobeka Mheshe: Oh yes. Yes. Hand in hand. Hand in hand.

Tiffany Mane: Okay

Thobeka Mheshe: If for example, there's a rally at times they would start doing poetry reading. They would start with poetry reading, you'll sing, sing, sing, then there's poetry reading and then you'd be addressed.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm okay,

Thobeka Mheshe: It was so good. It was so good.

Tiffany Mane: Wow. It sounds like it. Um... and so I think that's about all for you today.

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay

Tiffany Mane: And I wanted to thank you very much. [speaking Xhosa word for "thank you"].

Thobeka Mheshe: Oh thank you. [speaking Xhosa word for "thank you"].

Tiffany Mane: And we just want to let you know that there's a consent form for you to sign.

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay

Tiffany Mane: And a deposit form for you to sign so that we can put it in the archives here in South Africa and at our college. Um... and so we'll just give that to you, once we're done with this interview.

Thobeka Mheshe: Okay thank you.

Tiffany Mane: Um... and thank you again.

Thobeka Mheshe: Thank you very much. Thanks for knowing you, and thanks for having me.

Tiffany Mane: Thank you.

[End of Tape]