

Black Liberations Movement Mosaic
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Oral History Interview
with
Mr. Mongezi Stuurman
By Gqabi Njokweni
Zinyoka, South Africa
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Interview with Mongezi Stuurman, Principal of the BJT Tyamzashe School

Interviewed on 12 August, 2008

Location: BJT Tyamzashe School, Zinyoka Location, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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Interviewer: Gqabi Njokweni

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Gqabi Njokweni: Good afternoon, sir. My name is Gqabi Njokweni and my clan name is Zizi. I am here with a research project, but first I need you to tell us more about yourself and the school.

Mongesai Stuurman: My name is Mongesai Stuurman, my clan name is Tshangisk Zulu Skhoma Mahlatyana. I work here at the school called BKT Senior Secondary School. The school was started in 1981. I am the principalship of Mr. Yuko. It is been here ever since. Now there are five blocks which you are seeing with the laboratory. It is being used as an office and the staff room.

Gqabi Njokweni: All right, thank you, father. Would you please tell us, father, when did you start here at the school?

Mongesai Stuurman: I started here at the school in 1984 until now, which I think has been 24 years I have been in the school and the community.

Gqabi Njokweni: I see. I would like to ask you what made you come to the school?

Mongelai Stuurman: I live around Qonce or King William's Town. My home is in Masinyatha, so when I made my application then, I got a job at the school. Also, my aim is to work with people who I belong to, which is the role of community, trying to make my own contribution by uplifting people I belong to.

Gqabi Njokweni: Let me ask you, father, about the names of the school is named after. Does it affect the policy which the school goes by?

Mongelai Stuurman: You see, the school has been named after one of the people, which is BKT Tyamzashe who is well-known as a music composer. So we are named after a person who was a music composer who was well known, so I can say that his effect can be seen here at school. Even the children now love this kind of music. They no longer saying only at school, but even in the community they saying; there are choirs outside like Xhantilonzi which are here in the community.

Gqabi Njokweni: I can see, old man. I would like to ask, what does it mean to have the school choir?

Mongelai Stuurman: It is very important that the school must have a choir because you can make a living out of music, but besides that, when the school has a choir, when the choir is practicing,

the children who are in it are not exposed to things that they should not be. In other words, the choir is taking them away from the street, keeping them organized and not involved in crime and things like that.

Gqabi Njokweni: Were you involved during the times of liberation struggle? Did you participate?

Mongesai Stuurman: I was there. I was there in liberation struggle.

Gqabi Njokweni: May be the BCM, is there anything you know about it? Does it mean anything to you personally that you can tell us about—the Black Consciousness movement?

Mongesai Stuurman: As I mentioned to you, as I started working in this community of Zinyoka, I mentioned that Mr. Steve Biko died in 1977. I was still in school. That's where we learned and got interest [ed in] to the history of the BCM, “What is exactly the BCM?” We also learn that the aim of the BCM was to discipline black people for them to be able to be independent, not to be dependent a lot on other people, but for them to do their own thing, and also for them to be proud of being black, not to look at themselves as inferior to the other nations. So I can say the BCM has achieved its goals and improving black people’s minds because they do not look down at themselves. So they were practically involved in issues that were brought by the BCM. You found out that black people were discriminated against in their own nation. I think everyone tried to resist that kind discrimination in black people.

Gqabi Njokweni: All right. Thank you. Maybe about the changing of the street names, could you tell us your own point of view?

Mongesai Stuurman: It is a very good thing, this changing of names, but it must not be done just for the sake of changing names. The person the street is changed into must be a person who had a contribution in the country and, in my opinion, it must be done with great intentions because if it is not done that way, that means that history will be removed. So this changing of names must be done with great intentions. I think it is one of the right things to do to recognize our heroes who played a very significant role in our society. This should be done for those people who have already passed away because, if we named them after people who are still alive, that certain person may commit a wrongful act and that would result in name changing again. So this name changing should be named for the people who have already passed on so that their contribution to society will never be forgotten.

Gqabi Njokweni: So, father, are there any monuments maybe that you would like to see built or demolished?

Mongesai Stuurman: There are monuments, for example, when you enter here at school, there is a statue of BKT. This is to remember his contribution that he had on society. So, in all of that the monuments like that or the statues like that must be built to recognize the contribution of the certain people. In demolishing, yes, those that did not play a role in uniting our country and reconciliation. Those, to me, I can say do not have a place in this South Africa that we live in.

Gqabi Njokweni: So, father, are you proud of this country, of where it is today under the policies of the ANC?

Mongei Stuurman: I am very proud of where we are today, but we have not reached where we are going, but we are here today because of the people who fought for liberation, people who died for this place we are in. But, in order for me to be satisfied, this poverty, the unemployment, they must be the things that are no longer part of our people. That's why I'm saying we have not reached where we are going, but I'm saying we can go there if we work together.

Gqabi Njokweni: Are young people appreciative of the liberation struggle, or do they value their freedom that we have today?

Mongei Stuurman: Well, this question you are asking is very difficult because it wants to be answered by the youth because they often say they are accused of not being appreciative of the struggle. The most important thing is that we must teach them clearly about we really come from so they can be proud of this freedom that we have today.

Gqabi Njokweni: Okay, father, I thank you very much. Going back to music, is music progressing here at school?

Mongesai Stuurman: There is a progress in music ^ school, but I can say, it's not that much. In order for it to progress forward here at school, I would say I would love to see it being part of the studies we have at school here, being taught to students to make sure they continue with the music because as I've said here at school, we were named after a one of the well-known composers. So this name—BKT—should be accompanied with music. What I would love really is that this kind of music should be there as a subject and just like the way it is done in the Model-C schools.

Gqabi Njokweni: Is choral music still popular, or are there other kinds of music you sing here at school?

Mongesai Stuurman: Choral music is the most popular here at school.

Gqabi Njokweni: When did this kind of music start here at school?

Mongesai Stuurman: One I remember here at school, there was a grandchild of Tyamzashe named Ncedo Tyamzashe. He studied choral music, so he came and taught here at school. It was a long time ago, and he loved his music. So children at the school have been singing this music; we have history. There were even people like Sheilla Gqoma who have passed away.

Gqabi Njokweni: Do you know if Mr. Tyanzashe's music was related to the liberation struggle?

Mongei Stuurman: Mr. Tyamzashe's music—in some of his songs he composed are about the visits of the chief here in South Africa. Even though he composed his music in Xhosa, it still had the Western style. He had a song which we sang for you that says "Bisho, my home." It is a song that showed that he is not going anywhere because this is where his home is. Just like you would hear anyone else saying that this nation is a nation of our forefathers, so he too was trying to emphasize that in this song.

Gqabi Njokweni: Did this music contribute to the liberation struggle?

Mongei Stuurman: Music in general played a major role; when there is singing, even cowards are no longer afraid. They saw themselves going forward, looking for a fight, even though they were scared. So music did that. So music played a role in the struggle at large.

Gqabi Njokweni: We thank you, Mr. Stuurman. We thank you for the way you have answered us about the role music has played, including that of Mr. Tyamzashe in society and the school at large.

Mongei Stuurman: I thank you.

[End of Tape]