

**Black Liberations Movement Mosaic**  
**Under the direction of:**  
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Oral History Interview  
with  
Mr. Moses Twebe  
By Phumza Williams  
Dimbaza, South Africa  
August 13, 2008

Narrator: Mr. Moses Twebe

Location: Dimbaza, South Africa

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Interviewer: Phumza Williams

Language: Xhosa

Translator: Phumza Williams

Transcriber: Phumza Williams

Black Liberation Movements Mosaic

Phumza Williams: My name is Phumza, I am the community developer here in Dimbaza, I am with the students of Dickinson College, I am here to interview Mr. Moses Twebe at his home number 1833 Dimbaza township. It is the 13th day of August 2008 and the time is 1:50. Good afternoon sir.

Moses Twebe: Good afternoon my girl.

Phumza Williams: How are you today?

Moses Twebe: I'm fine thank you, and how are you?

Phumza Williams: I'm fine thank you, can you please state your name, sir?

Moses Twebe: My name is Moses Twebe, I'm the son of Kleinbooi and Nelly Twebe, my mother's maiden name is Nosajini. I was born in Addelaide on the farm. I grew up there on that farm, but we did not stay on one farm for too long, we were always moved around, so I did not get a chance to go to school because the farmers did not want us to go to school they wanted us to work on the farm. We were born six children.

Phumza Williams: How old are you?

Moses Twebe: I was born in 1922, I am past 80 just reaching 90.

Phumza Williams: How long have you stayed in Dimbaza?

Moses Twebe: I was moved to Dimbaza when I left Robben Island in 1969 in October, I was arrested in 1963 on the 17th of July. I stayed there for 90 days, then I got out and I went to Royal, I was working at Cadbury, the house of sweets.

Phumza Williams: What were your parents like, how did they raise you?

Moses Twebe: My parents were very good people, but I did not really know my mother because she died when I was still young, I was raised by my grandfather.

Phumza Williams: How did you get into politics?

Moses Twebe: In 1942 I went to Johannesburg to work in the mines, then I came back in 1945 then I stayed home then I moved to Port Elizabeth that is where I joined the politics and it was the time of breaking the rules. The I met Elliot Mbuqe and he introduced me to the politics, he was also coming from Addeleide. At the time there were two bridges in Port Elizabeth, one for white people and one for black people, and you were not allowed to walk on the white people's bridge when you were black.

Phumza Williams: What is it exactly that you were doing during the struggle?

Moses Twebe: At the time of the struggle we were breaking the rules, but I didn't go to jail at the time because I was looking after my aunt who was very sick.

Phumza Williams: When did you go to prison?

Moses Twebe: In 1963 on the 17th of July

Phumza Williams: How long did you stay in Robben Island?

Moses Twebe: I stayed in Robben Island for 5 years without the 90 days, before I was sentenced I stayed on trial for a year and a half.

Phumza Williams: Can you please tell us how it was during the time you were there?

Moses Twebe: It was really tough because we were not allowed to wear long trousers, we were only allowed to wear shorts even we were eating was horrible during dinner time and for break fast we had porridge. Sometimes you don't even finish your break fast because you are called to go to work, maybe you just had two spoons only and the porridge was ice cold and it made us cold too. Our job was to strike the rocks which are now called concrete.

Phumza Williams: When did you arrive here in Dimbaza?

Moses Twebe: I arrived here in Dimbaza when I was released from Robben Island, we were only given maize to eat we didn't even have pots to cook that maize and when I got here my house was filled with soil. I never worked here in Dimbaza because I was banned for two, not to leave my premises, but after two years I was released from the banning order then I started politics again.

Phumza Williams: How do the people of Dimbaza remember the role you played?

Moses Twebe: Some people remember the role I played and some don't, the Moses Twebe was build because of the role I played during the apartheid struggle. When I got I concentrated on the youth because you can never leave young people behind when you are doing something, because the youth is the foundation and without them you can do

nothing. I took the youth and I taught them about the struggle and people were saying “this old man is misleading our children.”

Phumza Williams: In which year was Moses Twebe [community hall] built?

Moses Twebe: I think it has about 20 years now it's a while since it was built but unfortunately I don't remember the year, but at the time I was arrested again and I was taken to Cambridge then from there to Queenstown, I was sentenced to 8 months then when I came back Moses Twebe was in construction.

Phumza Williams: How do you feel that the Community Hall of Dimbaza is named after you?

Moses Twebe: I feel very honored because it is the reminder of where I come from, because the Community Hall is here today because of Moses Twebe.

Phumza Williams: Did you play a role in naming of the Hall?

Moses Twebe: No I didn't the role I played was during the struggle, it was the decision of the people to name it after me because Dimbaza is here because of me.

Phumza Williams: What do you think of the other apartheid heroes, are they remembered enough?

Moses Twebe: Those were the people, heroes like I said that the history of Dimbaza is very deep. We were so many when we came back from Robben Island when we got back they found jobs but and I didn't because I was banned. I think its only right that their names should be used in naming the streets because they were also in Robben Island.

Phumza Williams: How do you feel about the names of other buildings here in King William's Town?

Moses Twebe: I feel great because those heroes like Steve Biko are remembered. When Steve Biko died I was in prison again only this time I was in Queenstown.

Phumza Williams: So now since you came back from Robben Island and the apartheid struggle is over do you thing the situation in Dimbaza has improved?

Moses Twebe: No the situation in Dimbaza is not improved because after the apartheid the factories moved and that was the only thing that helped the people to survive. That took us back to square one because people have no jobs and that is why the crime rate is so high. Dimbaza used to be a very beautiful place but now of unemployment it has turned into something else.

Phumza Williams: What do you thing of the youth of today as compared to the youth before 1994?

Moses Twebe: Like I said before the youth is the foundation of the struggle but in our communities today there's no youth, the one we are busy doing crime. So that means the youth needs to be organized because without them we cannot move forward because they have to pick-up where we left off.

Phumza Williams: What do you think of the leaders of today, are you pleased with the way they do things?

Moses Twebe: No I'm not because I don't see anything new instead of moving forward we moving back, but I am pleased because we still call ourselves free South Africans. So when you are in war it has to be the Women's League, Youth League, Workers they all need to work together. When you are in war you need to be informed of what is happening in Tembisa.

Phumza Williams: Please sir can you tell us more about the history of Dimbaza.

Moses Twebe: When I arrived here they were building toilets, the foundation of the houses we live in was only 3 inches, these are not house but stables for horses. People were working for only R15.50 per month, a man carried his maize for lunch all the way from the rural areas to Dimbaza to work, the money was only raised when we got here. We couldn't even have meat except for pork and citrillus lanatus from the rural areas and many children died of hunger then and Reverend Russell was here at the time, he is the



one who made plans for people to receive food rations. We used to get those food rations from Guzana and Fani was not opened yet, we all used get the rations and also the comrades from Robben Island whether you were working or not. We used to get our mail from Debenek and when Fani arrived we took our mail there, if you were sent money by mail the white men would open your mail and you didn't even have right to report because there was no one to report to. If they like they would come to your home and disconnect your stove maybe and throw it outside and you can't even say anything about that. I didn't spend much time at home I was always arrested because I couldn't accept what was going on, there's no prison I didn't go to here in Ciskei, police vans from King William's Town, East London and Port Elizabeth would all come just to get me. They would dig up my grounds looking for firearms.

Phumza Williams: When you look here in Dimbaza do you think that there are people who still think it was better during the time of the apartheid?

Moses Twebe: Yes there are many who think it was better during the apartheid because during that time they were working and that's the only thing that mattered to them.

People we easily organized then, but today people are not working and they point fingers at us saying we are the ones holding back on jobs, taking the money for ourselves although we don't even receive a cent. When you recruit people they start to think that you are rich but all you're trying to do is to prepare them for war.

Phumza Williams: When you look back to the time you spent in Robben Island do you think it was necessary for people to be taken there?

Moses Twebe: There was no need for people to be taken to Robben Island but for us who were there we learnt a lot because we wouldn't have seen the thing we saw, Robben Island helped to make us stronger because even after we came back we didn't stop fighting and said no we were in Robben Island so now we must stop fighting, if we didn't go to Robben Island we wouldn't have this thing we call freedom today. When we came back some went to training for Umkhonto We Sizwe and also my son was one of them.

Phumza Williams: The time you returned from Robben Island and arrive here in Dimbaza were you the only one who was dumped here?

Moses Twebe: No there were many of us.

Phumza Williams: Are they all still alive?

Moses Twebe: No, they passed away, it's only me and Kobo who are still alive, Kobo was only sentenced to 3 years in Robben Island then he was transferred to Port Elizabeth then from there he came here in Dimbaza with Mathe.

Phumza Williams: What was the cause of death for the many who died?

Moses Twebe: When we came back from Robben Island we came from a very cold place, here on the outside we met so many things, in 1964 a man used to hide with the other and sometimes we were put on the airplane field and it was so cold there, if you are working during dinner time there this white man called Delpoort he would push to the cold and the energy drink would spill on us, the energy drink was so cold that it would make your kidneys shake. So when we came here some saw that they could do this and that and that caused a lot of damage.

Phumza Williams: The questions I am about to ask you are the last questions and we call them the exit questions. I want to know if there's anything you know about the BCM?

Moses Twebe: The one of Steve Biko? Yes I do know it. When I came back from prison after my banning order I wanted to start making bricks, then I went to Steve Biko and he gave a truck and the concrete mixer. Then I got arrested again then the truck, concrete mixer, the spades and the people I was working with were all taken away.

Phumza Williams: How did the BCM attack the apartheid struggle?

Moses Twebe: Yes it did, thank God for asking that question. Have you ever heard of Mohapi? He used to come to see me all the time we were so close, their work was very good they were also fighting the apartheid we were also fighting, I heard that Mohapi was killed in Kei Road. He was my best friend and he would look for me no matter where I was.

Phumza Williams: Do you remember any liberation songs?

Moses Twebe: They are so many.

Phumza Williams: Can you please sing for us if you still can?

Moses Twebe: When we sang in those day we used to sing song with words like these: “BRING BACK AFRICA, WE AS THE BLACK NATION WE CRY FOR OUR LAND.” It was back in 1952 then, from there we went to song like: “WE WILL SHOOT YOU WITH THE BIG GUN”. The white men would complain like Dupree and the others because we sang this one when we were going under ground in 1961. The were so many songs but unfortunately I don’t remember them all.

Phumza Williams: Was music important during apartheid?

Moses Twebe: Yes music was very important back then it made us exited, then there songs with words like: “WHITE MAN ARE KILLING OUR CHILDREN.” These songs were great back then.

Phumza Williams: How do you feel, sir, about the changing of street names, town names and memorials in South Africa?

Moses Twebe: It is the right thing to do I love it so that we know that this is the Thabo Mbeki, this is Mhlaba and this is Mandela street because are the people who fought for freedom. We cannot just take anyone who did not fight and name the street by them, there are so many people who had fallen it only right that their names are used because they did struggle. Even me if I hadn't gone to Robben Island there wouldn't be a Moses Twebe. It is here because I fought. You see there is a Richard Varha High School, Varha was also one of the struggle heroes we were together in Robben Island, so all the names should be used.

Phumza Williams: Are there any building you wish to be build or destroyed?

Moses Twebe: Yes there are for example Kuyasa Secondary should be destroyed and rebuild it is made out of zinc and also Dimbaza Primary school they are both the first schools here in Dimbaza they need to be renovated, on top of that there's the soccer field it is not the right place to play important games because when you stand on the bridge you see everything going on the field, the main purpose for hosting games is for people to enter with money at the gate.

Phumza Williams: Does the youth value the role you played in the struggle?

Moses Twebe: Yes, some do and some don't but we have to try and show them the way, firstly its discipline when you meet someone older than you say hello Sir or hello Ma'm,

discipline helps a lot and today's youth doesn't have discipline, it is important that they are taught everyday so that when they see a white man they do not discriminate. Those days are over now. I don't say when I see a white man he used to beat me up in prison, there are some people who are still doing that but it's wrong, we must respect our leaders and do as they say.

Phumza Williams: Are you proud of South Africa today?

Moses Twebe: Yes I am proud of South Africa today and as I said before that the foundation of the struggle is the youth but today's youth know nothing about the struggle, but I value South Africa so much.

Phumza Williams: How did the struggle affect your life?

Moses Twebe: My life is affected because as I am sitting here my mind is in the struggle, when bad things happen I get deeply hurt because we have never seen things like these some people asking who's that Mandela, who is that Sisulu. Those things hurt so much but we need not to mind them.

Phumza Williams: If you could get a second chance to relive your life would you change anything?

Moses Twebe: The one thing I could change is the youth thing and the women. They say: “YOU STRIKE A WOMAN, YOU STRIKE A ROCK, YOU WILL ALSO DIE.” They were saying that to Strydom, but now when you go to the executive you find that the youth is not there and the women are not there.

Phumza Williams: Now my questions are finished now sir, is there anything you would like to add?

Moses Twebe: I am glad that you are here today because it remind us of where we come from, we remember the hard times we experienced in Robben Island today all of that is history, we were all together with Steve Tshwete and Zuma in Robben Island, I want children to go to school because I didn't get the opportunity to go to school I had to look after sheep and goats. We were not even allowed to have a dog, our dogs were shot. I would be very happy you could take the names of the fallen heroes and do something with them, maybe name the streets with them.

Phumza Williams: Where could we find these names?

Moses Twebe: I could make a way for them to be written down I still have them in my mind.

Phumza Williams: We are done now sir and we thank you for your time, is there anyone else maybe we can speak to?

Moses Twebe: Yes there is a woman next door, her family welcomed me when I first got here, I didn't even have a stove and her mother would lend me hers. But I need to go and talk to her and ask her if she can talk to you.

Phumza Williams: It is okay, sir, you can go and see if she is willing to talk to us.