

**Black Liberations Movement Mosaic**  
**Under the direction of:**  
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Black Liberations Movement Mosaic  
Oral History Interview  
with  
Ms. Stephanie Victor  
By James Chapnick  
King William's Town, South Africa  
August 12, 2008

Interview with Stephanie Victor

Interviewed on 12 August, 2008

Location: Amathole Museum, King William's Town, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Interviewer: James Chapnick

Transcriber: James Chapnick

Black Liberation Movements Mosaic

James Chapnick: Okay, this is James Chapnick interviewing Stephanie Victor at the Amathole Museum in King William's Town. It is August twelfth, 2008. Um, Stephanie could you just state your name and your willingness to be interviewed today.

Stephanie Victor: Okay, my name's Stephanie victor, and I'm willing to be interviewed today (laughs).

James Chapnick: Okay

Stephanie Victor: Yes.

James Chapnick: Also we have an archival deposit form for you to sign when we are done if that's alright.

Stephanie Victor: That will be fine, yeah.

James Chapnick: Okay great. So could I just start by asking where you're from and where you've studied?

Stephanie Victor: I'm from the Western Cape, uh, originally, from a little town called Wellington, which is about an hour away from Cape Town. That's where we make wine, well known for wine. Anyway, and I matriculated there and then I went to the University of Stellenbosch where I did my B.A. honors in history and cultural history and then I did a diploma in museum studies, and – yeah, and then I got the job here and that was eleven years ago, and, um, since then I've got – I got my master's in history from Rhodes University.

James Chapnick: That's great, I think cultural history is very interesting. What influenced you to become a historian?

Stephanie Victor: Phew, uh, difficult question. Probably the way I grew up, asking questions, very aware of – you know, all history is politics. So growing up in a house that was very sort of politically aware. Uh, my mom, uh, was a teacher in a, what we call, colored school, and um yeah, we were aware of things like danger pay, and sanctions and so on, so yeah definitely then. And just asking questions, you know, you want – your trying to understand the complexity of South African society and you, you do that with history, it's the only way to do it. So maybe it's got something to do with that as well.

James Chapnick: Very interesting. And the history of the museum, could you tell us something about that?

Stephanie Victor: It is the sixth oldest museum in the country. It traces its origins back to 1884, and yeah – so it's quite an old collection, um – very strong, uh, mammal collection, specifically. Um, so history and anthropology is relatively later, although there's been collections on both sides it's only quite recent that, uh, curators were appointed, um, and honorary historians and so on, um, and some of the mammalogists, um, actually, yeah uh, collected cultural objects, but yeah, so, what else would you like to know about? And all, all our uh, buildings are national monuments so they are pretty old as well. Yeah, in a nutshell...

James Chapnick: Well I guess I would also like to know how the museum has changed since 1994 from its original – sort of - what it displayed in the 1800s.

Stephanie Victor: Yes, yes, yes. Um, in many, many ways. From an administrative and managerial point of view of course many changes have come, but I mean I'm a historian so I look more at – sort of from a research point of view. There's been major changes in staff compliment, um, transformation being the operative word. Um, also we've become much more, I think, community based, you know. It's, it's one of those challenges that you – it's not just about looking after the collection anymore and putting on display what you as a curator think might be of interest. You now actually have to go out and prove that, you know, what you are putting on display is, you know, what people at least in part

might want to see in, in the museum. So it's outreach – those are sort of key words that – transformation, and outreach, and owning the process of, you know, the community owning the process. That sort of stuff is, is quite important. Also how we collect, um. So all the basic functions of the museum have changed, um, in a big way: education, outreach, collections, research – those things have all changed quite a bit since '94, but you must remember I only started here in '97 so I don't know much about the process before 1994, what things were like before that. I can imagine what they're like, but I don't really know what they were like. But I think this museum is quite, um - is maybe slightly different to others. You know, transformation is a process, it never stops, you always try and be more relevant to communities. It's not a process that – “okay fine, now we're transformed,” you know. But I think before that, mainly because the – of the Xhosa Gallery that was here it wasn't as if it was only white people's history that was displayed here. I don't think we – since the 1980s, that was quite, um, present here.

James Chapnick: You mentioned that research is one of the things that's transformed, or changed since the end of apartheid. What sorts of things are you researching now, what sorts of topics?

Stephanie Victor: Um, again I can only speak for after '94, but you, you're representing – I'm the historian, the only one here at the museum, so you have to sort of marry up what your interests might be to what, um, you know, might be interesting to other people, um, on display and research-wise. So, yeah, we've done lots, um, lot's of research on, um – I'm very interested in sort of pre-apartheid forced removals. We've done quite a lot of

work on that. Black Consciousness, um, what else, how things are seen in museums, you know, the way we curate things. I've written a bit about that. Um, the whole land claims, you know, how that's seen. But also way back, looking at nineteenth century and how that has formed and in many ways um – yeah, the struggle of the twentieth century, you know. It goes back. It's like a golden thread that goes through history, you know. Issues that we have today often have their origins in the nineteenth century. It's not just something that came up after '94, people just have short memories often, you know. So I think that's quite important, but also to see the relevance of history. I think that's very important. You know, people often say “so why are you doing this history?” You know, I mean, why is it important? It's often because it makes you understand why - where we're at at the moment. So that to me is quite important. But also what's nice about a museum is that you have a bit of freedom in that you can choose, you know, what you want to write about, but when you're a local historian, you know, when you're interviewing somebody here, tomorrow I might see them in the supermarket. It's not that you cut yourself off from who they might be, um, you know. We live in the same in the same town, you have things in common. So yeah, I don't know, does that answer your question?

James Chapnick: I think so. And you also mentioned the community involvement in the museum. How is the community involved?

Stephanie Victor: In various ways, uh, we have three education officers and they go on to the schools, and they do programs and so on. Once a year the history section specifically,

we do, uh, what we call our outreach program. And so we've done various things, we've done, for example, a few years ago we had, um - there's a area in town that's really the District 6 of King William's Town, it's called Old Town - beautiful name - and they were (coughs), excuse me. They were forcibly removed over a period of time, even as late as the 1990s, and we had a day for them, Old Town Revisited. And we showed them - we invited them and we went fund raising, so we - that paid for, um - the community themselves actually paid for the day, so we gave them lunch and everything, but it was.... Some people gave cash, some gave in-kind so that was quite nice. Um, and we had a band playing that was from Old Town, and then we showed them photographs that's in the collection, and they could then, um... It was wonderful how they responded to it, you know, they were sticking up their hands going "that's my house," and "I remember that place," cause these places are all gone, I mean, it's been, it's been removed - well, they were removed and the buildings, of course, were demolished. Um, and so this is the type of things that we do, um, and of course after that it, it has, uh, a circle-effect in a sense that people bring in donations, they bring in more photographs, they want to talk about this. Last year for example, we had the Biko on Ginsberg Day where we actually invited people from the community of Ginsberg to come talk about, you know, how they remember the man [Steve Biko], and we recorded this, and we invited, um, the kids to actually sit in on this, and they in their turn actually had, um, sort of poetry, and you know, it was a give and take. It was talking about the past, but then also it was a drama in his life, they read poets - poems that they wrote themselves. So it's very much sort of, uh, you know, yeah. In an outreach program the curator becomes the mediator, the cultural broker. You're not leading the process, you're just facilitating the space, you're

just saying “here’s the museum, use our space, this is my idea, what do you think about it?” And they then come in and, you know, they take over, which is really what we want them to do. So – and it’s a kind of recipe that can work with various communities, you know, you can do the same thing for Zwelitsha, you can do the same for Ginsberg, which we’ve done. Um, yeah, so we’ve done several other projects like that, so the idea is that every year we have a project like this. This year we had quite an interesting one. It’s the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the German settlers, which is – was very interesting to me. Um, so we had a seminar, and we organized for people to come. So again, it’s, it’s – you always have to, you know, we have to serve such a diverse group of people and everybody needs to feel at home here, which is almost impossible, but you know, you try your best. So, community involvement can always improve, it’s, it’s a process, but, um, yeah.

James Chapnick: And the Old Town forced removals you mentioned. Is that represented in the history section of the museum?

Stephanie Victor: Not on display, *yet*. Um, but, um, definitely in our collection now, and I’ve published on it, so yeah. And people come back and they want – they want that information, which is quite good. It’s very good for, for identity, you know, it’s very good to actually walk in and say “well, you know, this is what I know,” and you put it on the table (hits the table), and then they can add to that, because it’s their lives, you know, it’s how they remember it. It’s not my life, necessarily. Um, so that – that’s quite good, I



think, is when they start participating in, in a process that you've initiated, but then they take over from you. Um, yeah.

James Chapnick: Very interesting. And has the government put any pressure on the museum for an increased amount of change?

Stephanie Victor: You should ask management that (laughs). Yes, yeah, of course they have, yeah. I think that often it's, it's, it's, um, it's difficult, um – I think that a lot of pressure is on the – in museum sci- circles, the, the pressure's often on the historians as opposed to the scientists. Who – you know, all history's politics, so as professor Gary Baines always says, so um, mammal displays, or ichthyology, or whatever, they don't have to transform their exhibitions. They might want to make it a little bit more people friendly, or they could put a touch screen in with bird sounds, or whatever. We have to re-do our entire displays and how it's interpreted, and how it's viewed, and so I think there's a lot of pressure on, on your sort of, your historians and to a lesser degree your anthropologists and your archaeologists as to how, you know, a museum is seen as transformed in many circles when you've got black history on display. Um, and that puts a lot of pressure on your historians, doesn't it? Who are museologists as well, and also have to look after the collection, and do research, and publish, and so on. So – but it's because the exhibitions are so visible, isn't it? You know, it's how museums are seen in many ways. So yes, there has been pressure, but museums at the end of the day have to be seen to be apolitical. You can't – we can't, we can't do a display showing just one side

of the story, then we're not doing our jobs as historians, and we'll be severely criticized for it, um, so you have to sort of play the middle line there, somehow. Hmm.

James Chapnick: Speaking about the political, or apolitical, nature, I guess, of museums, do you think it is possible to present a unified South African history, or do different perspectives have to be taken into account?

Stephanie Victor: I think the only way to attempt to have a display that's inclusive is by having various perspectives on display. I think that's the only way forward. How else do you do a display that's actually talking about – think about it, I mean somebody walks into a display, it's about what you identify with at the end of the day. So if you walk through and there's nothing on Dimbaza's history there, you're not gonna enjoy the display very much. You're gonna say "yeah, it's very interesting and I learned a thing or two, but I don't feel at home here, there's nothing here for me." So it's very much like that when people walk through. So they, they want to see the integrated display, and especially politicians want to see that, but the people coming from Zwelitsha or Dimbaza, they want to see their history as well, you know. So you have to cater for various needs, knowing that you're going to be criticized for whatever you do. (chuckles) You know, so, just because – it's like, you know, trying to write history that's not, um, what's the word we, you know, the objective versus subjective thing, and that we can, you know – we always try and be objective knowing that we'll never entirely be not subjective, you know. So maybe it's a little bit like that. You're trying – it's – what is the guy from - Mark O'Neil from Glasgow University was saying that, you know, what you do is you

collect two hundred stories of the struggle, and then you choose three to put on display, um, and I think, you know, that's, that's the display – you, you, you do a lot of research and you only end up with one or two stories, so yeah. Though yes, I think it's possible, but it's not easy. (laughs) Yeah.

James Chapnick: Another aspect of change was the name of the museum. Could you explain what the old name was and the significance of the new name?

Stephanie Victor: Uh, the old name was Kaffrarian Museum, um, which has an interesting historical concept to it. Um, Kaffrarian means land of, ooh, and now I must say the horrible word, kaffir, which actually has a historical context, which not many people know. Um, the K-word actually refers to, uh, people that are not, um, that are not – how does it go? People that are not – that do not believe in Islam. So I would be one too, right? And in the, the previous century the word was not loaded, it was used quite freely. So, um, but from the museum's point of view Kaffrarian was the area where the museum is, where we concentrate our work, because we don't just deal with King William's Town history, we always go slightly wider. For example, Stutterheim doesn't have a cultural museum so we include them, and we of course go wider than just King William's Town. You know, some people might say "I don't live in King William's Town, I live in Dimbaza." So, um, British Kaffraria was this area's name, the area between the Kei and the Keiskamma rivers, so it was quite a historical name. However, we did get some flack, the people felt that they were not at home here, that we were alienating people, and if, if that's what a name does, maybe it's time to change it. Um,

but these things are quite costly, so, anyway, we decided as a, as a, as a staff, and the community, and head office was behind us on this, to actually change our name, and I can never remember the date or when exactly this happened. I think it was '99, guessing, um, where we actually changed our name to Amathole, which is a correctly spelt Xhosa name, um, and it's quite neutral, you know, even if the town's name changes – as there's been lots of rumors about the name King William's Town changing – um, then it actually refers to the mountain, uh, so it's – and it's, it's quite pretty. Amathole is quite a nice word, flows nicely on the tongue, it's easy to pronounce, and we don't – we're hoping that we won't have to change names very soon, um, you know. And it's a name that the staff have identified, I think, with quite, quite happily. Also Kaffrarian was unpronounceable, it was – many – nobody could spell it, it was, you know, it was time for a change. And you know what, I think it also indicates very clearly that, you know, the museum's on a different path, that we take transformation seriously, um, in museums. So, if a name says that, then, you know, then a change is always a good thing. Hmm.

James Chapnick: Very interesting. And since the end of apartheid this has been a major issue all over the country: renaming buildings, streets, and cities, even. Do you think in general it's an important move for the country to make, to rename?

Stephanie Victor: Um, yes, but one must, one must look at why you're doing this, but I think it is, it is quite – it's a new dispensation's way of showing that, you know, this is a new dispensation. Um, what is concern – what I think concerns me, personally, about it is that it's, it's costs a lot of money to change things, and this is often what's not on the

agenda is, you know, yeah. Things cost money, so instead of spending X amount of money on a name change, maybe one should really look at job creation, building a hospital, you know. But yeah, one understands why, um, it's a visible symbol of a change in dispensation, which is also important. It's all about self-image, and identity, and so on. Yeah.

James Chapnick: Okay. And do you have any future plans for new exhibits in the museum, and your current research interests?

Stephanie Victor: Yes, umm, exhibition-wise we're currently working on a display called "Stories of the Struggle," um, which is gonna be a contemporary history exhibition focusing on sort of post-1948, but not excluding, um, the role of, uh, African intellectuals, especially in King William's Town itself. So it's gonna have local content, um, we are gonna concentrate on that, and um, I'm busy with the interviews on that. We were interviewing people, uh, locally, um, on the struggle. So it's gonna contain information on, as I said, African intellectuals, um; on early segregation and forced removals in the town; we're going to look at the creation of the Ciskei, the homeland system and how that's, um, impacted who we are today; we're gonna look at the Bhisho Massacre; and then we'll look at certain personalities like Steve Biko, the Mxenges, and also lesser known people, um, that we think is, is worth, um, doing a bit of research on, which we've been doing for many years anyway, so yeah. But drawing on the museum's collection, uh, very much. So that's in the pipeline. Yeah. And then research-wise, various projects happening. Um, I'd like to do more – I did my masters on, um, hmm

what was it called? (giggles) Ooh, I forget the title. (looks at the title of the thesis) *On Segregated Housing and Contested Identities*, in um, in King William's town with specific reference to the colored community. So I'm very interested in identity making, and um, language as well, the influence of that. And also in comparisons between the rest of the Eastern Cape communities. So, that's an interest, and then new also, some publications. There's a, a nineteenth century letter box from a pioneer doctor in King William's Town that, um - we have the, the letter box here, just fantastic, he was a very interesting man. So we, we're very interested in publishing that, so I'm working on that as well. And then I'm also interested in African intellectuals, sort of in the pre-apartheid era. Very interesting people. So those are my research interests. Hmm.

James Chapnick: And will any of that be reflected in the museum itself?

Stephanie Victor: Well, you know, when, when I research something, um, it invariably leads to an outreach project, or a display, or um, just a publication that people might want to read, it goes across the road, the kids use my research in their projects. So yeah, these various ways of how research can be used, um – or even just collection based research is also very important because it's, you know, it's how we interpret this collection, you know. That's also important.

James Chapnick: The planned "Stories of the Struggle" exhibit, you mentioned Steve Biko would be featured in that. Does the museum currently, uh, cover Black Consciousness at all in its exhibits?

Stephanie Victor: Um, not really. We do have a display on Steve's mother, um, upstairs in the women's display. Um, so no, the answer would be mainly no. Uh, we've had some, some, um, temporary exhibitions here, and some outreach programs, but um – so the, the "Stories of the Struggle" would, um, fit into that gap, it would try and address that gap. Hmm.

James Chapnick: And Steve Biko's mother is in part of an exhibit about women?

Stephanie Victor: Mhmm, mhmm.

James Chapnick: Could you explain more about that?

Stephanie Victor: It was a very exciting project. Um, I, I - I'm very interested in people's lives, and sort of really thinking about that, and trying to find out as much as possible. So we took six women from various communities, um, that we just thought their, their lives are interesting enough to, to do some oral interviews on, and read up, and see how much we, we've got on it. And, um, so Biko's wi, uh – Biko's mom we wanted to do, um, just because I was wondering, you know, a man of that caliber must have a pretty amazing mom. So, you know, um, so that was the whole interest in it, "so let's find out more about her." The only thing we had on dis – on file about her was in connection with him. You know, we've got a photograph on dis – on file of her standing at his grave saying, you know, "really, should we not clean this up a little bit," you know, that was the, the, the

excuse me – the, um, how we saw her. So I wanted to just know more about her, you know, it's often out of curiosity that you, that you go and do research. You just want to know personally a bit more. So we had this wonderful interview with, um, Steve's brother, Khaya Biko, and I'm so thankful we did that because he has since passed on. And he gave this wonderful interview, and, um, I'm very proud of my connection with that because I think it's information that would have been lost otherwise, you know, nobody else thought of asking about Steve's mother, you know, um, who had a very interesting life. So we included her and we included the other, um, struggle figure that we included was Victoria Mxenge, a very interesting woman. Also we didn't know that very much about her, and of course then I became interested in her husband, so I've done some research on him as well. Um, so, you know, I mean it's not what museums do – not necessarily everything is on display. Sometimes it's in the files, or it's used in, in some other context. Um, but yeah, definitely they would be included in the new display, and they should be included in the new display, yeah.

James Chapnick: Do you think that struggle history is usually gendered?

Stephanie Victor: Yo, never thought of that. No, I don't. No. Well maybe you should explain yourself.

James Chapnick: Well, how do you think women are represented in struggle history?



Stephanie Victor: Hmm, I think maybe I should answer that more generally, maybe it's got to do with how women are exhibited in museums more generally. Um, we've been criticized, and other museums have – yeah, museums have been criticized, put it this way, um, for always putting women separate, you know, “why do you have to have the women's display? Why can't you just include women in all your exhibitions?” Um, which I can understand, that is a valid point. It's just that woman's history has not been, um – has been neglected. So sometimes when you do have a display on women it just puts the focus on them a little bit, which is not necessarily a bad thing. Um, yeah, I don't know about gendering women. I think it's – we're probably concentrating quite a lot on biographies of women, and I find that personally very interesting. I want to know about women's lives, um, or people's lives for that matter, you know, if somebody had an interesting life you want to read something that's well written about it. So yeah, don't know about that so much.

James Chapnick: And how do you think women contributed to the struggle?

Stephanie Victor: The same way men did. Surely. (laughs)

James Chapnick: Okay. Well, are the youth of King William's Town interested in this museum?

Stephanie Victor: Hmm, I think some of them are. I think that one can always improve on the interest rate, um – oh that sounds terrible. On how (laughs) – On how interested

people are, you know. Um, but you often get, you know – the kids come in, the learners come in, and they sit down and you chat to them. I think I'm quite concerned about the level of history education at schools, because they'll be interested if they have a good teacher. If they don't have a good teacher, they would not think for themselves that "hey, this might be interesting" until you actually have them in front of you, and you're just chatting to them about, you know, "where do you come from, and what do you know about religious history?," or whatever, and then they don't know anything, you know. Um, so I think it's got – it depends on the level of education in their schools that they attend, um, and hopefully – we've got two new education officers here, so hopefully they will, you know, play a bigger role, and that it's seen – they must use the museum more as a valuable resource, um, which I don't think enough people are doing, especially young people. So yeah, it's a area that we can improve on. We - We've done some positive things, but we can definitely improve on that. Yeah.

James Chapnick: And you mentioned new officials in the education department of the museum. What – What's their role, exactly?

Stephanie Victor: They're really our outreach, or education officers. So they'll go to the schools, and they actually tell them about the projects that we have here, but they also do specific lessons. So you can come in and say "well, I want to do a lesson on the SS Mendi," or "I want to know more about Steve Biko," or whatever, and then they must be able to do a lesson on that, and then they rely very heavily on what research we do. So they'll come to me and say "well, what do you have on this and this topic?," and I have to

assist them in that way. So that's also an outreach, um, leverage from our point of view. Um, so they're very much our public relations officers in many ways. Um, they also do adult education, but mainly at the moment they deal with the kids – so mainly when it's, um, high school, or um, adult education, the curators have a role to play in that. So we take groups around, or we – there's a tour group that has a specific interest, or if there's a talk to be given on a history, or anthropology, um, whatever the topic might be that the curator is interested in. So that's another role that we play, yeah. But they – it's vital. If you have good education officers, the museum's good image actually, uh, yeah, is reflected by your education officers. Hmm.

James Chapnick: Before you were talking about, uh, the transformation. The transformation of the museum, specifically. But, I'd like to know your opinion on transformation in King William's Town itself, specifically about monuments. It does have many old monuments around, and I'd like to know if you think any new monuments should be built, or if any should potentially be destroyed, or if a monument should ever be destroyed?

Stephanie Victor: No, of course not. You're asking a historian if something (laughs) should be destroyed. Never! (laughs) Um, there have been some new ones. Um, the Cattle Killing, uh, monument is new. Um, and there's Nontheta – I showed you the, uh, from the Sunday Times Heritage Project, uh, which has been quite popular. But yeah, there are many, but is a old town. Remember, this town was built on colonialism and so on, and yes, you might, you know – it's not always seen as a positive thing, but um, these

monuments are here to stay. It's how it's interpreted. For example, when you look at the war memorial, which is just around the corner here, just sort of – and there's actually somebody doing her master's on that. Uh, what's her name? Laura Miti, writes for the Daily Dispatch, you might know her name. Um, very nice lady, she's actually doing her master's at Fort Hare on that - um, how monuments are seen, and how they're administered, and so on. And, um (clears throat), she's been – we've been chatting about this quite a bit. Um, we looked at the war memorial, and it's seen as sort of quite a white monument, you know. And then we did some research on it, and we saw that, um – well we knew this for a while, anyway, that, um, there was a, um - it's the First World War. Just trying to get my facts straight. Um, the SS Mendi. Have you ever heard about the SS Mendi?

James Chapnick: No

Stephanie Victor: Anyway, it's quite an interesting story. It was a troop ship going to, um – they were in the English Channel, and, um, the ship actually went down - long story how that happened - and, um, some of the guys died, and it was the, uh, the old Native Corps, um, of South Africa. So it included many guys from the Eastern Cape, and five of them came from King William's Town.<sup>1</sup> Speaking under correction, I haven't done this research for while – and their names are actually on the war memorial, which makes it quite interesting. So often it's also a question of re-looking at monuments and how

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Six men, rather than the stated five, from King William's Town were killed in the sinking of the Mendi.

<sup>1</sup> The Buffalo City Municipality, "Historical King William's Town," *Tourism Master Plan*, [http://www.buffalocity.gov.za/municipality/keydocs/tourism\\_masterplan/phase2/HistoricaKingWilliamsTown.PDF](http://www.buffalocity.gov.za/municipality/keydocs/tourism_masterplan/phase2/HistoricaKingWilliamsTown.PDF).

perceptions can change when you do proper research on it. You know, it's like looking at the Statue of Liberty. Um, I was watching a program about this while ago, and how they – this woman was doing research, and how these connections with slavery cause of the – do you know about this? The chains at the bottom of her feet – there's actually, um, chains that's lying there, and it's got a slavery connection, you know. So all of a sudden the Statue of Liberty, does it not have a completely different meaning? Possibly. You know, it just makes you think about. So a lot of monuments, not all of them, but some can actually be re-looked at a little bit, and see well, you know, um, what does this mean that in the First World – at the end of the First World War, um, Kingites, um, actually put the names of everybody that died during the war, which came from King William's Town, irrespective of color, um, on their war memorial? I mean this is quite profound, isn't it? And then I started thinking well maybe it's not just King William's Town, and then it came out that Umtata's the same thing; a little town like Summerset East, same thing; Fort Beaufort. These are all tiny little towns in the Eastern Cape, they're not big areas. Um, you know, the same thing occurred. So, one must not – you must do proper research on your memorials before you come to some conclusion, and so I put this in a newspaper and there was a whole article on, you know, the war memorial, and what it represents, and the story of the Mendi. And this has now become a lesson that the educators do with the kids, um, at school, on the Mendi and the war memorial. So it's this – because they do it at school anyway, the SS Mendi, and so this is a local connection, which makes it quite relevant to the kids. So yeah.

James Chapnick: That's really fascinating.

Stephanie Victor: Small steps. (laughs)

James Chapnick: Yeah.

Stephanie Victor: Yeah, so I would not say – maybe other people might feel that some memorials would be – would have to be destroyed, but yeah, I’m a historian. We don’t – we don’t like destroying memorials. (laughs) But definitely it’s quite nice when communities come forward and say “we would like a memorial on a certain thing.” It should be people driven at the end of the day, not government driven, or Stephanie driven, or museum driven. It’s the communities that should come up and say “in Dimbaza we would like a wall of fame,” you know, “and this is what we would like to have in it.” Um, yeah.

James Chapnick: Has King William – William’s Town seen any kind of community driven call for a monument like that?

Stephanie Victor: There’s been a few. I know there’s one in Zwelitsha on, huh, what’s the school’s name? Nompendulu<sup>2</sup>. They had a, um, I think in the 1980s there was, um, some children that died. The police opened fire and some of the kids, um, drowned. Do you know this story? Or been to the school? Yeah.

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<sup>2</sup> The narrator pronounces the school’s name as “Nompendulu,” and is normally spelled Nompendulo. The Buffalo City Municipality, “Historical King William’s Town,” *Tourism Master Plan*, [http://www.buffalocity.gov.za/municipality/keydocs/tourism\\_masterplan/phase2/HistoricaKingWilliamsTown.PDF](http://www.buffalocity.gov.za/municipality/keydocs/tourism_masterplan/phase2/HistoricaKingWilliamsTown.PDF), p. 59.

James Chapnick: (nods to indicate no)

Stephanie Victor: Um, there's a monument that was opened up. It's obviously somebody from the school or the community that went to [The Department of] Arts and Culture and said "we'd like a monument," and then they take it further. So, uh, funding, I believe, is available for that sort of thing. So it has happened - there's more of it that can happen, but, yeah.

James Chapnick: And as a part of the community yourself, are there any monuments you would like to see built?

Stephanie Victor: I'd love one in Old Town. (laughs) But, um, yeah. And there's another area just outside town that I've done quite a bit of research on called Brownlee Station, which was the old mission station of the town, and I've done some research on that. I'd love to just see something, even if it's just a stone that just says, you know, "this is where it was" - put a photograph. It doesn't have to be a building, it doesn't have to, you know, cost thousands of Rands, but yeah, thinking of monuments. But, it can't be - it can't come from me. It has to be something that people feel very strongly about so that - because it has to be looked after, you see, and this is the whole thing. It's the same as anything that comes into the museum has to be looked after. So, it's the same with the monuments. Somebody in the municipality is going to have to make that it's clean, that

it's not neglected, um, yeah. So that's another side of it, it's maintaining it as well that's quite important. Hmm.

James Chapnick: Hadn't actually thought of it that way before so that's very interesting. Uh, to go back, you mentioned what was represented in your collection versus what's actually displayed. Is the anti-apartheid struggle represented largely in your collection, at all, that's not on display?

Stephanie Victor: Yes, to a certain extent, but, um, having said that, it's also true and has to be acknowledged that it's largely a nineteenth century collection, which largely consists of donations made by white King William's Town people, um, from King William's Town. What we find, however, is that you can use these objects. They are not biased, we are. Objects, you know – think of Huberta the hippopotamus. She's not biased, we're telling her story, she's not telling her story. And sometimes just by putting an object on display it's already says something. So – and I think it's – many of the objects can be used, um, from that point of view, uh, you know. From sort of post-1948 history we have lots of Ciskei objects that can definitely be used, and again, you know, the bias. I mean, putting, um, the champagne glass that was used at the inaugural flight of the Ciskei Airways. I mean, the Ciskei had its own airways, its own Boeing. Can you imagine? On display, you know, just seeing the champagne glass there. You don't have to put major labels on it, you can just give information. You can say “this was their – used as the champagne glass at the inaugural flight,” you know. You as a visitor is going



to go “wow, you know, they had Boeings here,” and “what a waste of money,” or whatever might be going through your mind. So it’s putting these things on display and giving people the opportunity to come up with their own interpretation. I think it’s the only way to represent history. Hmm.

James Chapnick: That’s fascinating.

Stephanie Victor: So yeah, so from, uh, the struggle display, also we – it’s very much – what I have found is it’s difficult to get objects, and now with the Dimbaza project we’ve found the same thing. Um, that it’s often document based, lots of photograph based, and very much oral history. And what do you display? How do you show these things? It’s not easy. Do you put an ANC t-shirt on display? Do you put a poster on display? Do you put a old passport on display? I mean, all the other museums are doing this, so to talk about local history, it’s probably gonna include quite a bit of multi-media where we actually have snippets of oral history on display, but then you just have to be creative and think of objects that you can actually put on display, that is part of the collection. Because at the end of the day, the display has to – it has to be inclusive, it has to tell a story, it needs to be educational, it needs to be interesting, it needs to talk about group and self identity, but it also has to reflect the collection. So this is the challenge of museums. It’s not easy, it’s a difficult thing to do, but those are the things we have to address, and all of this – through all of this we still have to tell the story, you know. People must still like it. (laughs) But, yeah, you have to use your collection. Why else do we have it? You know,

obviously there's other reasons for having it: research, and education, and so on, but exhibition-wise you can't not use your collection. So, yeah.

James Chapnick: The museum also does have an archive, correct?

Stephanie Victor: Mhmm.

James Chapnick: And would the Black Consciousness Movement be, uh, represented in there at all, do you think?

Stephanie Victor: Uh, mainly in the newspapers, quite a lot of that. Um, we have copies of all the local newspapers, and whatever we could get our hands on, photographs, but yeah, it's – there's not a lot of it in there. But, uh, you must also remember a museum is a question of what we have, what is donated to us, or what we can possibly get our hands on. And that's very difficult to do – anything to do with the struggle. Uh, what I've often found with photographs is quite helpful is that you have – you go to the community and you say “okay, fine, here's my laptop, here's my scanner, give me your photograph, and give me permission to use it in a specific display,” or whatever. So that helps – so you just have to, you know, use whatever you can get hold of, um, and what the community is happy about. But it's, uh – struggle history is – and I think you probably have the same thing in America, where you, you know – it's not object based as a, you know, as maybe nineteenth century history was before, but maybe also as time goes on it will be more object based, cause it's now difficult for us to know what represents twentieth century

history. What represents two-thousand-and-eight in an object? I mean, you know, difficult to say. A cell phone, or what? So maybe it's easier in ten years time to actually think back and say "okay, you know those shoes we were wearing in two-thousand-and-eight, they really were very typical of the time." So, yeah, it's one of the difficult collections to know what to collect and what not to collect. Hmm.

James Chapnick: So as a result do you see yourself moving more towards oral history then, than objects?

Stephanie Victor: You can't say that either, because it's just one of the things we have to do, but it can't be the only thing. You can't say "because it's not really object based we now are not going to be collecting objects anymore." Yeah. You still have to collect those objects. So, yeah.

James Chapnick: And does the museum actively seek out new, uh, (shouting in the background) objects, new...?

Stephanie Victor: Yes, we do.

James Chapnick: Okay.

Stephanie Victor: It's part of our – we have a collections policy where we concentrate on certain things, and we revise that every now and again, and when you interview

somebody you always mention this. You know, “don’t you have any photographs that sort of links with the story that you’re talking to?” So when we do – while we’re doing the oral history for the struggle I will be continuously looking for more objects, obviously. Think about it. You – you’ve got – I’m writing on Steve Biko, but I don’t have a photograph of him. So I’m gonna have to go and find one of him so that I can use it in the display. It’s going to be so much better than having no photograph and just some text on him. So it’s the same with objects. It’s just - it’s very visible. People react to objects, they don’t react to text, necessarily. So, uh – but also maybe, you know, television screen with somebody talking about their reminiscences of a certain event might also be seen as an object, you know. Collecting oral history is also collecting - you know, contributing to the collection, isn’t it? So, yeah.

James Chapnick: And you mentioned that there was a criteria for new acquisitions. What, uh, what are the priorities right now for the museum to acquire?

Stephanie Victor: Um, we first look if we don’t have – well not first, but yeah, there’s no specific priority list, um, for an object, but say somebody gives me this pencil. First of all I’m gonna ask “how much do we know about it?” You know, if it’s just a pencil then it’s not that interesting, but if I know Steve Biko used it, um, in part when he was dictating *I Write What I Like*, um, you know, he used this pencil. And then it’s gonna become quite interesting, and we’re gonna have it part of the collection. But if it’s just a pencil that somebody picked up outside on the sidewalk it’s not that interesting. So it’s, it’s all to do with what we know about the pencil that makes it interesting. Um, and then we’re also

gonna go and see “okay fine, how many pencils do we have in this collection?” because storage is an issue. So, then, um, say we’ve already got five that are exactly the same and, um, this one was just picked up outside so we don’t know much about it, then you’re not gonna take it. We’re going to say “I’m sorry, you know, this pencil, I’m afraid...” You know. And then of course is where that – your negotiating skills come in, because next time they might pick something up that’s really valuable, and you still want them to come back here. So, yeah. Um, and then you also have to look at – does it fit into our collection’s policy? We have a very strong missionary collection, for example. You know, there’s certain things that we concentrate on, but it has to have local provenance. If it’s a pencil from Cape Town, um, you know, maybe the Cape Town Museum should rather have this as part of their collection, and not us. So, if we have photographs coming in and there’s some that have Umtata history, for example, we might consider sending it to another museum. So there’s all that sort of variations that you have to think about. Um, yeah.

James Chapnick: Well I just have a few more questions for you, if that’s alright.

Stephanie Victor: Okay.

James Chapnick: As a historian, what does BCM, Black Consciousness Movement, mean to you, personally?

Stephanie Victor: Personally. I remember when I turned thirty, I was extremely depressed the whole day because, you know, Biko was thirty when he died, and you sort of compare your life with him. I think many people do, um, as to what you've achieved and what he's achieved, and of course you always come, come off short, you know. (laughs) So, yeah, I think that - just his humanity, and you know, people often come in, and they knew him, and they would talk about him. So it becomes something quite personal, you know, that you've lived through even though I've never met him. I think that he would have a huge influence on me. I always think about some of the things he said, for example, on humanity, that "you are a person through - through other people." His whole idea of pride, and who you are, and where you come from. It's very inspirational, and it's wonderful to see the inspiration on other people, last year with the project that we had here. Yeah, it was just really great to see, you know, that it's a positive influence. I like that very much, yeah. Does that answer your question?

James Chapnick: Absolutely, yeah. And what kind of an effect do you think BC had on the anti-apartheid movement in general?

Stephanie Victor: Hmm. Just that pride in yourself and that we don't have to - you don't have to apologize who you are. Um, I think it was very - it was a very necessary message, wasn't it, at the end of the day? People really needed to hear that, that they are not inferior, they are not - there's nothing wrong with them. That even if somebody's saying that, you know - that the indoctrination that took place, um - there's something I think that even today we don't really realize because we don't live those lives anymore,

you know. Yeah. I think that it – from that point of view it was extremely helpful. And the people could do things for themselves, that they don't have to wait for somebody else – that self-help, um, part of it is also extremely, um, relevant, you know. You don't have this waiting for funding from somewhere. We're actually gonna do our projects ourselves, and have – have lives that, you know, we can be proud of. I really like that, yeah. The whole thing about – teaching somebody to fish, you know, um attitude. And of course he was a – an immense intellectual. You know, when you read so many years later, you still read what he wrote in a very specific context, with a very specific message of, uh – and I think people often forget that. They read him and they think of today, and of course he's relevant today, but you must read him as relevant – he was trying to bring a message across in the 1970s, and in a very specific and difficult social context. Yeah.

James Chapnick: You mentioned his relevance to today. Do you think that the youth, uh, appreciate the anti-apartheid struggle – do they, do they value it?

Stephanie Victor: I think it depends very much on what you learn at home. Um, unfortunately it's a difficult history, so often parents don't speak to their kids about it. You often get this, you know, people come in and they say "oh my mother said it's difficult, and I'm not – she's not gonna talk about it." So they lose all of that, um, which is not good, but on the other hand, you know, having born – having been born free, um, is also something very positive, you know. Um, yeah, I don't know. But, knowledge comes – yeah, you can only – understanding comes with knowledge. So they have to know a little bit about what's - what was wrong about apartheid, and – but also to learn to be

critical. But I don't know if parents are teaching those – their kids – those skills. So it depends on your parents very much. And if you look at your own lives, it's probably – you probably are interested in history because of what you got from home, um, and it's the same with – yeah. With everybody else. Mm.

James Chapnick: I see. And, do you know any liberation songs?

Stephanie Victor: Do I know any liberation songs? Yes, I do. Beautiful song by Johnny Clegg, called “Asimbonanga.”

James Chapnick: Would you mind singing it?

Stephanie Victor: Oh dear. I don't know it very well, but I do know the meaning cause it talks about Steve Biko, and Victoria Mxenge, and Nelson Mandela. (sings a few words)<sup>3</sup> It's as much as I know. (laughs) But I have looked up the meaning cause I want to use it in the display. (laughs) Yeah.

James Chapnick: Could you tell us the meaning?

Stephanie Victor: Um, oh dear. Now I put my foot in it. No, it's gone. I did read it up. (laughs) Sorry.

James Chapnick: That's okay. Do you remember in general, at all?

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<sup>3</sup> She sings the first two words to the song: “Asimbonanga, Asimbonang’.”



Stephanie Victor: I know that it refers to them as strong people, and how they're gonna get up, and it talks about their deaths. It's not a uplifting song, necessarily, but, yeah. It's just a beautiful way of, um, singing it, and it's very emotional. It just talks about the people that we've lost, um, and I like the fact that it actually refers to very specific people, but it also refers to the un – the unknown, you know. So I'm quite interested in that too, and it's not just the well known people, but also the – just the normal people that had extraordinary lives, um, just for being who they were. I don't know. Hmm.

James Chapnick: You said that you actually wanted to use this song in a display.

Stephanie Victor: The struggle display.

James Chapnick: The struggle display. Do you think that music played a large role in the anti-apartheid struggle?

Stephanie Victor: Um, don't know. Haven't done research on that, don't know. But probably, yeah. Yeah, I mean, it's still – I was at a Cradock Four, um, exhibition opening a few years ago that I was – I was helping 'em with the research, and yes people were singing all the time, you know. So yes, I would say so, yeah.

James Chapnick: And lastly, are you proud of where your country is today?

Stephanie Victor: In many ways, yes, yeah. I – I don't know if it – the answer would be overwhelmingly yes; there are things that I'm very concerned about, but that's on a personal level not – not on a professional level. Um, but yeah, there are things I'm concerned about, such as crime. The fact that many people are immigrating concerns me. Um, yeah. But there are also very positive things. It's wonderful to be a South African. There's something very, um – the spirit is something very special to me. I can't imagine myself living anywhere else, or wanting to live anywhere else. Hmm, yeah. Just the, the diversity of it, then also the complexity of it, you know. The Chinese have a proverb – it's actually a bit of a curse – they say “may you live in interesting times,” you know, and that we definitely have here. Um, but I also think that we should give ourselves a bit of, um, breathing space, you know. This is transizionario – I'm sure I'm mispronouncing that word – but, you know what I mean, it's a period of transizion.<sup>4</sup> So we must give ourselves a bit of breathing space to actually, just, breathe, you know. Give ourselves a bit of a chance to – to adapt. Cause it is – it's a huge – huge jump. Yeah.

James Chapnick: Okay, well I thank you very much for your time.

Stephanie Victor: No, it was a pleasure.

James Chapnick: And is there anything that you'd like to speak to that we didn't ask you about?

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<sup>4</sup> The narrator pronounced the words “transizionario” and “transizion” in place of transitional and transition.

Stephanie Victor: Mm mm. I've just – I've got some – some articles here that I thought you might be interested in, that I wrote on the displays and how we did it, and so on.

James Chapnick: Excellent. And, um, any other questions that you guys would like to ask? (referring to colleagues)

Corinthia Jacobs: Um, you just – you talked about Laura Matie? Matie, she works for the Daily Dispatch, and she's doing...

Stephanie Victor: Oh, Miti.

Corinthia Jacobs: Miti, sorry.

Stephanie Victor: Laura, Laura.

Corinthia Jacobs: Um, I was wondering if you were in contact with her in any way, or if you thought...

Stephanie Victor: Just contact the Daily Dispatch, she's – she's a – she writes on Tuesdays. Is that right? She used to write in a column on Tuesdays, and she wrote – I don't know. She must have – I don't know if she's got her master's yet, but she must be very close, and it's on memorials, and she's taken King William's Town – um, very

interesting, um, she's just looked at – quite critically, at memorials, and policy making around it, and, yeah, that sort of thing. So, give her a call, very nice lady.

James Chapnick: Okay, we've only got three minutes left so... (looking at camera) Um.

Corinthia Jacobs: It's done.

James Chapnick: Pumza, anything? (referring to colleague) Okay, and is there anyone else who we should talk to about these issues, you think, that you know besides Ms. Miti?

Stephanie Victor: On memorials... No, not really. Yeah. You're thinking museum-wise, or just whoever?

James Chapnick: Commemoration-wise.

Stephanie Victor: Similo Grootboom. Hmm, no I can't think of anybody specific, at the moment.

James Chapnick: Okay, well thanks again.

Corinthia Jacobs: Thank you.

Stephanie Victor: My pleasure.

[End of Tape]