



Project name: "Voices from Below: An Oral and Photographical Community History of Tembisa Project"

Date of interview / workshop: 09 December 2010

Location of interview / workshop: 737 Endulwini Section Tembisa

Language/s of interview / workshop: English and IsiZulu

Length of interview: 00:38:39

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Name of translator (if any): Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

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Audio file name/s of interview: TEM_MasombukaP_20101209

NN: Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

PM: Paulina Masombuka

Interview with Paulina Masombuka

NN: This is Nonhlanhla Ngwenya. I'm doing an interview with Ms Paulina Masombuka, I'm doing this interview on behalf of SAHA, and today is the nine of December 2010. Ms Paulina Masombuka, would you please introduce yourself by telling us who you are?

PM: I'm Paulina Masombuka and I live at 737 Endulwini. I was running a tavern and it was called Sammy's tavern.

NN: Sammy's tavern.

PM: Since from 1989

NN: From 1989?

PM: Yes.

NN: Can you please tell us more about your history, before we get on to that.

PM: My history?

NN: Yes, like where you were born and so on.

PM: I was born in Kempton Park in Phelandaba, which is close to Simba chips as it is now, I was born there.

NN: You were born there, so in which year if you can still remember?

PM: It was in 1949 December and I attended at Tshelo Themba School in Phelandaba.

NN: Were you attending primary there?

PM: Yes

NN: So what year was it?

PM: I can't remember clearly because we were still young, we started school when we were six years of age.

NN: Can you please brief us about the situation that you were facing at school?

PM: It was not right, because we were raised by our mother because we didn't have a father, in other words we were supported by our grandfather. So in the olden days our parents used to hide and don't tell us who our fathers are, but that's if they are not married or they don't live together anymore so they didn't tell us and you as a child you had no right to ask who your father is. We were just growing up. Even my surname, it's not mine but it's my mother's surname, I don't have mine, the one that belongs to my father and I don't even know it, so lot of people know how people from the olden days are like, they used to hide lots of things from us. They didn't just talk even if they

were talking, they didn't want a kid in front of them. You had to go out if they were talking so that they can talk as old people. If you wanted to talk with an elder you had to wait for other elders to go, you were not supposed to enter while elders are talking and say what you need to say.

NN: So as you were living with your grandpa, how many were you?

PM: There were eight of us

NN: Eight in a four roomed house?

PM: No, three roomed house, but we did not see that the place was small, we were just living and my grandpa was living with this woman because the woman who is my mother's mom passed on and we were living with my mother.

NN: So who was the bread winner?

PM: My mother was the one who was working

NN: And your grandpa?

PM: He owned taxis and he only came to bring us food and give my mother some cash and he brought bread every day and every week he would bring sugar and tea bags.

NN: How was Phelandaba during the apartheid times?

PM: It was bad because when people came back from buying alcohol, they used to dig and hide them underground and when they have brewed traditional beer or pineapple they would hide them in the garden, every house that was selling alcohol had a mealies farm because it grows long so they would hide their alcohol there and some will dig for it but they would fix the place properly and put a drum when they are done brewing it, they would pour it there. If someone comes to ... but they would go and pour it from the garden and when the police come to check if they are informed they come with a sharp stick and put it in the ground. If they could hear a sound they would know that there is alcohol underneath and you would be arrested.

NN: Were there people who used to give them a tipoff about the booze?

PM: Yes, even now the police know where to find hijackers so they knew that if there is a group of people, so people were hiding if they are drinking, they even arrested you for umqombothi (traditional beer). People were being arrested even for umqombothi (traditional beer) and taken to police station and the beer would be spilled, and the Golden Dry Gin, they were taking it and they would tell you that they going to keep it, but you won't see it in court during the trial and you were arrested for something you don't even see, because they were taking them for their own benefit. A black person was not allowed in bottle stores and a black person did not have a tavern certificate like now so that he can be able to sell alcohol, so in bottle stores only whites and coloured people were allowed to enter but Indians were not that many, in our days they were just few, it was only whites and coloured who were dominating and you were being arrested as a black person if you enter into the bottle store and they would arrest you for entering.

NN: The people who were selling liquor in the bottle stores, were they white?

PM: Not whites only, even blacks were there but it was very strict.

NN: So only whites were needed?

PM: Yes, my mom as they were doing their *stokvel*, if she wanted a Dry Gin, she would ask her boss to buy it for her and that was how she would get it. Or there were these old people who were thieves and they were used to come to where I stay, but we were still stupid but we saw when they were arrested, they were... you see, firms like Snowflake, Five Roses, Crown and Coke, all these firms were built while we were still living there but Simba Chips, its foundation was built while we were looking, because Simba, it's just like Pick'n Pay because it was also close to my home, it was built while we were looking and that's when they moved us to Tembisa. So alcohol was transported by trains and these old men would go and open up these trains because sometimes they would just park and continue their journey the next day and these men would go and steal alcohol from these trains at night, and when we woke up we would hear noise outside and we would ask ourselves what happened now only to find that they are just happily drinking and having fun, but some of the alcohol is being buried under ground and sometimes they would put grass on top. If someone comes to buy alcohol it's been marked with grass so they would go there but even if he goes there to take it, he must be careful because the police see him, he would be in trouble with the people who went and stole the booze and again he would be arrested. Life was hard during that time but we didn't see it because we were still young but if we think about it now we can see that it was hard. There were many of us at home, we were about eight because... do you know Shirley?

NN: No I don't know her

PM: You know Dzodzo, right?

NN: Yes

PM: Dzodzo's mother, Shirley, I'll show you her one day, Hluphi's mom, Girly, Kokol, me, Debra and then the pastor... you see that there's eight of us?

NN: Yes

PM: Pastor is the last born in our family, we moved from Phelandaba while he was still young.

NN: Which year was it when you moved from Phelandaba?

PM: I don't remember that well but I think it was during 56 or 59. I don't remember very well.

NN: So you were moved to Tembisa?

PM: No, the school moved first and there were buses that used to pick us up and bring us to Sphiwe Primary and they would come to fetch us again every day until it happened that they told us that we are moving permanently and we had to bunk school because we didn't know where we were moving to and when we arrived we stayed at Welamlambo section, because my sister got married to this man and the stand that was ours it was written in their name only to find that my grandfather had

made us the beneficiaries but it was me, the pastor, Debra and Kokol. We grew up very hard because if my sister is having a fight with her husband who was a mechanic, we had to leave the house in style carrying blanket and we would sleep in the cars that he fix till morning and we ended up not going to school and it was when we sold alcohol but that time it was legal because now we were old and we knew how to wash for ourselves.

NN: How was Tembisa when you first got here?

PM: When we got here, Tembisa was a nice place but because we were not used to it and it took us time to get used to it but it was nice because you could leave Welamlambo at twelve pm and come to Ndulwini

NN: Unlike now.

PM: We would leave Lekaneng at one am because Kukune had a tavern and we would come here it was quiet and safe with no guns and knives.

NN: So what is the difference between Phelandaba and Tembisa?

PM: Phelandaba was first class because money was there and we could save. It was nice and things were very cheap at that time, because we had a five cent meet and we called it five penny, sugar coast Tic which is half of five cent two and a half cent sugar, if you had twenty rand you were carrying a lot of money.

NN: So how hard was the apartheid system this side?

PM: It did not end because they would wake us up at night and asking for permits. If you not on the permit you were being arrested, if you had no ID, you were being arrested. If they find you in town without a marketing special you were being arrested.

NN: Did they made you a book if you're looking for a job?

PM: Yes, you had to go to home affairs and they would give you a book and that book had days, not that it was going to give you the whole month, it was going to give you two or three days to look for a job, not a week and if they can find you in town without that paper you were being arrested and they called it a special. At night Blackjacks would knock on your door and they would wake everyone up asking for ID or permits and they would search the house, see if you all there, if you had everything, that's where you were going to sleep. If I hate your grandmother and see visitors at her place I would go to the police and tell them that there are people at your place who don't have ID and permits and they would come at night and if you don't have an ID they would arrest you and take you to the police station. All they wanted were permits and we always had them with us.

NN: If you were going to visit someone were you suppose to have a permit?

PM: If you were going to visit you were supposed to have a permit, you were getting a piece of paper that will show that you have a visitor and for how long is that visitor going to stay. They didn't allow a visitor to stay for more than a week, which is why there were not many outsiders; people from Maputo were not staying for a long time like they are doing now; people from Ghana and India

did not stay free like they are doing now. Honesty speaking, I love apartheid, because it was much better.

NN: Why do you say it was much better?

PM: It's because now you don't know what is what and I can even say it in court that I did love apartheid - they might as well lock me up for saying that - because there was order. It was painful in other things but if you can look now, you will see that it was much better. We didn't even stay unemployed - you would lose your job and get another one. You didn't wait for thirty minutes to get job. Even if the money was so little, we knew how to save it. But now there is no job, but the money is there but you can't save it.

NN: Because of needs?

PM: You see, so I did love apartheid in other things like now we are getting grant and now they say that the people from outside are also going to get it, you see where this is going, this is your tax money which is paying these grants.

NN: So where did you start your tavern?

PM: I started it in 1989; the thing is I left Welamlambo because my sister and his husband were no longer getting along and we moved to Moyeni, so my grandfather came to fetch us saying that we belong at Moyeni and our permits so we must stay with him but we did not stay with him for a long time because he passed on and we stayed there.

NN: So you were the beneficiaries?

PM: Yes even if he had a wife but the house was in our name, so I ended up working.

NN: Where did you work?

PM: I worked at PVM

NN: For how long did you work at PVM?

PM: I worked for five years and then I quit, then I worked at the dry clean, I quit again and then I worked at Simba and then I went back to PVM in 1971 and I worked for two years then in 1972 I got this house and in 1976 it was the year of the student uprising on June 16.

NN: So how was the situation here in Tembisa?

PM: Things were very bad, because the taxis from work did no longer deliver us here in Tembisa but they ended in the Tembisa entrance at KOP

NN: You mean there at the entrance?

PM: Yes. The taxis were not coming in. We had to walk in order for us to get to our place, as we were coming in we did not see anything but the smoke... You couldn't even see the houses because they were covered by smoke. We got lifts from people until we arrived at Moyeni. As we arrived home we found lots of alcohol in basins.

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NN: Were they also destroying tavern?

PM: No, during that time we did not have taverns but there were bottle stores and night clubs, bottle stores and bars we destroyed you see the one in Sedibeng?

NN: Yes

PM: I don't think you know it

NN: You mean the one at Thabethe place?

PM: No, you talking about the bar place. I mean the bottle store that was close to Tembisa station. Let me not force you to remember, but that was the biggest bottle store in Tembisa during that time and it was burned and brought down and that was the end of it. People were taking alcohol for free, everyone was taking and they were pouring the barrels that were carrying beer and they would just petrol bomb it. When they are done, it was just chaotic. Guns and fires were all over the place, people who are 1976 survivors say that they thank god because things were very bad, guns teargas but the boers couldn't handle it and they ended up running away from school kids.

NN: How long did it take for it to end?

PM: The strike, it was for that day only and it started late because we were called from work at 11 telling us that things are bad in the township. We ask our bosses to release us but when we got here, things were bad already, in just hours things were damaged and it ended that day. The following day it was the police only looking for people who were involved. Our brother almost got arrested but we took him away to safety, because he had a case which involved politics that is why we sent him away. Lot of people were arrested and some went to exile, my aunt's child was also arrested and it has been four to five years since he came back from prison.

NN: Since he was arrested that time?

PM: Ever since he went to exile and most of them died in exile, they did not come back, some came back disabled and some came back with mental disability, it was bad.

NN: How did it come about for you to end up owning a tavern?

PM: You know how it came about, because I was in politics but uneducated. This white person I was working with, I was a hard worker when I got the job. You find that sometimes... because we were doing car wipes, if they say that they want one thousand five wipes from each ... I was very fast. You find that I finish the target that they gave me for the whole day. I would finish at three then I'm not supposed to work because the machine it being generated to make 1500 and it will just stop automatically after doing that target and you find that we knock off at past five. Then when I am done I would go to the bathroom to prepare myself because I would be done for the day and he saw that I was fast and he would give me another job to do and I would tell him that I have reached my target, I don't know why you taking me to the other department, because he was jealous that I was free and I did the target that was given to me and then he shouted at me in the painful way then I got angry and took off the working coat and threw it in his face and then I went home. They hold me as I was about to beat him up because he was just a small boy, they begged me to stay and I told

TEM_MasombukaP_20101209_7

them that I won't stay and let a boy take advantage of me just because he is white and I'm black and I have reached the target that he gave me. Since from last week he said he wants 1500 I did that. Then 1800, I also did that, and he went to 2000, I also did that, and I finished them before time so he was jealous and wanted me to continue working.

NN: So he wanted you to work until you knock off?

PM: Yes, so we fought and I came back home, when I got back home I sat and thought because the house was not done and the floor was still not done when we swap the dust would come up, I thought what I would do so that I cannot go back to work because the other thing I would get paid on Friday but come Monday I would be having no money because during that time we were still partying and drinking. You find that you come from work and you want to make food for the kids on the other hand you had to go out to have a good time with your friends. On Friday I went to get my money from my previous job then I got back early and sent Sammy to go buy ice block and five cases of beer with that money and when he got back I took the booze and put it in the basin and the five cases got finished. Then the following day I bought ten cases. It went on until I saw myself buying thirty cases of beer, until they introduced the beer licences and I applied and this man from the shop where I used to buy my stock was now delivering for me. And then I applied for the tavern license and it passed and now it was hard for me to get a garage because I have not yet made enough money to build it and Sammy decided to go and take a loan and the bank was still Perm Bank and it also went through and we started to build and it was very quick and the inspectors came to check it and it passed and we went on and on, and Sammy paid the loan and he finished it. The tavern got so busy; I tell you even now if I can start it again, it can be very busy. It's just that it was very busy and I started to work at the tavern in '89, and I closed it in the year 2000 after Sammy passed on in 1999. And no one got injured and no one died in my tavern years. The thing is that selling alcohol is a risk - it all depends on your luck because you are putting your life in danger when you are selling alcohol because you can die anytime. People can die in your tavern and also you have to be involved as the owner of the tavern so selling alcohol is not easy. So after Sammy passed on we closed the tavern because now there was no man in the house so I decided to quit. Even now as we speak I was still paying it. I only stopped two years ago because I was getting old, but if my children still want to use it I can still open it.

NN: How was the community response towards the tavern?

PM: They did not like it, because sometimes music will play until two in the morning and the noise... even if they won't say anything but you can see and sometimes you have to think for them because on the weekend we would operate the music until past eleven even if we don't switch it off but we would play it softly and the noise would be made by the customers, you have to think for other people because we know that as the tavern owner you have the right to play music until two o'clock but I was respecting them because I was old also and we would lower the volume at twelve o'clock.

NN: So as I have heard that there were gangsters here in Tembisa, did they also come to the tavern?

PM: The thing is that these boys, I was used to them, because Sammy's dad was living in Umthambeka where Yster was living, you know Yster, the one who used to tell people to bath in beer. That name became very popular.

NN: Yes I have heard about him.

PN: He was living third house from Yster's place, because Sammy's dad had a house in Umthambeka so in that way they were used to me and knew me as Sammy's mother. They have entered in other taverns and made people to bath in booze and taking their money but they never did it here. But there was this one person who tried to misbehave here and that was ma Seven. It was this boy from Madela who was going with Jacky. I don't want to speak lies about them, they never done anything to me but I believe that they never done wrong to me because they knew Sammy and his dad but they also knew me, they grew up in front of me so they respected me very well. But one day they did come and asked money for cigarette and I gave it to Sammy to give them because if they did enter, people who were there were going to hate me. So I gave them the money, so this guy from Madela (the time it was new) saw them and went to tell people that there were Toasters at the tavern, so he told them that they were still in the tavern and they came because they were fighting with them because they were gangsters also. So they got in and searched the place and this guy stood in the door and took out his gun as he tried to shoot me, the gun got stuck he took off the bullets and put them in his mouth and put them back in the gun but still it got stuck and he said *lesifebe sikhendlile* (this bitch is using witch craft) and then they left. You see this gate in the passage, we used to close it, so they jumped it to get in and again when they leave. I have survived twice from the gun as people tried to shoot me and they just got stuck. Zet from Ndulwini also tried to shoot me as I was coming from the toilet but his gun went into flames and then he ran away, and that was when pastor told me to stop selling alcohol because Jesus saved me from death. But I carried on until I saw that my children are dying and there was no one, who was no man to run the tavern and if we continue there will be no respect in the yard, but I quitted in a painful way because I was not ready to quit selling alcohol, because there was a storm from nowhere, you know that these houses were asbestos?

NN: Yes

PM: There was a storm from nowhere and it took the roof and threw it far and the house was left without a roof and from that day I got scared of the house and we moved to Moyeni and stayed there for two years. I was so scared even if I'm from Moyeni to check the house, I would get scared and go back without entering the house and I prayed for a very long time and God help me and I entered this house. Then I asked myself, what exactly am I scared of because I could fix it and we can come and live here, because Sammy was the one who was living here, do you still remember Sammy, the one who was tall and he was working at Revlon?

NN: Yes

PM: He was the one who was living here and he was living alone and he was driving a Cressida and selling Revlon perfumes. He stayed for a long time here and it happened that we left Moyeni but it wasn't nice when we left, because we were not getting along and I asked for a place to stay from this woman who was living at Timong and we stayed there for a month because now I have given the people who were renting the place a one month notice to leave the place and they left and we stayed in the garage for like two years.

NN: Two years?

TEM_MasombukaP_20101209_9

PM: Yes, we stayed in the garage for two years until I got my money which I was saving and I had forgotten about it and it was R45000 and I used that money to fix up this house. You know when you have forgotten about money and here came a letter from nowhere, what is it?

NN: Insurance

PM: Yes, insurance money and they told me that my money was ready for me to take it. I was not sure because I did not know English and I gave it to my daughter to read it and she did and we went to fetch it.

NN: Comparing Tembisa now and then what is the difference?

PM: It's very big and now it's not right, in the past Tembisa was okay, the problem is that they have let the outsiders to come and stay in our country. In the past they were not allowed even if things were not okay but we were living and now we just can't and now you become scared to go outside at nine o'clock you have to look first before you go out, just like I said that we used to leave Sangweni and come here at night and they wouldn't do anything to you but now you can't do that so that is why I say that I love apartheid because it was better in other ways.

NN: Why, because it demanded permits from people?

PM: Yes a permit was better because we knew that we were not going to get arrested we belong here; the people who were going to get arrested were the ones who didn't belong here so now we are crowded and this place is becoming very small for us.

NN: Okay mama, we would like to thank you for your time and we are going to come back for the follow up interview.

PM: Another one again?

NN: Yes and this time I'm going to come with Tshepo, so for now I would like to thank you for your time that you have given.

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