

KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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3 **(Interview with Eric Matshatsha, conducted by Ruth Lundie on 26 July 1995)**

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5 (‘C’ shall signify the Interviewee and ‘R’ the Interviewer)

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8 R at the University of Natal, held at the Alan Paton Centre on the 26th of July 1995. Eric,
9 when did you come to Edendale?

10 C Well, I first came here in Decem - January 1957. I was twenty-two years at that time? (There
11 is an interference which is inaudible)

12 R And what was it like when you got here?

13 C Well, when I came here at that time it was the sort of good old Edendale which was of a sort
14 of a peri-urban area. Ja, which had a mixture of being an urban town as well as a rural area -
15 because people lived in a sort of a free society where they could plough and rear cattle and
16 everything in the area. And the people were living under sort of the tribal authority at that
17 time there was a chief in the Edendale area towards Esigodini who was a Chief Ngegela? Who
18 ruled all the urban townships here, including Sobantu as well

19 R Yes, we must include Sobantu in this overview because it is part of the peri-Pietermaritzburg
20 area, yes. So, it was in fact the third largest township in Natal at that time

21 C Well, I

22 R in the 1950s, I think

23 C Ja, I would presume so because really there wasn't sort of that comparison, people of
24 Edendale were an exclusive area because that area was bought from a certain Mr Pretorius
25 which used to be a farm, Edendale, a farm in Edendale area - part of Edendale valley and then
26 people were settled in that area.

27 R And the townships, at what stage was Ashdown established? Do you remember?

28 C Ashdown, really it was a small town, a small township but there were some heavy rains, round
29 about 1948, '49 and the Ashdown township was built as a place which looked for the people

who had been displaced, had been washed out because they were living in shacks and mud and daub houses in the Macibisa area and some were living along the banks of Msundusi River and that flood sort of washed away their minute wood and daub houses and now Ashdown was built as well as the Ashdown School was built, actually I think it was built around about 1949. This is what the people, when I came there told me - their arrival and what it involved. A lot of people from the Matatiele area, which was Sotho speaking, this is eventually Ashdown was regarded rather as a Sotho-speaking township. Though now the complexion of it around about 1957 had changed.

R Yes, I hadn't realised that although I'd realised, it was in those days - it would have been called a government location

C Ja, it was - but it was built because under the Local Health Commission type days it was built there to accommodate people who had sort of that tragedy of being washed away along the banks of the river and those were living in the Macibisa sort of settlement? ja?

R And then of course Imbali became established by the municipality and that's where you live now, could you tell us a bit about that?

C Ja, it's actually, the reason that Imbali was built - it was part of the apartheid days - it wanted to move all the Blacks from the town areas - this led to the people - the intention was to relocate the people from Sobantu and the places towards which is known as Msikweni - towards where I am now - this Hay Paddock area, these now. And towards

R New Scotland?

C New Scotland was in town, but with those people there - they had a little bit of a problem there. The intention was to remove all those people who like the Sifilos and the Gumedes, they were moved there and they were located into Imbali. Imbali actually was sort of - was built in 1964, I think it started round about 1963, by the Department of Native Affairs, ja. And then from there they wanted to force people from Sobantu and places like Msekweni, and places like - which is known as Ndadini were moved. In such a way that - well, when you go to Imbali now, the people that came from the place known as Msekweni are in one section and those that came from a place known as Ingathina? In one section and those that came from Sobantu are in sort of - in one area in Imbali. But the Sobantu people resisted and refused -

1 they didn't want to move. They were promised all sorts of things and as a result the Tatham
 2 Sports Ground, which was used by people from Sobantu mainly, was taken away by the City
 3 Council and it was given to the Indian and the Coloured communities and the Imbali people
 4 were promised a big stadium in Imbali, which hasn't materialised up 'till now. This gives a
 5 lot of discontent and problems - people are very hurt about that things and now the only
 6 happy part of it is that Sobantu people eventually - those who didn't want to move has
 7 remained in Sobantu up to the present time

8 R: What was the City Council's motivation in trying - did they want to get rid of Sobantu
 9 altogether?

10 C: They wanted to get rid of Sobantu completely because they are applying the separate
 11 development - the - this is - because no Blacks were wanted in town

12 R: So they wanted that area for Asiatics and Coloured people?

13 C: Exactly! Yes. Hence there are sort of Coloured Township close to it - which are built which
 14 I think is in

15 R: Copesville?

16 C: No, Copesville is a new one - Coloured townships - like Eastwood, it's bordering on Sobantu
 17 Ja, I think the plan was that the whole area should become a Coloured and Indian area

18 R: So it was a whole separate development issue?

19 C: Ja, and the first inhabitant, the sort of people that moved into Imbali were in 1964, now the
 20 first Superintendent - as they would call them those days was a Mr Goodiger? I think he is
 21 now employed by the Department of - I don't know what they call it now?

22 R: Well, you've had a long life?"

23 C: Yes, it is

24 R: And you moved to Imbali almost right away

25 C: In 1965 - Moved into Imbali in 1965, from - I lived to - when I got married in 1964, I was
 26 staying in Macibisa - And just over the Msundusi River, facing the - towards Caluza way, and
 27 1965 I moved into Imbali.

28 R: So, was Edendale losing its rural character, but it was still a conglomerate of little
 29 communities - Ashdown, Imbali, Georgetown all these various areas?

- 1 C Actually, Ashdown, and Imbali - the Edendale people didn't regard them as Edendale people
- 2 R I'm sure they didn't - was there a little bit of snobbery?
- 3 C It was at least Ashdown - it was a bit different. Imbali in particular became a sort of - a
- 4 municipally-owned township with special privileges - like work permit. It was easy for the
- 5 Imbali people to get work in town whereas the Edendale people had all sorts of difficulties -
- 6 this is what really led to Imbali - up to the present day - the Edendale people don't like the
- 7 so-called township residents. that is Edendale, Imbali and Sobantu - they don't like them -
- 8 there is no sort of - that sort of enmity it still exists today because they regarded those as
- 9 special, privileged people who could walk in town with no special permits and so on.
- 10 R Also, of course they regarded themselves as the original inhabitants of Edendale
- 11 C That's it - you see.
- 12 R And so Edendale belonged to them, but Ashdown, Imbali and Sobantu
- 13 C belonged to the Whites..
- 14 R It belonged to the Whites, yes, that's absolutely - it Now we're moving from the 1960s into
- 15 the 1970s, when different ideas were cropping up. In the Eastern Cape we had SASO, with
- 16 Steve Biko, various of his lieutenants were also educated at the Medical School in Durban
- 17 Were these influences infiltrating into the township?
- 18 C Yes, they were infiltrating because I think Steve was - Steve Biko's influence was actually in
- 19 places like Marianhill, where I think he attended their
- 20 R Yes, he went to school there
- 21 C And his influence was so important to the people because they became conscientised - they
- 22 became aware of they are being Black and their potential as Blacks and this is how the BCM
- 23 influence came to the people and because all other sort of political organisations were banned
- 24 as it were - they were not operating as they should have been operating - they were all
- 25 underground. And those were left who were not locked up - they became sort of part of the
- 26 Liberal Party which was the only hope of the Blacks at that time - that the only salvation that
- 27 had come was the Liberal Party
- 28 R And they had its - one of its most famous members was Selbe Msimang who was a foundation
- 29 member of the ANC in 1912, and lived in Georgetown. Tell us a bit about Selby - he was an

- 1 important person.
- 2 C Well, Selby, you see he was sort of an old veteran, a person whom people - a lot of them
3 regarded that God-given - what the IFP called - he could use him to influence the living of the
4 well younger generation in the Edendale valley and a lot of people Ngongaya we Fusa very well
5 and he's a highly respected person and whose ideas had a lot of influence to te younger
6 generation, like myself
- 7 R. What was that name you gave him?
- 8 C Ngongaya vusa? - you see, there is a wild buck that lives in the - you know this wild buck that
9 lives in the fields up there - you see, he can run a lot - he can run a lot so Ngongaya vusi - was
10 well experienced, he could run away from all the White man's harness, if you like. So he
11 could avoid it - so they need men to match Ngongaya we Fusa
- 12 R. Oh, that's an interesting detail. And then, of course, other influences were becoming workable
13 because from the 70s we moved into the 80s and there's tremendous disturbance in the
14 schools, Edendale schools in the 70s and 80s - am I right?
- 15 C Ja, that's fine - that's true
- 16 R Because '76 was the Soweto
- 17 C The Soweto Uprising
- 18 R And then - you had had the Biko influence now we have Soweto '76. How did that affect the
19 young people of Edendale?
- 20 C The Edendale people, as well as the whole of Maritzburg, Black schools came under heavy
21 sort of test from the students, because they objected, as you may well know, they didn't like
22 the Afrikaans medium of instruction. They thought well, Afrikaans was the language of the
23 oppressor and therefore they didn't want to learn it and the - though they had accepted the
24 tuition, in English they had no objection. But the influence of the - they objected strongly
25 against Afrikaans and then the schools, the Bantu Education had already had its brief and they
26 couldn't sort of change it and people just plodded on and there were quite a few strikes in
27 schools and then the schools objected to students forming their own sort of SRC's and this
28 brought about the whole programme. But, Steve Biko's influence and Dave Mashinini from
29 the 1970s the influence from the Transvaal had come and get its grip here and there was no

- 1 running away from it. They formed their sort of school.
- 2 R: Well there would have been an AZAPO group, was there?
- 3 C: Well, AZAPO there was very little, but there was a little bit that came up - its strong influence
4 came from Sobantu really - Nomaz Azazi? And that one was neutral from Sobantu - those
5 boys in Sobantu they formed themselves into a very strong group and they objected to all the
6 other things that were happening - but, there were a minute group from the Inkatha influenced
7 areas and then there was that - this is why things didn't work as well as they did in Soweto.
- 8 R: Yes, because it was 1978 - thereabouts, that Inkatha started its new life?
- 9 C: Ja, it actually started round about '975, and a lot of us were .
- 10 R: Selby was one -
- 11 C: Ja, we really, like people - you know people like Professor Nvembezi, too.
- 12 R: Yes, indeed.
- 13 C: Ja, they and Excel Msimang, they became members of the Inkatha because it was believed at
14 that time that Inkatha was the body that could sort of carry on with the struggle while the
15 ANC places were banned. But it turned out to be something else. I think the clashes, we were
16 told became " was between Oliver Tambo and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and it changed
17 the whole thing and then in the Inkatha itself those who have joined - or who nearly joined,
18 like myself, realised that what we were joining, we were about to join, wasn't the sort of the
19 right body and in actual fact - thanks God, we were saved by the influence of Steve Biko.
20 And there was various other groups that came about - the BCM and the other bodies know
21 as Mass Democratic Movements came about.
- 22 R: That came about - when did that come about? In the mid 1980s?
- 23 C: Ja, I think around 1983 or '84 - round about that date - I'm not too sure.
- 24 R: Yes, the first State of Emergency was '85, I think wasn't it? Or '86?
- 25 '83 (don't know who interjects)
- 26 C: It should be round about 1983, '84.
- 27 R: But this UDF aspect played a huge part in Edendale didn't it?
- 28 C: Ja, actually what saved a lot of people from joining Inkatha was the establishment of the UDF
29 under Archie Gumede and there were a lot of people from the - there was not - at that time

1 what was know as the Black Consultation in the Anglican Church, which had a lot of
 2 influence to the members and all those people - they were leading figures, like Nadi?
 3 Gumadi? Who was quite active in the Anglican Church community - the Black Consciousness
 4 - the Black Consultation, Black Consultation and it led to forming of the UDF

5 R I see

6 C Ja, which in fact was regarded as the authentic sort of ANC body, a. that the government was
 7 going to have difficulty - in fact it was part of the plan to continue with the structures of the
 8 ANC and each time the government wanted to ban any organisation, then a new name would
 9 be formed and then the same sort of old people joined ..

10 R Yes, yes, it was all working like yeast ..

11 C That's it!

12 R And then of course, the 1980s, with the UDF, moved into the 1990 Edendale War which was
 13 one of the most important things, I think, in the history of this region.

14 C Ja, actually the 1990 sort of Imbali War - I think there's a man, some of the victims of that
 15 war who are fortunately living - there is a man whom is know as Samuel Mchunu, he lived
 16 in Imbali, and with a certain man, now he's dead - Titus Tenjwayo and a few other ones - they
 17 are two sort of victims that nearly died - Mchunu was nearly killed by the Inkatha people and
 18 he's still alive and there is Tenjwayo who was the Chairman at that time and there was
 19 Lovington - who is still alive - he works I think for Oxford and Mchunu has a garage in the
 20 notorious Pendula area in Imbali. He has a very clear memory of how this whole thing
 21 started, because he was involved

22 R Please tell us

23 C Ja, it's a - in fact I would have loved if you had come - if you would tell Tandu? That he
 24 could sort of give you the Seven Day War in the Edendale Valley

25 R I'm sure we'd be glad to

26 C Yes, and I think he has got very clear memory than myself - 'cause he actually - the war there
 27 started in Imbali. People may not seem to think it started in the whole Edendale area. There
 28 was the problem because the Inkatha people are (wetter) - there is a notorious awetha ? and
 29 this Velaphi Ndlovu. They are the people who started the whole trouble because now they

1 didn't want their people from their areas to use the taxis - that were owned by what they
 2 regarded as ANC supporters and now they wanted to rule or to run the taxi industry in Imbali
 3 - the conflict started. So in Umlahla Nkosi in an area called Umlanankosi the Inkatha faction
 4 started shooting at the passengers and then the passengers resisted and then there was a youth
 5 mass meeting called to the hall - in the hall at Imbali. And then the young groups just took
 6 a resolution that no one will go to work - it was because the police were not doing anything
 7 to arrest the Inkatha from its trend and when those people were attacking the passengers and
 8 taxis, the police did nothing. So the young groups, including students, called on for a work
 9 stoppage. And now this work stoppage escalated to such an extent that it stopped the
 10 ordinary people from going to work. After three days, the Department of Commerce called
 11 in the factions in Imbali to a meeting in the showgrounds I think and that resolved nothing.
 12 And now the Commerce was saying the usual three days for staying away - it's expired - we
 13 will now deduct money from these people and now this is when the whole of Edendale came
 14 in and the late Harry Gwala - he called for the whole of Maritzburg taxi industry to come to
 15 a stop - no transport at all - even in Sobantu - even in Edendale. And then there was big fight
 16 now - this is how - this Seven Day War started, ja, and then the rallies were called in Wadley
 17 and this is where Harry Gwala revealed that the taxi war wasn't a taxi war - it was another
 18 ploy of continuing with the struggle and this is how the Seven Day War - it was just a war
 19 between Inkatha, and the whole of Edendale people. It was terrible.

20 R: There were a huge number of deaths.

21 C: Yes, there were and this Samuel Mchunu I am talking about is one of the people who are
 22 lucky to be alive - because after then - from that time - because he was instrumental in causing
 23 - because he owned some taxis and now Inkatha was targetting him.

24 R: But, Eric it must have been very painful for you living through that with your family?

25 C: One couldn't sleep. I imagine a lot of people had to sort of - patrol, walk up and down
 26 throughout the night if you are a days sleep, an hours sleep, or two hours sleep - that was a

27
 28 R: That was a lot?

29 C: That was a lot. And it was quite painful to see the kids and the wife in the home because they

- 1 were so worried, they were panicking actually and - but there were the younger group also -
 2 the male juveniles, they enjoyed it. This is the - actually participated in the fighting which -
 3 the most heavy fighting was above Ashdown area - between separating Mpumaza and
 4 Ashdown - that was a battlefield, it was ' ?
- 5 R: Because Inkatha were in the heights
- 6 C: Because Inkatha was in the heights and most of the Indian people converged around
 7 Ashdown - Ashdown became a battlefield, really
- 8 R: Yes, it did, but there were thousands of refugees in town, in the church halls
- 9 C: Yes, those in Ashdown and others - there were sort of towards Mpumaza area - they had to
 10 sort of leave their homes
- 11 R: yes, yes . how do you think things are in Edendale today?
- 12 C: Well, they are gradually taking shape and people are now realising that, well, what they had
 13 been sort of struggling for is round the corner, but though the feeling it's not completely
 14 taking place - the people are still very sure whether there is a new South Africa in real terms
 15 as they expected it - because some of the things are still continuing in the same old good
 16 order. Some of the roads are still bad, and there are no facilities as they would like to see
 17 taking shape in the area.
- 18 R: Services are promised and they don't appear
- 19 C: Oh, ja, They don't see - to see any RDP taking place, but things are a bit better, people are
 20 relieved - they sort of tolerate each other now - they talk to each other and they walk with
 21 each other
- 22 R: You're happy that you made it your home?
- 23 C: Oh, yes!
- 24 R: We're glad that you came and found your place in that community.
- 25 C: That's it. But anyway, I think, as President Mandela does say, it's the related to the criminal
 26 element and it's to be, well, ' out - I mean where the criminal element is now sort of using -
 27 in fact I think part of the problem in this town - there were criminals that joined the struggle -
 28 and with no good purposes of fighting for any struggle or for democracy as we should be
 29 know - they were not fighting for democracy - they were fighting to sort of continue with

their criminal activities

2 R. Yes, and for what they could get

3 C. Is

4 R. in the end. Well, thank you very much unless there is something you would like to add?

5 Thank you

6 C. Okay

7

8 The tape goes blank, is switched off and then resumes as follows

9

10 R. This is a recoding of an interview with Mr Eric Mtshatsha, of the Ceramics Department,
11 University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, giving us a background of his life in Pietermaritzburg
12 over the last forty years. He originally came from Flagstaff in the Transkei

13

14 The tape is then switched off again. And the rest of the side is blank

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16 Side 2

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18 There appears to be nothing taped on the second side''''