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## **Mama Mkondweni interviewed by Koni Benson, New Crossroads, Apr. 25, 2005**

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# Mama Makhondweni, interviewed by Koni Benson, translation Nomakhwezi

Dlaba, April 24, 2005, New Crossroads.

Makhondweni: I was born in Transkei in a place called Qhungwane, which is situated, in a town called Itsolo. I grew up there and I did my Sub Standard A up to Standard four in that place. After that I moved to Nxapho High School in Eqokwana. After passing my standar six, I went to do a three years teacher's training course. Shortly after that, I got a school to teach and I also got married.

Koni: How did you meet?

Makhondweni: He approached me and asked to marry me but I refused but he sent delegates to my home and we got married. After marriage, I stayed at home [his home] for a few months. Then I moved to Cape Town.

Koni: What was Cape Town like the first time you visited?

Makhondweni: I used to come to Cape Town to visit my aunt and in 1960 I visited my husband.

Koni: Where did you stay the first time you visited Cape Town?

Makhondweni: I was staying with my aunt in town. Then we went to Retreat, from Retreat we went to Gugulethu. We didn't get a house because the people of Gugulethu had to move from Retreat to Nyanga. The board said that we couldn't get a house because my husband and I were still new in Cape Town. He must finish ten years at work and fifteen years in Cape Town in order to get a house. We went to lodge at 56 Walter House in Parkwood for years. In 1960 to 1963 there was this law which stated that natives should go back to Transkei. The inspectors were going up and down saying that we should go back to where we come from but we stayed. We received a notice informing us to vacate the area because we are black people but

we didn't move. I was pregnant at that time and the inspector gave us a chance to stay until the baby was born. A month after my baby was born the inspectors came and they arrested me. I was with...and my mother had visited us. The following morning we had to go to Salt River where we had a big talk and I came home after the talk.

After that the messenger of the court came with another inspector and they have placed all our clothes outside. They ordered us to leave but there was no place to go at that time. In fact, they don't tell you to go you must just leave. We stayed outside until we got another place.

Koni: Was that in Retreat?

Makhondweni: No it was in Parkwood. They had moved us from Retreat to Parkwood. We had moved from Retreat the time people had to move to Nyanga and we had to go to Parkwood because we didn't get a house. We went to stay in Parkwood at 54 Voortrekker Road. From there we went to stay in Heads Road and we stayed there for a long time. We were staying better but the inspectors were worse. They came and look for the people then after that our house burned. It was on a Sunday night and we were sleeping. When I woke up the other side was dark. I woke up and I went to check what was going on. It had started burning on the other side and my house was burning. Everything was burning but I only took the children and we went to stay at the other side. We built our house there and we stayed for a long time. Another day when I was going outside to throw water, I saw the inspectors who called me out and took me to the police station. I went with my children to the police station and the following day we went to the court. At this time the court heard the children they couldn't then charge us. We stayed the whole day until it was very late and when the court was going to be closed, the inspectors were still outside looking and waiting for the children. We were also standing outside and they took the children. They took the children and placed them in a crèche. We were taken back to Salt River. Other people were charged but I was not. My permit was still

valid although I was staying in Park wood. We went home but the inspectors came and we had already built our houses. They demolished the houses but we built them again. We initiated a new plan because they came with new brown vans. Everyday they marched down the streets. In 1975 they came but I was not at home. When I was back I was told that they were at my house and the reason was because they wanted passes and they wanted people to move to Crossroad because they had found a place for us. But I did not bother myself about that. They came on the following and they forced me to go. I told them that I'm waiting for a house because the time had arrived for me to get it but they forced me to go. The other day they came and left a paper instructing me to leave because Parkwoods is a Coloured area and not a native's. The paper also stated that natives must go if they don't have permits and they must stay and find houses if they do have permits. But it was difficult. On the other day they came and broke into my house and took all my clothes outside. We stayed outside for three days. Day and night we were staying outside.

We didn't have a place to stay until we heard that there is space in Crossroad to build houses. Then my husband went to look for the area. He came back and found another land where he took us. I asked him if the place is nice and he said yes because the inspectors were already putting numbers on the houses. They came again to put few yellow numbers on the houses and they started chasing coloured people. They said that coloured people should go to Phillipi but they were also staying with them. Then after that they came on another night. I heard a noise but I didn't see any people until a woman and other people passed. I was standing outside and I ask them what was happening. They said that the inspectors were here arresting people. There were lots of police vans and it was the first day they have arrested people at Crossroad. Then it started that day and carried on. Everyday they arrested people and people were talking until they decided to do something and help themselves. We decided to meet and have a committee and discuss this matter. We were not staying in other people's houses. We were in Parkwoods, Elsie's and in Retreat but they arrested us in all these places. We fought back because we didn't want to move. They arrested people and the people came back and they went to the Black Sash. The people, who were fighting, were fighting because of not having places (or passes). The inspectors only gave them three days to stay. A person who does not have a card (or a pass) must go and pay.

That day they arrested Mama Yanta. They talked and talked until they came to her and they said that she has three days to stay in Cape Town.... She asked them why because she has come to her husband in Cape Town. "My husband have a permit which allows him to stay in Cape Town and I also have a permit to be with him. I must stay with my husband" People told the policemen that they have come to their husbands. Then those people were they were arrested and brought before the magistrate. The magistrate...they arrested the people until they needed the people

who had permits. They wanted the people who have and have no permits. The people who had permits went to the Black Sash.

Then three people were elected to stand for Crossroad, Mrs. Yanta, Mrs. Ndamase and Tata Mdayi. They must stand for Crossroad at all times until it wins and then Crossroad was declared as the place of natives and the Pass Law stopped, people were not arrested anymore. They were still arresting at Gugulethu, Langa and other places but they still couldn't arrest the people of Crossroad. After that plenty of things happened. We stayed without being arrested but on the other day we heard that the inspectors were coming but we didn't worry about it. We thought we must look at it. In the evening we heard that there were few inspectors walking in the streets. The speaker told us not to sleep because the inspectors are here. They were not in the location but were standing at the other side of the road. People were ordered to stay out of their houses. We didn't sleep that night. We were on guard because they didn't get in. They were standing at the other side of the road and we heard that they started to fight on the other side. We moved to the bottom of Crossroad and they were at the top. Now we went to look if they were not coming because we were standing at a base. Now it was going to be difficult if they were going to use tear gases. But other women and us went to look but did not see anything. But when the third group went to look that is when they started to shoot and we shouted and told them that we will never move or we'll move when we got good houses. The last blood was paid. We won't move if there are no houses.

By the time we were doing all these things we had find other means of helping. We made these stories. It was going to be a concert then we thought of doing something or our children must smile that day. Then we thought of doing a play, we must demonstrate so that our children can laugh. Then we did this play. We demonstrated how the police arrested us and others were Transkei and Cape Town policemen. Others have been arrested. We were thirteen women with the children. There were four children. Then we made the first part...we add and added bits by bits until it was satisfactory. We were playing for the children that day but the visitors were there and were so sorry to see the things that were happening to us. The people who were staying in town did not know how we lived in the location. Then they saw how we stay. It was difficult to fetch water and it was difficult to walk in the streets because the vans where everywhere, everyday. Then on the other day the students came and wanted us to play this play for them and after we have finished, they went to Langa to see these places. Then it was strong. We played in Cape Town and after that we went to Johannesburg and it was that time of violence. When we arrived there was a man from overseas. We had to cover Josette and Brian with our blankets. We played although it was difficult because there was violence. People were frightened and the other one was a woman who didn't understand English. But it was difficult to say the Boers had no right to take our land. After that we played in East London and in Grahamstown. We played at Dimbaza after we have been arrested in...but when we went in there was a police station and the van followed us and directed the driver to go to the police station. When we were at the police station they looked at us when we were playing and they say that it is not right to play it but the children liked it. When we finished we went outside and by the time we were sitting in a bus, they called us one by one and interviewed us. They wanted to know how we did the play, why have we left the husbands to do the play and what kind of women we were. We told them we got permission from our husbands to go there. Sebe helped us and told them not to arrest us. He told them to leave us alone but they told us to go back to Cape Town but we didn't. We went to East London, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and all those places. And we have seen Glenstown where people were moved to other places. The place was far from the taxis. It was difficult but they were staying

and they had the aim of taking us from Crossroad and put us Gwatyu in Queenstown. We heard that because I had gone to my home and my aunt says that she knows the magistrate. She told the magistrate that we from New Crossroad. He asked how are we staying there and I see on the list that you are going to be dropped to Transkei again and I looked family first and my brothers' family and Tata Ndima's and other people's family. They were listed there from a man to the child. We were listed like that. When I arrived here, I told the cast and we have elected Celeste, Nomangesi and Mama Yanta to go and find out this place, Gwatyu because we didn't know about it. They went to look and they found the toilets. They had only to put houses far from Queenstown... We showed them that we will never go and we didn't but we struggled. We have tried to make a good Crossroad, everything but sometimes other things failed and the people who had permits stayed because the place was quiet. They complained that the place was dirty and that it will make diseases for people. Then the committee divided it into four parts and we cleaned it.

Koni: What was the book?

Makhondweni: I haven't got a book myself. I think Mrs. Mene have got the book. Mr. Ngxobongwane was a strong man and people were divided because we had police in Crossroad. We had a chairman and a committee and we had a women's committee. We had a committee on the other side and when we meet we would divide, man and women. We were making everything together.

Koni: How did you come to New Crossroad?

Makhondweni: Through the negotiations, they decided to build for us houses. We went to Pretoria and there was a big meeting, which was held for a week. We stayed there for a week discussing. It was a world meeting. Brother Russell helped us because to go to Pretoria. We had a discussion about Crossroad and luckily we put in different places and I was in a group. I was in group two and Koornhof was also in that group. Then I had to... on a teatime I had to talk to him. We had enough time to speak to him and in the meeting the topic was Crossroad. Different people were explaining their life style. A person would stand and explain the difficulty of his place. The thing was for people to unite and we were in that meeting for the whole week. The theme was "Unity is the strength".

Koni: Who organized the meeting?

Makhondweni: It was Father Russell who helped us because we

didn't even pay to go to Pretoria. The Claremont Anglican church gave us money.

Koni: Was it government people who were at the meeting?

Makhondweni: No, the church people.

Koni: When was that meeting?

Makhondweni: It was in 1979. It was a big meeting and it was strength.

Koni: So what happened when you came back from that meeting?

Where there many women at the meeting?

Makhondweni: There were women and men at the meeting. The people who went there was Mrs. Mene and Thoko and the other group was Mrs. Ntongana and we have talked and we wanted to see Dr. Koornhof because he was going to help people. So we wanted him to start with Crossroad when he starts his position. When we came to Crossroad the houses were built and we had to move according to our section. We divided Crossroad into four sections. Then section 1 had to go. They arrived here in 1980 late in the year. Then we arrived in 1982, section 3 followed and section 4.

Koni: How did the women's group want people to come to New Crossroad?

Makhondweni: We were a group of four. We say the kids would stay in Crossroad but when we arrived here it wasn't like that. It was only for a short time. We were doing the same but now they have elected another committee because they were going to have a committee while we were still there. Things didn't go nicely, they had another committee. That is where the things failed because they couldn't do what we were doing and when we came here we rent and it was going up quickly

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Makhondweni: When we arrived here it was 2350 but shortly it was going up unless we have to complain. We complained and it was stopped and there was a party of right also made another problem. The women were caught because of that and it was now difficult because other people who have taken legal aid lawyers couldn't pay. There was a friction because of that.

Koni: There was a friction between who?

Makhondweni: Between the people who have taken legal aid lawyers and those who have taken other lawyers. Even Mr. Ngxobongwane himself was in that friction because his lawyer was paid and the others were not paid. Now those who took a legal aid wanted money because they didn't...and the others paid their money. It was the time of violence and things were not going nicely at that time.

People chased other people from here and they chased Mama Yanta who was the leader of the committee. Nomangesi was also chased. Others went to Transkei while others went to Khayelitsha. People couldn't stay nicely and that is where Mama Yanta and Nomangesi are. They are in Khayelitsha.

Koni: How did they get chosen as the one's to be chased away?

Makhondweni: There were people who used to spy on certain people and sell their houses and our location was still new and we didn't want this act to happen to our location. It was still new and not finished. The women asked the men to call a meeting to that we can talk about this. Then the meeting was on but I don't know what happened because we [the women] didn't had a chance to speak thought we have called the meeting. We called Bhelwana who was in charge of Gugulethu and now the meeting was rough and women didn't get a chance to talk at all. Mr. Ngxobongwane also took the opportunity of rushing things up. He didn't do as it was planned. Our aim was to convince Ngxobongwanathat we are new here and we

still want to stay for years without being involved in the intricacies of the society until our place is finished. But we didn't get that chance because of these people who talked a lot. Few people spoke and they said things that were hurting. After that we heard that we are heading for the elections. People thought of choosing someone from New Crossroad who will represent them in that cabinet because Ngxobongwanawill also rule here. It was difficult for women because if her husband died, she and the children would be put outside. You couldn't get a house without a husband and the children couldn't stay alone in the house. The house must be given to someone and the children should stay with their relatives.

Koni: That's what they decided in the meeting?

Makhondweni: No that was the rule of the court but we didn't like it because in the meeting they have taken us to look at the houses they were going to build us. We went to Bahala Park, Mitchell's Plain and in Mitchell's Plain they have chosen three bedroom flats. In we chose one-bedroom flats in Bahala Park. After that we decided what we wanted in those houses because there some of the things that we didn't like about the houses. The board had a right of dividing people if someone has died and they take the house and chase the women if the man is dead. The same also applies with the woman. We didn't want these things to apply in Crossroad because children won't manage on their own. We wanted them to have the opportunity of staying nicely and not battle like us. Those were bad times. Other people can just tell you that this is my house but theoretically it's not hers because she was chased out. I remember my husband's brother's wife died and he received a notice ordering him to move out of the house because he has no wife. He moved out of the house and gave it to his daughter because she was married. He got married and found another house. Now they wanted to do the same thing here because they had already visited the houses whose relatives have passed away. But we went to the office and the difference with this was that the coloured person in the office

did not chase people. Instead, they checked if there is someone who can manage the house and pay rent.

Koni: So that's how Mama Yanta got chased out? Had her husband died?

Makhondweni: Mrs. Yanta and others were chased because they decided to choose a person who should represent Crossroad. When we had meetings we used to tell her what to say in front or otherwise we won't have a representative in Crossroad and Ngxobongwana will do what he likes because he was wrong. Others were chased because of money laundering but when you inquire about the money, you don't get any answers. The other money was for paying the lawyers. There was no straight but what happened to Mama Yanta was a sin and we don't know how mend it. The women in her house claimed that she paid a R2000, 00 and now there is no one to pay her. If someone could give her the money then Mama Yanta would be able to get her house again. She was working hard even early in the morning going to the courts and Black Sash. If people were arrested she would go to the Black Sash and represent them.

Nomakhwezi: To whom did this woman paid the money?

Makhondweni: She paid the money to another woman.

Nomakhwezi: What if the recipient of the money is no longer around?

Makhondweni: She is around.

Nomakhwezi: Where does she stay?

Makhondweni: She is staying in New Crossroad.

Koni: Did she have the authority to sell somebody's house?

Makhondweni: I don't know how this worked but after the location the houses were empty and people went to their relatives and friends because it was a bad time. The houses were burnt and people were killed. They made you to leave the house and run away. After you have left these people will get a

chance to give your house to someone who wants a house privately. Even the house one next to that one was also given to someone.

Nomakhwezi: Who stays there?

Makhondweni: It belongs Diya's sister. When she came back to her house she found that someone had already occupied the house. So she couldn't get out. People tried to force the 'occupants' of the house by the resisted.

Nomakhwezi: When was that?

Nomakhwezi: Perhaps in the early 90s.

Makhondweni: You were still at high school. Mama Yanta had tried to come back and still wants her house.

Nomakhwezi: I think she can get her house only if the community can work together just like in the olden days.

Makhondweni: She had tried.

Koni: When has she tried to come back and what happened?

Makhondweni: She went to the office and it gave her a permit to come but the community arrived and took her out of her house by force.

Koni: When was that?

Makhondweni: I think it was last year.

Koni: Who came?

Makhondweni: It's the ANC members.

Koni: So what was the role of the people who are now in the ANC during the early 80s? Is it the same people who kicked her out in the first place?

Makhondweni: It is the street people. Sometimes they make a community meeting and talk about that and after that they will visit your house and your things.

Koni: So it's the street committee?

Makhondweni: Yes sometimes it's the whole committee.

Koni: So they had a meeting and said Mama Yanta had come back.

So let's go and send her away. What are the reasons that they give?

Makhondweni: Mama Yanta and others choose Windvoel to represent them instead of Ngxobongwana. He was going to be in charge of New Crossroad and Gugulethu and Mama Yanta and others obstructed Ngxobongwana from being in charge before the time. We were still new in Crossroad.

Nomakhwezi: I think they chased her because of her activities.

Maybe she was too strong....