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INTERVIEW WITH MALOME SERAME ISAAC MASIKE

Malome Masike (MM): I have tried to bring many organisations around Rammolutsi together. Because Mr Mandela and Mr De Klerk said that all our credits should be declared. But that did not happen, unless if it took place only to those councillors families and friends.

Dale McKinley (DM): Malome, can you tell us a little bit about your past. Were you born here or when did you move to this community?

MM: I was born in Sophiatown but my parents were here, so I was raised here in Rammolutsi. I know this place from 1948.

DM: How would you describe growing up in this community in the 1950's and 1960's?

MM: This place was very rich in the olden days. We had factories and farms here and everyone had a job. Those who did not have jobs were just lazy. The farmers were producing sunflower, wheat, peanuts etc. and we could be fetched here by the Boers to go and work.

DM: Can you tell us little bit about the political side of things during that period?

MM: In politics we had people from here in the late 1950's and 60s who joined ANC and 'Umkhonto we Sizwe' ... they went out and had offices in Botswana and Mozambique. Most people were not interested in politics, it was only those who were educated that understood what was going on. Politics were just municipality politics ... we had 'blockmen' who looked after the people. So everything was right.

DM: After 1976, after the Soweto uprising, was there more conflict in the 1970s and 80s in the community, in this?

M: This thing between whites and blacks, I can say that it only started the time when Mandela was released from jail. I can mention Mr. Allan. who was close to us and was helping us and those in town were not bad ... it was only our education that was down and they were a bit up. I remember when I was in Std 2 in 1952 aged 11 we stole some pictures in the school in town, asking why those pictures are not in our class, why is the white's education higher than ours?. We were arrested for three days for doing that and came out after two days. The town and the township – those people were level.

Just before the elections there were others who didn't make us feel right ... they made a gate before we could go into town but it was removed. It was only about 2% of them, the rest were okay.

DM: Why did you think things between the communities started to change after Mandela was released?

MM: The councillors, they have got this bad spirit of 'this white man he can't help me' because they do not correspond with them. This has happened here one day at an 'imbizo' here. Our Premier was also here, but there were no one translating from Sotho. So I stood up and asked why there is no translator here to translate into English or Afrikaans because we had more than 30 white people here, rich businessman. But the Premier said no, why can't they learn Sotho – just like that. That's why I say our councillors are not close to these people, even though they come to us. They don't want to support them so we can get things levelled.

DM: In the early 1990s, after the un-banning of the ANC, the PAC etc., the release of the leadership from Robben Island ... when things started to look like they would change. At that time, what did you think was going to happen?

MM: I thought that as we merge we are going to have higher education, to know jobs. You know because these white people they come to us and we must do one thing, we must do all jobs and go up together. It's what I thought would happen, but it never.

DM: So your main expectation was for a better education?

MM: Not just education but practical also. We have got people who can do anything, even without school ... building, carpentry, roofing, windows/frames. But the people who lead us, they don't like them (the white people) ... even at the meetings if you are white they don't care what you will say and they will vote against you. That's the thing that kills us here in Rammolutsi ... all the white people, most of them (80-90%) would like to merge with us, to work together. But now, it's why this big factory of about 1400 workers goes down because water was too weak for the factory, the roads are bad ... Those people from the outside they do not want to go on, so they say this place is bad. It's the municipality that causes all this trouble.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): Malome, before 1994, how was the racism from people in town?

MM: In town, racism was at the police station, people were being sjamboked. When I was 11 and I was arrested and stayed there two days ... but it is at the police station that there was racism. But this town is not mostly Afrikaners, it is also Italians, Greeks and Lebanese who were staying here – those Afrikaners were not so much, those people who really like racism. These others are not so much really.

AV: You said that after 1994 there were some people from town that weren't happy about the changes that was taking place and were trying to do stuff. What did you mean?

MM: When I say some people, it's about 1-2% - they don't want to come to push us so that we can go up. Some of them only, about 90-95% are alright, they are first class.

AV: Okay, so that 1% - what were they doing?

MM: That 1% I can just say ... if there's a camp for cows and it is that side, they would give those cows poison, they must die and then they were just shooting them. Secondly, you can knock at his front door ... let's say he sees that you are a black man, he's going to hit you. I was hit by a doctor right here in town ... I was going to report that my child is sick, it's night at that stage and I was going to check for my child .. so he hit me. So it shows that I am a black man and he must just hit me. And let's say there were some shops which entertained us in the right way, but there some shops which didn't entertain us – we must go to the back door. Even the lawyers, one side is for the white and one side for the blacks.

AV: When was this, when this white man hit you?

M: It was just before 1994.

AV: Has those kinds of things changed?

M: I can just say that they don't happen to me now. I can say that most white people in town (80-90%), they have changed. I am with them in the business association of Viljoenskroon and I have tried to have the Rammolutsi Business Association to merge with them ... they are just waiting for us. So we must work together. There are some guys in town here who have funds which can help us. We have not got good leadership – that's the only thing.

DM: Now tell us a little bit about ... after your childhood and you started working. What kind of work did you do when you became an adult, during the 70s and 80s, to make a living?

MM: I was a driver at a factory.

DM: For how many years were you a driver there?

MM: For 11 years.

DM: How were you treated as a worker?

MM: Well you know it's as ... I am a black man, you are a white man. I then I put the union inside.

DM: That was FAWU?

MM: Yes, it was FAWU. And when we put the union things were levelled, it was better, because people changed without saying anything. But only if I was in town, say after 10/11 o'clock then they would ask me what I am doing there and would chase me away.

DM: You worked there for 11 years. When did you stop working at the factory?

MM: I stopped working 8 years back exactly.

DM: When did the factory close?

MM: It closed in 1990/1991. Actually it was not completely closed (only gradually).

DM: When did it finally stop completely?

MM: Last year.

DM: Okay, so I want to shift a bit. When April 1994 happened, the elections, the ANC government came in and Mandela became President. How did you feel at that time?

MM: I felt so happy. It was the first time I vote. I was very, very happy.

AV: And what did voting mean to you?

MM: We were going to be together, and we're going to have more power. When we are together we are going to have more power to improve everything.

AV: When you say we are going to be together what do you mean?

MM: I mean we have never been together with white people, so I mean together white and black they are going to be South Africans so we are going to have more power.

DM: What kind of things were you expecting were going to change specifically?

MM: Firstly our education, outside and inside the class ... outside, practically and everything. And let's say you are better than me but you are black so you must go down and I must go up ... so everywhere, in the factory we are together. I would like to change the mealie-meal I can do many things but I have not got the help ... Bloemfontein doesn't help. You can be asking them lots of things but they do not answer. We can do anything ... we had thought that democracy will give us something. I am going to die tomorrow, so who's going to know that I can do anything ... so that I can do something new which never somebody has done – but I never get any help. I have applied now for this certificate to make overalls and garments to be sold to the farmers. I have spoken to the Free State (business) association and they say speak to the government and you will have that factory. But they have done nothing, so they don't want to keep me up.

DM: In the 1990s ... you've mentioned now that you think the main people to blame for things not happening is the municipality. Why do think that, that was the case?

MM: Firstly, if you can introduce something that is new they don't like that – they must introduce it, If at all you can speak something that helps the people, they are going to say that no, you are misleading the nation. They don't do it ... once I said - why are the toilets not all built together, you put only the pot, only the flush system but why no walls while other towns they are building the complete toilet? They say no, I must not say that, I am misleading the nation.

DM: When did you open your little shop here and how has it gone?

MM: Is about 11 years now. You see that place was for the municipality. So, I bought that place and I have some people, some companies that were going to help me. So I go to the municipality and they gave me that place – they said they would put everything in there ... a sewage system etc. So they say no those people cannot come and put things in there ... I was trying to create jobs for the people, to have a bottle store, a chemist, a hair place can be there, But now the place does not go forward, the

municipality does not help me.

AV: In your opinion, why doesn't the municipality help?

MM: The municipality, they say that they are not a business. We have these rents – when we pay these rents, the municipality they must do something for the people, to give people jobs. They could plant gardens so that you can take those vegetables to the market and so people are getting paid – so they said no, they are not a business.

DM: How would you describe how the basic services have been provided since 1994?

MM: They only had a jojo system on this side ... basically the services were very bad around here. We were digging in our yard here and it was bad, bad, bad - and most of the people they are dead now. The whole township was smelling (not that side, just this old township here) ... outside in the street as well. Twice a year, those people in town were helping us with the tractors and them and their wives, they came into the township to help us clean up as well as some from the Youth League. This municipality was being detached ... because of what? Because of lack of experience in the municipality offices.

AV: I have noticed that where Bramage stays (in an areas where there are mostly shacks) they have stand pipes. Have you got water running inside?

MM: Yes, but if there is no water we'll have to go and pump. We are pumping here ... somebody up there has got an electronic pump but sometimes we are without water for 2-3 days.

AV: When did they put a meter in here?

MM: Mine was broken, this is a new one. They put in 1989, but it was only in the streets, not inside.

AV: So when did they bring water in the yards?

MM: I think it was in 1992 or 1993.

AV: So when they put it in the yard, did they bring in the meter immediately?

MM: Yes immediately.

AV: So does it run in the tap inside the house?

MM: No, it is only outside. I have no money.

DM: You say the municipality, they don't see the opportunity for people to be productive, to run businesses etc. – and you also say that you think the municipality thinks that Rammolutsi is not an important place. The councillors that you have elected here, what about them?

MM: The elected councillors, they don't listen to us. At the meetings that have some two or three who are going to crush you ... they talk before they come to the meeting They see Malome and say he has got a big mouth ... and when I speak at the meeting there are 3 or 4 who are going to be against me. So the people they are not educated, they just go to them on their side.

DM: We have talked with other people and it seems like most of the people, they don't like their councillors, they don't think their councillors are doing a good job. But they get re-elected. Why do you think that this is the case?

MM: We don't elect them. We don't know who elects them. We just see pictures, that this one is for that vacant (?) ... we don't know who elects them. As an ANC member myself, sometimes I know nothing – just that somebody is there, and there. There is no one who calls a meeting to say let's have somebody who can stand for us. They don't do that.

AV: When you vote, and most of the people here, who do they vote for when they go to the municipal elections?

MM: They vote for ANC. That councillor who is there is for the ANC, then there is Inkhata ... there are four pictures (of the political parties) – it's not straight for that man who is there.

AV: So you're saying the problem is that in the ANC you don't know how the person gets on the list to become a councillor?

MM: No we don't know. Even the Mayor, we just heard her name is what, what.

DM: We were in town earlier and we saw the ANC constituency office there in Viljoenskroon. As an ANC member do you have relations with them, do you go there?

MM: I think they take me as an old man, they don't care about me, they don't listen to me. It's where they are drinking beers and having a nice time there. That office is not for those who are going to complain, or to do something better ... no, they can't do that.

DM: What about ANC activities in Rammolutsi, like calling a mass meeting in the community or even a march ... anything like that?

MM: People who are voting for ANC in Rammolutsi here, they can make 60-70%, but at an ANC meeting they are going to be 12-14. But at the votes, they are going to vote for the ANC. They are just used sometimes ... old people ..

DM: You've been here for most of your life, you have lots of experiences, you've been involved in lots of activities, economically and politically. Why do you think ... irrespective of what you've described – lack of delivery, lack of opportunity - people still think and vote for ANC, is it because of loyalty or what?

MM: They vote for ANC because they are just used. There are some who will say they want Botha again – not because to say Botha is only white. It's what I say, our councillors, they don't want to come near the white people ... even in the meetings they are talking you know, not nice cause you are only white. Now, how can those people come close to us or support us because we are fighting them? I am no more so much interested in the meetings because in the meetings they are fighting me. I mustn't come with the truth to say gentlemen, you are not doing well here please, let's do this or let's try to do this. What I'm doing now is I'm just organising people – people they must know their rights, they must go forward ... let's do jobs so that our people can work.

DM: At all local levels, the municipality sends tenders out for local people to do certain jobs like toilets etc. Does that happen here?

MM: I have travelled to Bloemfontein many times to go and have these tenders of housing, but they don't give us those tenders. I have got everything here ... I can have material, everything. I have tried but they don't even give us one. Those people have been given from Kroonstad, from Bothaville, but mostly from Kroonstad, it is those people who are building here in Rammolutsi. So that is why I'm saying we can't have anything ... I have got a contract but I am working for others. I am a sub-contractor of Kroonstad people, Parys etc. Those people ... sometime we say that those people are friends with Mr. ? in Bloemfontein so they have opportunities to come and build in Viljoenskroon.

(PAUSE for tape change)

DM: Where does this name Rammolutsi come from?

MM: It comes from somebody who was doing the circumcision school – he was doing it at this side from Potchefstroom and when the students were out of school they came here and had celebrations here. Mmulutsi is somebody who does that. The old lady of next door, she named this Rammolutsi because of that man..

DM: As someone who is very involved and who has lots of skills, what do you think should be happening in this community?

MM: The government must send somebody in ... national government not even this Bloemfontein one. They must have an administrator to come here and something will go on ... cause that someone is going to listen to us. We've got many things to do here, many jobs here is only we can have somebody who can listen to us, who can attend meetings. Always, I have told the Mayor that she must attend the meetings, say the Viljoenskroon Business Association, so that she can have something which can be taken over to the people.

DM: You have said that business people here in Viljoenskroon have said we would like to work with you but the government must come in ... is that correct? In other words, are the people in the private sector in this area willing to work with people from Rammolutsi, but they are waiting for the government to come on board. Is that what you are saying?

MM: No, they are not waiting. What I was just saying is that if at all the government can get in somebody (nationally) who can help with the councillors then something will happen.

DM: What about the private business people in Viljoenskroon?

MM: People in Viljoenskroon are scattered you know, people who can say we are together, There are the Indians, the Pakistanis – they are working together and I have tried at least to do that with them. I called them and we had a meeting ... if at all we can stop then we are going to have one transport, a truck that can come and deliver food for us. It is better that one, one, one, one ... but I can say that we never succeed.

DM: Why do you think you did not succeed?

MM: Some people may say that if you are clever then you want to eat them ... they say no, that man is clever and he is going to eat our money ... the town is too small.

DM: Do you get along well with the others shops .. the Pakistanis etc. ?

MM : They are alright. Yes, they know me and they are fine, they also call me Malome. They love me.

AV: Malome, you said quite a bit that is criticising the local municipality ... but you say you also think something will happen at national level. Do you think that the problem is only at the local level and at the top it's fine? How do you see it?

MM: You know ...our councillors and those in Bloemfontein they are the same ... they are friends. I am just from the meeting now and they are telling about the improvement they are going to do. Every meeting they are saying that but it doesn't come out.

AV: So when you are saying that something at the top might happen, what did you mean?

MM: I say that at the top, if an administrator – one of the people at the top – can be sent by national government something will happen. He hasn't got friends among the councillors ... he's going to work for national.

AV: Do you think that the problem is that Mbeki does not know what is happening?

M: No, he doesn't know nothing. If he can do that then maybe Mbeki can know what is happening here. Everything is in Kroonstad .. our money is going to improve Kroonstad. Even in town there is no tarred roads, there are so many pot holes in town. You can't take somebody as a visitor and say I'm going to show you our town ... factories are closed, there are bad roads ... and someone from let's say Johannesburg or overseas comes to see for a factory because sunflower is nearby and he sees bad roads and holes ...

AV: Just to clarify ... you are saying that part of the reason that people won't come here to invest is because the infrastructure is not good enough?

MM: Yes, thank you very much, it's no good.

DM: Has anyone from national level ever come to Rammolutsi?.

MM: Yes, Zuma came here.

DM: What did he say?

MM: I wasn't here at the time, but they said that Zuma was in the hall and they just show him at the shops here. He didn't turn around and say what's happening in the township. There is a tar road through from town to the hall, that side of the graveyard (pointing) ... that's where Zuma travelled. So Zuma thought that something's happening because he sees the tarred road. And this is a tarred road of that old apartheid, not of these councillors of 1994.

AV: When was Jacob Zuma here?

MM: About 4 years ago.

DM: Just to wrap this up. Besides your idea of a national administrator coming here, if that does not happen, what do you see as the future of this place, particularly for the young people? Because you've been and watched all these people grow up. I've seen lots of young people around here.

MM: There is no future for the young people. We must stand up and then the young people they are going to get a future. Now we can't stand up because the administration blocks us to do things and to suggest things. The administration as it is, is just looking for Kroonstad. They are just talking about helping young people but it does not happen .. it's just like I am sleeping today but tomorrow it will be alright. It will take 4 years ... they saw the Rome was not built in one day – that is what they say. But I have seen Johannesburg which has big factories from Alexandra to Pretoria – why is it that we don't have that this side? So this democracy has given us something but there are some people who have mislead it cause they are looking for their own pockets. They are no building big houses and new cars .. through my vote. And you can't say anything to them..

DM: Do you feel betrayed?

MM: No, I don't feel betrayed, I just say it's their luck.

DM: Do you think people's patience is running out?

MM: Yes, at the ANC meetings there are 10-12 people. There are no more many people coming to ANC meetings, they don't go there As I've said, I am one of them but these meetings just crush us ...

DM: Last question. Next five years, what do you see happening here? I mean realistically, if you look at the situation. Not what you want to happen but what you think.

MM : It is hard to say, because there is nothing happening that is going to help the poor people. Now when I say there are some people who do not have candles, right here at Rammolutsi. Really, I am working with the community and I know, they haven't got money. I was collecting this offal at the abattoir with my van every day but I was being stopped by the councillor who was saying he liked to organise people so they can vote for me (him). For what? As an old man I was just helping them, those people. The councillors stopped that and they said I mustn't do that. For what reason I said, and they said well they are going to choose you sometimes as a councillor. I'm too old, I can't do those things. I have not got money to do things.

DM: Last thing. Lots of people will see this recording. Is there anything you want to say that we have not covered, that we have not talked about did not ask? Anything you would like to say”

MM: The people who lead us must try by all means, if at all we have suggestions then they must turn to them. As I have made a latter to our Premier telling her that I can do

something for the Free State. I have got a plan .. if you can just table this plan of mine it might help the Free State as a whole, they might create jobs. I have many things that I think can be fruitful to the nation. Even I can invent some things which are not around in the whole world .. this thing I can do with a skill. Mandela, even Clinton will like this. These leaders must listen to us. There are many things we can do if we can be together like here in Rammolutsi and Viljoenskroon ... there are many jobs but only, we don't have leaders. Leaders are just flying ... and from there it is just parties What they like is parties, always it's parties ... they are taming these people so they can have their votes, really that is what they are thinking. They are not thinking about leading for tomorrow, they are not thinking about these children and what they are going to do tomorrow. I see those big people who have got monies and I see what they are doing. When you take a child to school and he returns he must know what he wants to do .. he is going to be a doctor to my animals, to feed my animals so they can get fat ... for our youngsters, we must do for them so that they can have a step forward.

DM: Thank you so much.

M: Thank you.

Minutes: 58:50