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INTERVIEW WITH MOLEFI JOHN PHASHA

Dale McKinley (DM): Will you, just for the record, state your full name?

Molefi Phasha (MP): I am Molefi John Phasha. I stay here at Rammolutsi at number 3979, under Viljoenskroon.

DM: How long have you been staying here at Rammolutsi?

MP: Not so long, the last place that I lived was Bothaville. I became a pensioner and I had to come live here. I left my previous wife and then I took my new wife – who passed in April – and now I'm staying alone her with kids. That's my life.

AV: How many kids do you have?

MP: 3 boys. One boy and two twins. The younger kids are 12 years old, and the older one is 15 years old.

DM: Where were you born and raised?

MP: I was born in Bothaville and raised there. I started working there at a hotel because I couldn't go further on school. So, after Std 6 I just had to work until I can not go further.

DM: How far is Bothaville, from here?

MP: It is about 50 - 59 kilometres.

DM: What year did you start working in that hotel?

MP: When I started working at the hotel I was a waiter. Then I got work at the furnisher and then I became a supervisor. From there I was a training instructor, training in about 15 towns which were Bothville, Klerksdorp, Orkney, Potch, Christiana ...

DM: What kind of training was that?

MP: I was training sales ladies and supervisors how work ... how to use themselves and people... something like that

DM: Okay, and all of those people were working in hotels and restaurants ...?

MP: No, at that time I was working for a furnisher, which was Protea furnisher shop. The regional office was in Klerksdorp and the big one was in Joburg.

DM: I'm just trying to locate the time .. when was that?

MP: When I started working in the hotel it was around 1970, and then in 1980's I was working for the furnishers. From the furnishers, I had to open for Rodney, a pawn shop. That man gave me R80 000 cash, an empty shop, and gave me a bakkie then I started that pawn shop in Bothaville. Then until I'm making R80 000 in income in one month.

DM: So you were able to pay the initial loan back in one month?

MP: In one month, yes.

DM: How long did you run that pawn shop?

MP: I was running it for 4 years, The 5th year – that man was paying me R350 a month – and when I started to say that he must give me some more, he left his work and came to the shop himself.

DM: And then you lost that job?

MP: I lost the job.

DM: What year was that when you stopped working at the pawn shop?

MP: 1997. From '97 I started to work piece job.

DM: What year did you arrive here in Rammolutsi?

MP: 2004 when I left my piece job.

DM: Tell us how it was working in all those place ... what was it like as a young black man in those days ... was it very difficult for you?

MP: It was not that difficult for me. Because when I started to work at the pawn shop I had been trained by the furnisher. They took me and trained me ... how to make income, how to spend money. I got my drivers licence in 1963. I'm still driving, I'm still alright .. code 8.

DM: All those years n Bothaville, what were your living conditions? Did you live in a house?

MP: Yes, in Bothaville I've got my own house. But here it was only that wife who was staying here and I've got to help her. Unfortunately she passed away in April.

DM: From fairly early on you had your own house in Bothaville ... and you still own that house

MP: I still own the house.

DM: Are you renting it out? Who stays there in your house in Bothaville?

MP: My first wife is staying there.

DM: So that's after you got divorced from her?

MP: I am not divorced.

DM: Okay, so you took a second wife?

MP: Yes.

DM: So your first wife still lives there but the children are here with you.

MP: Yes, but it is the 2nd wife's children.

DM: Do you have children by your first wife?

MP: Yes, I have two.

DM: Do they live in Bothaville or have they moved on?

MP: The young one lives in Bothaville and the elder one is working at Welkom.

DM: What I'm trying to do is get a picture before you came here ... what it was like to live in a place like Bothaville? Most people would say, Bothaville is a small Afrikaans town and it is difficult for the race relations between people, a very conservative place. Tell us about what it was like to live there?

MP: Bothaville, there are nice people living there. The white people and the black people were not fighting so much. We were trying to work together. As for myself, I was having that shop there and the white men were getting in the shop and asking me things .. and I was telling them about this and that. I was selling cash and account. My deposit was half the price

DM: For your own personal life, then you didn't experience any negative kinds of experiences?.

MP: No.

DM: So you quite enjoyed life there?

MP: Yes

DM: When things started changing in the early '90s after the unbanning of the ANC, the release of Mandela and all the negotiations that were taking place. How did that make you feel about things?

MP: In the early '90s everything was changing. From my side, I was feeling better, because I had to do anything I want, I am free now. If I want to do my own business now, I could do that. I could have my own business now but to do that you have to borrow money and to do that is a bit difficult for me just because of money. But if I can get money I can open a business and carry on.

DM: How did all those changes, change things in a place like Bothaville? You described the relations as healthy between white and black ... did that start changing?

MP: Bothaville, that was a nice place for me. Since I arrived here in Rammolutsi I see a bit of difference ... here in Viljoenskroon black people are still working like blacks and whites are still working like whites. There and there they can communicate but not much. If you want to ask help from the white man he doesn't know you.

DM: So what you're saying is that in Bothaville the relations were much closer and people knew each other better?

MP: Yes, closer, better everything. If I can carry on I think that in 2010 I will be back at Bothaville.

DM: When April 1994 happened and the elections happened and Mandela became president, you were working at that pawn shop right? How did you think ... that was going to change things for you?

MP: It was nice for us. Even the black in Bothaville, those who could not buy furniture and things like that tried to enjoy themselves .. at that time business was good.

DM: You were also approaching retirement age at that point ... you were getting older.

MP: Yes, I was getting old. Next year I will be 70 years.

DM: Was the decision to move here purely based on your family and the situation with your 2nd wife or was it other things ...?

MP: Yes, it was my family.

DM: Tell us what it was like when you arrived here ... what was your experience when you arrived here?

MP: I didn't know people when I arrived. I just knew that wife ... so I had to start communicating with people ... even now when she was dead, she was a good lady

DM: What was the situation with housing? Have you been here (in the shack) since you first arrived?

MP: No. When we arrived here we had to go and sit in the informal settlement.

DM: And how long were you in that place?

MP: 4 years.

DM: How did it happen that you moved from that place to this place?

MP: The owner of this place moved from here to Vereeniging, so I asked him if we could move into this place. And so we went to the police station and did an affidavit so we could do the account. It's just like this.

DM: So that was more of an individual agreement between you and him? Did you get any assistance from government ... had you been on a housing waiting list before?

MP: No. It is not mine. I still have my house in Bothaville. It was under the wife's name. I was starting here for the sake of the kids. I want to go to the municipality so that we can get the support.

DM: How did you support yourself since you moved from the pawn shop in Bothaville and came here?

MP: When I moved from the pawn shop and came this side, I was now a pensioner.

DM: Do you have a pension .. from the government?

MP: From the government.

DM: When did that start?

MP: When I was 65.

DM: And you had no problems getting that pension?

MP: Not at all. I was famous at Bothaville, everything was clear because they know me.

DM: What do you think about the amount that you get for your pension?

MP: Nowadays it's small ... if it can go up. But I'm happy because with that, I can't live really.

DM: There's no other income? Do you support your children on that pension?

MP: No other income. Yes, I support the children – they have to get food. Anything that they have to do, I can it from that money.

DM: What about the provision of basic services – electricity, water, those things?

MP: I have to pay. The electric here is pre-paid. If you don't pay, you don't get.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): Do you have to pay for water very month?

MP: I have to. But now, it's about 3 or 4 months that I have not been paying because the wife was paying. But I want to go and change all those things .. I think I'm going to do it now at the month end.

DM: When your wife as still alive, was she working?

MP: She was not working but she was a traditional healer.

DM: You've now lived here for 4-5 years. What do you think of Rammolutsi ... tell us a little bit about your own opinions about this place ... about this community?

MP: It's difficult here because the people here they first want to know you well and then they can make a business with you, help you, borrow some small money for you. But if they don't know you totally, unless they see you every day and know where you are staying. It's not like when I was famous in Bothaville.

DM: Have you involved yourself in anything here in the community .. been active in anything?

MP: Yes. I have joined that political party, the ID (Independent Democrats). Now, I'm starting to go with them here. Heh, it's difficult to bring them to understand .. you arrange with them today but you come tomorrow and they are no more there.

DM: Why did you decide to join the Independent Democrats because here it is clear that the ANC is dominant in this area/ Why the ID for you?

MP: I just like it because the ANC is big. I see that if they haven't got opposition party they're going to work like kings and go like kings. They are just going to say no, today you have to move there, you have to sit there ... move from that chair to this chair. They've got all the power. Now it's not to say that I don't like the ANC, I like it very much but I'm afraid that if they can be like a king we won't have so much. If they make a mistake who'll say, you've made a mistake or you are going wrong (otherwise) they will always be right, whatever they do will always be right and *wena* ('watch out') you won't say anything. That's the only thing that made me join the ID.

DM: How long ago did you join?

MP: I've got a year now and I've tried here in Rammolutsi. They want me to open a branch here but I don't reach the number ...

DM: How many do you need to open a branch?

MP: Fifty

DM: Why do you think it's so difficult for you to recruit and open the branch?

MP: They are all alike, the ANC. If you come and say, hey, let's try this party you get ... it's hard to pull people away. Even the whites here, they tell me straight that they can agree but no donation.

DM: Have any other ID leaders from outside this community come in to help you?

MP: I've asked them to come but they've got a problem and they didn't come. They give me the date (February/March) and everything but they did not come.

DM: What have been your experience as a pensioner moving into this area, with the local politicians, with the local councillors? What is your opinion of the development in this area and the job that they are doing?

MP: You see now, recently they are starting to do well. I don't want to blame somebody .. if he's doing good, he's doing good. They are starting to do good, to show people that they can do something.

DM: What kinds of things have they done that are good for you here?

MP: The first thing ... they buy a farm to make a new place for people to stay. And then they start to make toilets and all those things. Even here at my place yesterday, they started with the foundation for the toilet. All this time I was on the bucket (system) but really they are coming up. But I'm still saying that I will go for ID so that ... not to say that I hate the ANC, they are doing some good things ... but I'm afraid that when they are coming to the votes, they will take all the votes and all that ... that's all I'm afraid of ...

DM: You say that the ANC is doing better here in Rammolutsi. What about at the provincial and national level ... what do you think about ... as a pensioner you now have some time and you are also dependent on government for that pension grant ... how do think things are going in South Africa on the larger level, not just in this community but in the bigger picture?

MP: On the pension side, those people on top they have done a very good thing ... they are very good for us, the pensioners. Because every time they are giving us more and even our kids, they are giving our kids. And then, for the education the government at the moment, we can see that they can do something for us.

DM: So for your children here, are you satisfied with the education they are getting ... that they are getting a good education?

MP: I am satisfied. I am happy.

DM: Just a few more questions. What kind of things would you like to see? You've

mentioned that things are not bad, somethings are improving. But what kinds of things would you like to see happening here – both in your life and also in the community in which you live - in the near future?

MP: Well, the first thing that I would like to see is communication.

DM: Just explain what you mean by that.

MP: If the young people can see that they can be with others and not fight every day, be happy with others. And, the white man and the black man, going up ... if they are happy and can communicate like that you see.

DM: Why do you think there's not much communication going on .. if you want to see that in the future.

MP: Here in Rammolutsi, I don't know if that thing is not happening because they haven't got even work or something like that. If you go around in the night here, heh, they can rape you and do all those things. The men are wanting money from you .. I don't know if that thing is happening because of shortage of work but crime I see it's making things come down, down, down.

DM: Anything else besides communication?

MP: Well, I haven't got any more comment.

DM: You mentioned earlier that you might see yourself going back to Bothaville in two or three years?

MP: Yes, because in Bothaville they are going so fast. If I can manage to have a business and get into Bothaville, I'm sure I'll move there.

DM: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but are you saying that in Rammolutsi, there is very little opportunity for moving forward ... you don't see much opportunity?

MP: Yes.

DM: Besides the fact that you say some of the people are not nice and don't talk to each other ... Why do you think that's the case in a place like Viljoenskroon but not in Bothaville? Why is there such a difference?

MP: You see, Viljoenskroon, it is a small town. The big business here in Viljoenskroon is the farm. If you want work, the better work, you have to go work for the farmer. And somebody like me, I can't go and work on the farm ... I can't do it. I have started in a big position and to go down again ... heh! The problem in Rammolutsi is just that ... the black people here have all moved from the farms and they are staying here and they all haven't got work. If you start a business here it won't work ... if you sell something higher they can't afford to buy it.

DM: When I asked you the question about the early 90s/1994, you said things were very good and you were happy. How do you feel now, 13 years later ... do you think the same expectations, the same happiness, is there ... now that we have the time to look back ... ?

MP: I'm going back to my statement when I said why I joined the ID. Because I can see when you are going forward the ANC will grow up and act like a king and they will forget that they have made independence.

DM: What are your expectations, for the next 5 years for yourself. What would you like to see for yourself?

MP: You see, according to my age, I've got a small disappointment. I can't say after 5 years that I can expect something like this and this ... because now, in our government if you are over 60 they don't give you work to make your talent, to work with your talent. They would like you to be under somebody. Not to work.

DM: Do you feel as an older person, as someone who has lived a full life .. that you are respected as an elder ... including from the youth?

MP: Yes, they respect us, the old people. What I mean when they respect us ... a few days back they didn't look for us when we were getting paid .. we were standing in the long rows, being there for a day ... in the morning from six o'clock, standing in the rain, in the dust. But now, recently from last month they have started to divide us and give us, the old people, two days ... and the young people, two days. So Rammolutsi, instead of one day will get two days. That has made it much easier for us, that is why I say they are starting to respect us

DM: In some communities there are problems with pensioners ... some of the *tsotsis* ('criminals') take their money ... ?

MP: They are standing alright here with the security here. Recently they started to do good for us.

DM: Those are the questions I had for you. But we always ask at the end of the interviews if there is anything that you want to say yourself that we haven't talked about. You know people will be watching these things, some people will see them and what we trying to do is get a picture of the community and some of their stories. So is there anything that you want to say, just for yourself?

MP: I just want to say to people that really, they must try to be good people in life. Because life comes once and we'll never see it again. So if they do good, we will always be good. I'm expecting next year to be 70 years, but I'm really glad for my life. Since I was born I have not been in jail for anything and I was driving since 1963 until today, I haven't got an accident or anything. It's only to keep myself in the right way and trying to do anything good . I'm not saying that I can do everything good, but I'm trying to do everything good. So I ask of the people ... if they don't have something try to go slowly and you will have that thing. Anything you will like you will get it but you must be patient. Don't say today you'll get R800 and then buy something for R10 000. You have to go slowly. So, I'm asking all the people, to be right and positive. Thank you very much.

DM: Thank you.

AV: A good note to end on ...

MINUTES: 44:09

