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## **INTERVIEW WITH MOKETE TSOLOTLO**

**Dale McKinley (DM):** How was it like growing up in this community as a child as a teenager in the 1950s and 1960s?

**Mokete Tsotlotlo (MT):** The life was okay at that time cause my parents were living, both of them; it was not too hard for me. The life started to be hard when they passed away, we couldn't do the things we wanted to do because of the laws of the apartheid regime ... like when you go to the offices with a certain complaint they were looking at your face, who you are and where do you come from, and your background.

**DM:** What kind of shop did your parents run?

**MT:** It was a general dealer.

**DM:** When you grew up in this community how big was it, how many people were here, how big was Rammolutsi?

**MT:** It was only this old section ... about 333 houses.

**DM:** So it was a fairly small little community?

**MT:** Yes.

**DM:** What did most of the people who were living here at that time doing?

**MT:** They were working at the municipality ... but most of them were working at the factory called Central Wes (?) that I was also working for ... including ESKOM in Freefontein. When ESKOM closed down in the 1990's, they used to transfer them to the branches outside town ... others got their packages and pensions.

**DM:** By the time of the 1980's, what was it like in this community ... that was a time period in the country when there was a lot of conflict ... ?

**MT:** By that time most of the people were struggling because of the life (uprisings/picketing) and the education etc. ... Then there were the so-called councillors who only wanted us to vote for them and they did not serve the community's interests. My father's young brother was also a councillor who helped the

community members pull down those previous councillors down.

**DM:** So what kinds of things were you doing here? Was it the ANC, the youth ... what kinds of organisations were active here?

**MT:** Before it was only the so-called comrades ... we were mixed together with ANC, COSAS and unemployed persons. It was a very active group. But afterwards, when the fight is over, they used to come to the elections. We voted for them but we don't see any progress.

**DM:** When things began to change in the early 1990s ... the un-banning of the liberation movements, Mandela gets out of prison ... how were you, at that point, feeling in those years before the elections?

**MT:** Before the election of our previous President, life was a little bit better. When he started sitting on the Presidency things become good ... talking to the community and saying we must be together and try to live in a good manner. But when he leaves the 'chair', things go wrong.

**DM:** When the first elections in April 1994 happened, what were you expecting? Were there lots of celebrations in the community? What were you feeling ... you had a job working in the factory, now apartheid is gone, political freedom is here ... how did you feel?

**MT:** We as the community of Rammolutsi were happy because we thought that apartheid was gone and there comes our democratic freedom, but there were empty promises because they promised the people they would do this and that ... but at the end of the day nothing has happened.

**DM:** What I was trying to ask is what were your expectations after 1994?

**MT:** I was expecting that I would get a better job, a better life ... as we were promised.

**DM:** When you say a better life, what does that mean to you? What kind of things?

**MT:** To get a job and work for my family so that I could afford to take my children to school. Anything that needs money, I must not ask anyone to help me ... but now, I am ashamed to say that I have been without a job for about a year. My younger son passed away earlier this year and I struggled to bury him.

**DM:** After 1994 you were still working. Did things change for you in terms of the way you were treated ... you were talking about during apartheid, all the laws etc. ... How was that different for you when the laws changed and there was no longer any formal apartheid? Was there much change here in this community, with your employers and the way you lived as a person?

**MT:** The changes were there, but not so much ... because there were boundaries between us and our leaders.

**DM:** Tell me what kind of things changed? What changed for the better for you?

**MT:** There is only one change that took place - this house that I'm living in. But here

in the community, things have not changed much ... the houses, the rubbish Even the water can be shut down anytime and when it comes again it is not clean, not good for people to drink, it's smelly.

**Ahmed Veriava (AV):** Growing up ... In terms of the Afrikaners who live on the other side ... they are normally very racist. Did you find that there was a change in their attitude after 1994?

**MT:** Not so much because we used to fight with them. I have been fucked up about twice and in the second case I take the lawyer from Welkom to help because the one who fought with me said that I make myself a white person .

**DM:** When did that happen?

**MT:** It was about 1994.

**DM:** After 1994, besides the leadership that you elected here, the new councillors etc. ... Did you feel as a person in terms of your dignity ... because under apartheid that was taken away because of the colour of your skin, but now you are equal under the law and have the same rights ... did that made you feel better as a person or it made no difference?

**MT:** I used to become a little better, but when I am struggling and going to them to seek help so that they can discuss a problem with me, it doesn't come out like I expected. Because most of the leaders here they've got their friends, their brothers ... so if we are going to put our troubles to them they don't even answer you

**DM:** You feel that the way you were treated did not change?

**MT:** Yes, it did not really change..

**DM:** Here in this little community of Rammolutsi and Viljoenskroon there is a white side there, black side here You said you thought things here in the township were going to change? Did you think people will be able to move and start living in other parts of town so that apartheid walls were brought down?

**MT:** I thought things would become better after those promises, but for our poor people who can't afford, they refuse to help them. They don't even take your words to help you. There are not even 10 people who have moved to town.

**AV:** Do any of the kids who are going to school go to school in the white area?

**MT:** There are some but not so much. because here at our township we just paying for the transport - for school trips - but in town there's a big amount that has to be paid and we can't afford that.

**AV:** Do you know how much the school fees are there?

**MT:** No I don't really know.

**DM:** From the mid 90's ... this had been a very small township when you grew up here, a few hundred houses ... what started to change in the township after 1994? Because clearly from 1994, the last 13 years, this place has grown a lot, from a few

hundred houses. So, were a lot of people beginning to come into Rammolutsi after 1994?

**MT:** The people started to come in after Mandela was released from prison (after 1992). Till now, they are still coming, but they don't get the stands, they stay in the settlements because it's not only the settlement we have ...

**DM:** Why, in your opinion, were there a lot of people coming into Rammolutsi?

**MT:** They have the hope that they will get houses and better jobs, but the job is nowhere to be found in our town.

**AV:** And where do they come from?

**MT:** More of them, they are from the rural places ... they brought the kids to attend school and they are moving from the farms and are travelling in the afternoon and the morning

**DM:** We are going to talk to some other people about this but were there people who were coming here because they were being evicted from the farms or loosing their jobs at the farms?

**MT:** Some of them, they have been loosing their jobs because they were working for white farmers for some years and when they are claiming for their salaries for long services, the white farmer is telling them just to take that house and go with it because I haven't got money to pay. Some of them, they broke the houses and took the roofs and they come to the locations where there is no help. They have been promised ... we have bought a farm next to the gravesite to fix it up, to put the water pipes – it's almost a year.

**DM:** You mentioned earlier that after 1994 you elected your own councillors and I imagine that probably most of those councillors are ANC. You have already expressed your opinions on some of that. But after the 1990s, what has been your experience with the representatives that voted you voted into power in the municipality. Tell us what you expected them to do and what has been the reality?

**MT:** We had the hope that they would do everything for us as they promised. They were doing things, but they were choosing their own people. For example – if we voted for Brame and all of us are not working, if there is any post or work available because he is my brother or my friend he will take us along.

**DM:** So what you are essentially saying is that councillors only employ people they know, that are in their families.

**MT:** Yes.

**DM:** What were the councillors saying that they were going to do for the community?

**MT:** They promised us houses, better health, better jobs. All the things we are willing to do, but we must come together with them so that they can help us.

**DM:** So that is 13 years now since 1994. You have said that since Mandela went, things have gotten worse. Tell us about that ... what do you mean by 'things have

gotten worse'?

**MT:** The people, who took over from Mandela, they were trying to satisfy everyone even though they were not reaching all the people, they tried. But when they put those who are calling themselves comrades' when we were fighting against the apartheid regime, things got worse.

**DM:** Why do you think that's the case?

**MT:** They are cruel people. When you go to the councillor they might know you, but you know that your problem will not be accepted by those councillors. They just write them down and then put them in the office.

**DM:** So you are saying they are cruel people but they weren't before ... they were your friends ... but now they become councillors. Why do you think those people have changed once they get into those positions?

**MT:** Bramage, you are a witness. With the things you are doing here (protests etc.), how many people are hating you, how many love you? When we go to the meeting, it is not going well ... they don't want to be questioned because they hate the truths and they are going to try to make people hate you..

**DM:** I understand what you are saying but what I'm trying to ask is that if you look at how things have gotten worse and you look at these councillors ... so why do you think that is happening? Did you think that was the way it's going to be or that they are particularly bad people? Because they get re-elected, there have been four elections since 1994 ... so maybe if that person is bad you put somebody else in ... but what you're saying is that it doesn't seem much has changed. Why do you think that's the case even if you put someone else in that position?

**MT:** It's because they are looking for themselves.

**DM:** Prior to 1994 you said that the community is working together .. and then the change comes. Why do you think that in a small community like this where there are so few resources ... people act this way. I want your personal opinion, your own experience?

**MT:** These people, when they have meetings and you ask a strong question , before they answer your question, firstly they will start caucusing and they are not going to answer your question because your question is related to the promises that they have made to you. At the same meetings, when your question is not answered and you raise your hand again, they are not going to give you a chance to ask another question because they say you are confusing the community.

**DM:** I am going to ask you a personal question now. How many children do you have? You said your one son passed away?

**MT:** Because my previous wife died in 1980, I married the second wife. The first one had 4 children - 2 boys and 2 daughters. The second one had only 2.

**DM:** Six and one of them passed away. So you still have five children?

**MT:** Yes.

**DM:** So where your children? What are they doing?

**MT:** The younger one is still at school. The older daughter is married to an unemployed gentleman who used to have a small tuck shop around in the township. The others are not working.

**DM:** So they are all living here ... they haven't gone to Joburg or other places?

**MT:** Yes, but they are struggling to find a job, there's no place to find a job..

**DM:** So do most of them still live with you here in this house?

**MT:** We are only 4 – the bigger ones live in the shack (on the property).

**DM:** You are unemployed, your children are unemployed. So how do you survive, how do you make ends meet?

**MT:** My wife is working but she does not earn enough...

**DM:** Where does she work?

**MT:** At the pre school, crèche. The volunteers, when the school fees are more that month, they gets shares equally. My younger brother is working at the mealie-meal company and he used to help us sometimes, going to buy groceries.

**DM:** Does your family get any social grants ...any pension or something?

**MT:** I have applied several times for a pension but they say that I'm fit to go and work. But on the other side, the government says you can't get a job when you are over 50. I can show you the letter that says I need to look for a job and that my pension is not accepted.

**DM:** (Looking at the letter) So you applied for the disability grant and they refused you and said you are fit and they you only have hyper-tension/high blood pressure. So you are a diabetic?

**MT:** Yes.

**DM:** Did you go for medical assessment?

**MT:** Yes I did. On Tuesday I was at the hospital to collect the medication.

**DM:** And they say you can appeal within 90 days, to the provincial government, to the MEC.

**DM:** Do you see ... you are unemployed for a year and your children are unemployed ... do you see any prospects for the future for your children here in this area?

**MT:** If I was still working I would have taken my kids to university and so forth. But, when they have finished matric they will just run around here in the town ship and at the end of the day they might be killed by *tsotsis*.

**DM:** Do you know of any kinds of programmes for the young people, for the unemployed here in this community? Has there been anything offered let's say to train people, or for the development of individuals, to help them move forward?

**MT:** Yes, we have them here but they are only there for individuals that are close to councillor's and the leaders.

**DM:** So what you're saying is that if you are outside that circle, you have no chance?

**MT:** Yes.

**DM:** When you lost your job at the funeral undertakers a year ago and you had previously lost your job at the Central Wes? As someone who has been a worker here for a long time, tell us what kind of industries are here now? Why did Central Wes factory close?

**MT:** The main reason why the factory closed is that they thought that the black people will intimidate them and confiscate their firm and they thought the unions will force them to pay black employees reasonable salaries. Most of the shareholders are the farmers/the boers.

**DM:** So what you're saying is that the main reason they relocated was that they did not want to pay you good wages and were afraid of the union. You were a member of the union .. and what union was that?

**MT:** Yes, it was the Food & Allied Workers Union (FAWU).

**DM:** Just for the interest, at the time that you lost your job what were you getting paid? What was your salary at Central Wes?

**MT:** R670 , as a driver, a month.

**DM:** Was that gross pay or was that what you took home?

**MT:** What I took home. They used to subtract only the GST

**DM:** And you worked for them for how long?

**MT:** It was not so long ... I was hired at the end of November ... end of February (1990) we started striking at the company. During May I was chased away.

**DM:** The other job that you had for 14 years ... you didn't receive any pension or any payout when you had to leave there?

**MT:** I received nothing, including my 'blue card'.

**DM:** Just explain to us what's a blue card?

**MT:** It's a UIF. We were together at the CCMA in Kroonstad .. and we have been made an offer (by the employers) that he must give me R7200. They agreed to pay me for the first three months – R3600 – and the second one I will get at the end of August. Till now, I am struggling for that money, the man is nowhere to be found. The last address I got was in KwaZulu Natal, so I must send my letters there.

**DM:** So even though you got a ruling at the CMMA you have not been able to get those funds due to you?

**MT:** We have not been able to get because even though I have signed a letter about liquidation of that man's property and what, what. The last letter that I sent to him,

they have never gone to collect that letter from the post office. The post office sent the letter back to me.

**DM:** has there been any help that you have received from the union or any legal representative?

**MT:** I was helped by a volunteer from the ANC.

**DM:** What kinds of jobs in this community ... as someone who has worked for a long time but who is now unemployed .. that the authorities/the government could do?

What would you like to see them do for this community because the big employer has closed and in town there are not many businesses. So what kind of jobs, projects ... ?

**MT:** There is a storm-water drain there that is blocked with sand and if you can go to the municipality and says there's a job we can do, or to clean the graveyards, they will say that they do not have the money. Even if you can go to the municipality with a tractor and trailer to say let's clean up the township – because our township is so dirty, people are dumping rubbish in the open spaces and the environment is not good with all the dead dogs and cats as well as the smelly sewerage where people are living - if we can be hired to clean it that will be a job. There are lot of faults that we can fix around this place.

**DM:** You worked in the private sector, for two companies etc. but most people who work in this area now, it seems they work for the municipality. So, why do you think that in the last few years there are no more opportunities to work for firms/private businesses which all seem to have gone?

**MT:** White people, especially the boers were not happy with the results of freedom. Most of them have left the farms because they did not want to pay those employees who worked for them for many years. That's why I said to you that instead of paying the black people they just say, take this house and go.

**DM:** Now, 13 years after freedom do you feel that this community, and you, have been abandoned. Do you feel that you've been forgotten?

**MT:** Yes I agree 100% - our government has abandoned our people. Now, they know that their term is about to end, so in 2009 we will vote. So, they will come again and promise many things they will do just to make us to vote for them again. After the votes, my fellow brother here, he will remain staying at home and not working, not earning anything. For example, my wife is getting the child support grant, about R200. We will have to divide it ... this month we will buy clothes for the kids, next month we will go buy food. Life is difficult.

**DM:** A last couple of questions. What would you like to see happen here, for you and your life ... to get a job or what?

**MT:** They must bring better health .. and the ANC government mustn't choose people, everyone has got a right to work. So they must give us work. If all of us work then maybe there will be some changes. When I mention the health story .. we have taken my cousin to PAX (the local public clinic) and from there they took him to Kroonstad – he has sugar diabetes. Today he slept there, they send him back

tomorrow. He came back and stayed here at home up until he passed away. We just buried him last week. They gave him the same tablets that he left here with.

**DM:** That's a very sad story. Why do you think he was treated like that?

**MT:** I think this has happened because the company my cousin used to work for used to prefer a certain doctor. As time went on we decided to take him to a new doctor and the doctor said ... you see now he's dying you bring him to me.

**DM:** I asked you at the beginning of the interview about the expectations you had after 1994. Do you think those expectations have changed a lot in the last 13 years and why?

**MT:** No, nothing has changed. People are still struggling. There is a part of this community that is benefiting but the other part doesn't get anything and still struggles.

**DM:** The last question I have. If you look to the next 5 years,. What do you think is going to happen for you and your community?

**MT:** If our cabinet can be changed, can be clearly organised,. They should be the persons of their words. They should not promise us and afterwards they do nothing. We should expect good things from them, like they have promised ... including the councillors.

**DM:** So are you saying that the hopes that you have for the future rest with those politicians?

**MT:** Yes.

**DM:** Do you think that community can do anything by itself?

**MT:** Yes.

**DM:** What do you think that you can do?

**MT:** The community can elect those people that they like, those people who will be first time councillors and have never been elected before, who won't be putting themselves before the community,. To add on that, my brother here has a matric, together with his two siblings, but when there are posts they do apply, but nothing is happening. Including the SA Defence Force and the SA Police Services and the other government posts ...

**DM:** In these kinds of conditions you describe, that are not very good ... and for which there is disappointment or maybe anger that things have turned out the way they have ... do you think the community can continue to live like this for the future or do you think you are going to have to do something to make that change?

**MT:** What we must do is to let my brother here stand as a candidate. Let the community vote for the brother to put down the ANC government because they are of no use to us. Instead of helping us they are just using us like spanners or screwdrivers. After they have used us, they just throw us there in the corner and will see us after 20 years.

**DM:** Those are all of the questions we had wanted to ask,. If you would like to say anything else that you don't think we have covered or asked ... is there anything you want to say to others, to individuals out there about life here, about your situation that we have not talked about?

**MT:** ... We are aware that this government is playing a clever role, by using the old age people like this – when they see the elections are close they put another R40 for the pension and for these girls (child care grant), they put more money. They are using us.

**DM:** Okay, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us, we appreciate it.

**MT:** Yes, thank you.

MINUTES: 67:44