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INTERVIEW WITH JK KGWETE

Dale McKinley (DM): Can you just tell us your full name and your position in the community.

Joyce Kgwete (JK): JK Kgwete, “Kgosigadi” the wife of the chief of Maandagshoek

DM: Can you tell us - were you born in a family here in Maandagshoek and when were you born ... were you raised here?

JK: I was born at Manganeng at Sekhukhune, I am married here and I’m staying with my in-laws.

DM: What year was that?

JK: 1974 November on the 8th.

DM: When did you come to this community Maandagshoek?

JK: 1991

DM: Can you tell us a little bit about your Kgosi, your family, was your father a kgosi (King) ... here in Maandagshoek or somewhere else?

JK: For me to become a queen the king of Manganeng and my father they are siblings and the king of Manganeng is older than my father, I come from a royal family.

DM: Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like to grow up in a family of chiefs? Was it a different life from other children?

JK: I will say life was not different; different will be when we go to traditional school only.

DM: Why the difference?

JK: At the traditional school (circumcision) when other girls go to fetch water and woods, us the children from the royal family don’t go there, they fetch water for us, and when we go and sew blankets ourselves we do not use the same material with the other girls.

DM: Do you have memories of the 70s and 80s of what it was like in the struggles, all the struggles that were happening, what was it like to be a chief’s child, was your father involved politically involved/or were you involved?

JK: Myself I was very young I don't know anything, for what was happening I just know from the 80s when we started running.

DM: JK can you tell us about the 80s because you were born in 74, maybe you were a teenager, 10-11. What was it like; did your father get into trouble with the authorities?

JK: In the 80s it was the time of the protests, it was the time when they were still fighting for Mandela to be released from prison. My brothers were no longer sleeping at home, we were struggling at home, always making him escape and run, because he was one of the leaders of the community when protesting

DM: So your family was politically involved? And how was it like being a girl with all the men in the chiefs family? As a young girl was there a difference for you?

JK: Because my father was a little chief, he was supposed to take care of the people . No, there were no difficulties.

DM: Can you tell us a little bit, I can see you T-shirt says - long live the king Sekhukhune the 3rd - and he just died last year - can you tell us about the house of Sekhukhune's history?

JK: King Rams Sekhukhune is the big chief of Bapedi in Sekhukhune at Mhlaletse Martin, the one's mother was married in Manganeng as Mrs Mankopodi Mahlaku Nkadimeng, and basically his mother is my aunt.

DM: How long has the Sekhukhune chieftaincy existed, do you know JK?

JK: I don't know

DM: So, when things began to change in the country in 1990 when the unbanning and all the things happened, you were 16 or 17 in high school right? What, as the daughter of the chief or brothers, was it like for you when things started to shift and politically things started to change?

JK: I don't see any changes.

DM: Nothing changed? I'm trying to get us in the 90s ... Were you in school that side or here?

JK: I was that side.

DM: Tell us a little bit about that time period in 1991, 92, and 93. Were you toyi-toying all the time as a student with all the changes happening, what were you doing at that time?

JK: We will just see people toyi-toying but as for changing I don't see anything has changed.

DM: And what did you feel like when April 1994 happened, what was your feeling inside?

JK: In 1994? I just saw us going to vote but for feeling I was not feeling anything.

DM: You didn't feel anything? Why?

JK: It's the same I just went to vote but I don't see any changes.

DM: But that was 14 years ago, even at that time like 95, you had no excitement that things were going to get better?

JK: No, I went to vote when I was pregnant; they just picked me by a car I didn't see what was happening.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): Did you get your matric?

JK: No, I reached standard nine.

AV: So what did you start doing after your last school?

JK: I didn't do anything.

AV: Tell me, why didn't you finish school?

JK: When these people married me, they said I must quit school to take care of my duties.

DM: Who told you?

JK: It is the one who gave me a child.

DM: Did you marry because you wanted to or because you were told so, like it was an arranged marriage?

JK: I was told, we did not meet at the street.

DM: So you were told to get married, how did you feel? Did you like it?

JK: It was just parents stuff in the royal family. They just came with a man and said they are asking for a jug of water and I called parents and they said to me here is a man, he comes from wherever and since you are royal blood you don't have a choice.

DM: After you got married and you had a child, did you stay at home or did you start working or what did you do?

JK: I stayed at home.

DM: And you came here ...when did you say you came to Maandagshoek?

JK: When I started staying here it was 2001.

DM: So up until 2001 you stayed at the place that side?

JK: Yes.

DM: In the community that you were in there ...I'm trying to get a picture of what life is like for in a family of chiefs. When did it become clear to you that you were going to be a chief yourself?

JK: When I came to Maandagshoek there was a woman they married at Manganeng, married by Chief Mamphahlane the older man from Mawela was married at Mamganeng for a wife here. Mamphahlane was a chief but she was just a wife not a chief. It reached a time when they beared children, these children were girls and for Mamphahlane there were boys and girls. The boy they call Mamonei, married a woman from Mawela again - they did not have male children. When they did not have male children that's when they married me for that family with no male children, so that I can start afresh.

DM: Can you tell us a bit about that point. What do you remember being in a family of chiefs? What kind of things did your family have to deal with and your father, your brothers as representatives of the community, as chiefs?

JK: Is to lead the people.

DM: When you became a chief, were you proud about this fact or was the responsibility something you were not happy about?

JK: I was never happy, I said they forced me ... can I be happy with what I didn't know.

DM: Just to go back to my previous question ... what I was trying to ask about ... she said the role of the chief was to lead the people. What kind of things did you have to deal with, even the small or big things that you do daily? If someone was to ask you what you do as chief?

JK: I'm taking care of the community. When there are differences I help and when people want letters for the bank I write for them and put a stamp and when people want accommodation we give them and other things.

AV: You said you were not happy when you became the headman, what did you want to do for yourself?

JK: I wanted to go to school so that I can learn and be educated to do something about my future.

DM: As a women chief ... there are not many women chief leaders in this country, whether it is Sekhukhuneland or anywhere in the different places in the country. We are interested to know, when you became chief ... was there any resistance, were there any problems in becoming a woman chief as opposed to a man?

JK: Yes, there was a problem with the people before because problem was that they did not have a boy because the chief is born by the wife and chief and the child of Mashidi Mamonei did not have a boy, they just had a disabled girl. There are many problems with the people saying they can't be led by a woman.

DM: Describe the problems?

JK: The problems were that for me to come here there was someone who was appointed to look for the community temporarily the one I brought a child with who is Ralekgwetla. Until the time when they married me, they told him that since the person who is to lead the people is here, we are asking you to step down for your wife because you married a woman. The problem started there and he said he can't step down because he is the chief, and his group said they want to be led by him. Some community people said we went to marry a woman with our money to look after our community and here she is.

DM: Do you know much about how the government has approached the role of chiefs, can you tell us if you know much? Is there support for, and a relationship between, the chief and councillor?

JK: In the royal house we have two parties; the "Contralesa and Sediba sa bogoshi". Government has the party they respect and then government does not respect Sediba sa Bogoshi. Contralesa gets support from the government, they build offices and give cars but us the Sediba saBogoshi we don't get the support.

DM: Why do you think the government does not recognise Sediba sa Bogoshi?

JK: The reason is that I'm in the Sediba saBogoshi, so I know.

DM: Why do you think the government is only recognising the one party and not the other one? Is it political or is it because they are in the other side that they don't get along with each other?

JK: There are political problems.

DM: What is the problem, is it the problem because you are in Limpopo or what?

JK: The problems with politics are that the time of commission of Raleshae, people went to submit forms saying they are chiefs and though they are not chiefs. We from the old government, where the boers oppressed us, the elder Ralegashane never applied for the forms because there was government of oppression, is now that we are waiting for commission Ramphatlo.

DM: Previously when we were talking about 1994 you said you were just living your life and it didn't seem like much was changing. Since you became chief since 2001 it is now almost 6 years ... Have you seen any positive changes in this community and what has happened as a result of the democracy and the new government?

JK: I don't see anything.

DM: As the chief, what have you been saying to the authorities that this community must get. What kinds of things have you been thinking to yourself as chief, in relation to the government?

JK: We don't have roads, we don't have water. When it's raining kids can't go to school because of the roads that we have now and our royal house does not have an office and there is nothing.

DM: And as a chief in this community why do you think that a lot has not changed in this community?

JK: Now for things not to change, I think this new government is full of corruption.

DM: When you say bad spirits do you mean that the government does not care about people in Maandagshoek?

JK: Yes, they don't have that responsibility.

DM: Why do you think that is?

JK: They don't have responsibility because as I'm speaking now at our local municipality in the Greater Tubatse, they don't even know who the chiefs of Maandagshoek are. They don't tell us anything, when they have meetings we don't know nothing and even when its good things.

DM: Did you have any involvement when the mine came into this community?, In negotiations, in setting up the section 21?

JK: No, I don't have any role or involvement with the mine, They talked to Ralph because they came to misuse him the way they want. When they started they said they want to work with Ralph

DM: Ralph is her former husband? And what is his role?

JK: I don't know what he does because in the mine they appointed him as chairperson of section 21 of chieftaincy.

DM: Do you think that when the mine came here the intention was to divide the traditional leaders in order to control them and get what they wanted?

JK: Yes they divided us.

DM: Since the mine has been here since 2001 - about the time that you became chief - how would you describe things in the community in terms of changing for the better or for the worse?

JK: I was looking at roads, water and the children that they will build them ... tertiary, nice schools and a high class clinic.

DM: How have you responded to that with the community? What kind of things have you done to try and get them involved and the government to respond to the needs here?

JK: I and the chief we had our plans and they were disturbed by the mine which came and started taking people's farms by force. That's when we ran and stopped them and they reported us at the police. So we were still at court, and for there is nothing that I can say we did.

DM: Have you been arrested by the police?

JK: Yes.

DM: Tell us how that was like?

JK: When I got arrested I was at home wanting to take a bath, I was with my messenger, and my messenger called me and said JK there are many police cars outside here. When I looked it was true they were there, they came and knocked and my messenger said she is still bathing. Then they waited at the door when I went out the cars were seventeen, and they said they came to arrest me because we expelled the machine people for the mine when they came to prospect. They showed me the paper saying they made me a court interdict that I illegally went to the place that they claim I'm not supposed to go, so it was illegal. There are places that they say I must not go in.

DM: Did you spend time in Jail?

JK: I slept one day.

DM: Why do you think they arrested you?

JK: It was just painful as I suffered from colds in jail without killing any person.

AV: Why do you think the community supported you instead of Ralph?

JK: The reason is that they married me with their own money, they are the ones who collected money to marry me, Ralph did not contribute with anything

DM: In the last five years since you became chief, you have talked about the problems in the community, things that have not changed. As a mother, as chief you talked about the water and everything. But what about the opportunities for people particularly children, including your children in the community? Opportunities for life whether that's education, employment and any other kind of things?

JK: I believe they must get them, that is what we fight for, so that our children can get good things, though we are fighting for them but we don't see them but we are preparing for our children.

DM: For example we have talked to a quite a number of people. Yesterday we talked to a pastor of the apostolic church who was giving us an indication that ... something that I have not realised ... that there is a lot of hunger in this community. Is that the case, do you come across a lot of situations, not just the basic services but the things that are quite bad?

JK: Much more, some of them they fail to even bury them and we then collect money as the community.

DM: As chief, do you have any access to resources to help the community?

JK: Now I don't have resources because I don't get any salary even myself but as a community we try to help one another, when someone is experiencing such problems we donate because even if we go to government there is nothing they can help us with.

DM: So if you are not earning a salary from the government how do you make a living?

JK: I live by the community. When I don't have anything like maize meal I tell them and they collect money and give me

AV: In your life, what was the best, the proudest moment of your life, the moment that made you the most happy and proud?

JK: (Just laughs)

AV: The second question, what was the worst moment in your life, the one that made you the most sad?

JK: I hate noise.

AV: When we go back to Joburg and the people who are going to see this video, what message will you like to tell the people outside Maandagshoek?

JK: Just to ask them that basically what it is that the government and the mining people ... what is it that they are going to do in our community, to divide us and take us to prison? Since I was born I have never heard anywhere people saying a chief or queen has been arrested without committing anything.

Minutes: 48