

Project name: Alternative History Project
Date of interview: 2008-04-02
Location of interview: Rammolutsi, Free State
Language of interview: South Tswana
Name of Interviewer/s: Dale McKinley & Ahmed Veriava
Name of Interviewee/s: Samuel Mahoko
Name of translator: Bramage Sekete
Name of transcriber: Moses Moremi
Audio file name: AHP_RAM_MahokoSamuel_20080402

SECOND INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL MAHOKO

Dale McKinley (DM): We are starting the follow-up interview with Samuel Mahoko whom we talked to on our previous visit to Rammolutsi. Samuel once again we thank you for making yourself available.

Samuel Mahoko (SM): Thank you

DM: Samuel, in the first interview we didn't talk much about your childhood, so we want to know a little bit about your childhood and growing up on the farm?

SM: It was fine.

DM: Can you tell us more about your childhood on the farm?

SM: It was good for us in those years between 1961 to 1965; we used to play freely in the rain. We didn't wear any trousers ... we used to wear some traditional clothes ... I don't know how to call it.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): Your father, where was he born?

SM: My father was born in Thaba Nchu.

AV: When did he move to come and work on the farm?

SM: I don't know exactly what year he moved to the farm.

AV: Did he ever tell you why he moved from Thaba Nchu to come and work on the farm?

SM: What he told us is that he came here with my grandfather. I don't know the reason for my grandfather to come and work here in the Viljoenskroon area.

AV: When you were growing up, did you use to go back to Thaba Nchu ever?

SM: No.

DM: We just also want know about your family. What did your mother do? Was she a house wife or did she work as well on the farm?

SM: She was a domestic worker.

DM: And brothers and sisters?

SM: We were 12. Three have already passed away. There are now surviving, 4 boys and 5 girls.

DM: So where are you in age from the oldest to the youngest?

SM: I am the last born.

DM: How was that, growing up as the youngest?

SM: I was too cheeky and my mother and father, they used to give me anything I want.

DM: So were you a spoilt child?

SM: Yes.

AV: In terms of your brothers, did they have to take on more responsibilities in the house than you?

SM: Yes, and the reason being that I was the youngest and smallest – they used to do things for me and give me things.

AV: When you were a young man, when did you start going to school?

SM: I started to attend school when I was big because the farm owners were not allowing us to attend the school – they wanted us to look after their cattle and sheep.

DM: So how old were you when you started school?

SM: If I still remember very well, I was above 12 years.

AV: How old were you when you started working on the farm looking after the cattle and sheep.

SM: I was very young, because I used to go there with my father.

AV: Did the farm owner pay your dad extra for the work you were doing?

SM: No.

DM: When you started at 12 years old, how far did you go in school?

SM: I didn't go far, I did only Grades 1 and 2.

AV: When you were a young man, how did you want your future to look like? Did you think that you will be working on the farm or doing something else?

SM: I liked being a mechanic. As you can see now, I am working on the car outside. Being a mechanic – that was my priority job.

AV: Did you ever try and pursue that in some way?

SM: I did in 1993 and 1994 when I left the farm. I worked at a garage.

DM: Where?

SM: In Vredefort.

DM: You said when you were talking to us previously that the life on the farm was hard but you said you enjoyed it as a child. What was the good and the bad?

SM: Life on the farm as good and bad. It was good because we were getting everything from the farmer. But it was bad when my father had to move from the farm ... he had to take the whole family and move to the other area ... you don't live in one place.

AV: Did you have to move many times when you were a child?

SM: Yes, a lot.

AV: Why?

SM: Sometimes it would be because the money was not enough; sometimes the Boers would be too hard on our father and would beat people up. So that's why we decided to move.

DM: Did you, yourself ever get beaten up?

SM: No.

AV: And your father?

SM: He wasn't beaten as he chose to leave instead.

DM: But were other workers beaten up?

SM: Yes.

AV: For what kind of things?

SM: For drinking liquor while at work, for not working and for refusing to milk the cows.

DM: You said when you talked to us previously that some of the white farmers and the white people back in those days were better than the ones today. We want to know what you mean by that?

SM: I was saying that the white people in the past were better because they were understanding when you had problems. But now, when you seek help from them they will tell you – 'Go to Mandela and demand that money that you want' - and there is nothing you can do/tell them.

DM: What about the working conditions on the farms before 1994 and now. Are they better or worse or the same?

SM: Previously it was a bit bad because when we were cropping we used our hands – like the peanuts we had to take them out of the ground with our own hands. Now, there are machines helping with that but the bad thing is that many people are losing their jobs

DM: Did you find that before, it was easier for you to make a living with your salary than it is now? In other words, you could get what you needed – food, clothing, things for your family, housing ... those things.

SM: That smaller salary that I was getting before was better than the bigger salary I am getting now. Previously with my little salary I was managing to make many things for my

family but now even with the salary increases the price of things increases daily. So today it is not easy to make a living.

AV: What's the biggest expense you have now that you didn't have then – or that is much more now than it was then?

SM: Previously on the farm we were provided with the mealie meal bag. Now, I'm putting the 80kg in the house I must buy it and it is expensive - R200.

AV: When you were a child, how were your relations with the white people on the farm? How did they treat you?

SM: It was in the middle. I say this because the kids of the white people I used to work for, they understood me. The whites then used to show you the jobs you can do – that's why now I can do many things.

AV: Did you become friends with any of the kids of the white people when you were a child?

SM: No, we were not friends but they used to come to us.

DM: When you say, 'they used to come to us', what did you use to do?

SM: They liked the cars I was making with the wires, so they liked that I was the young one who was always working and doing something with my own hands.

DM: Could the white kids make them for themselves?

SM: At that time they were making them but I don't think that now there is anyone of them that can do them. Now, the wire cars and tractors are ready made and I see them in the windows of the shops in town. So no one is making them any more.

AV: Was that your favourite toy as a child and did you use to make all your own toys?

SM: Yes

AV: Did anyone teach you how to make them?

SM: When we were young we started with the clay. I saw the older ones doing this so I said I must do it .. even the lions. I also saw the young ones making the wire toys and I said to myself that I must also do this.

DM: Did you keep any of them?

SM: No, I don't have them now.

DM: They might be worth quite a bit today.

SM: Yes, that might be true but now I am fixing those ones which have petrol.

DM: Was your interest in mechanics and engineering linked to making those little cars?

SM: Yes, a lot.

AV: When you were a young man, besides making your cars and so forth, what did you enjoy doing?

SM: I did most of things like hunting for birds in the bush with the slingshot and climbing the trees.

DM: When you were there, did your brothers and sisters go to school, did they all work on the farm there or were they going off and doing something else?

SM: Some were working at the farm .. some of my sisters as domestic workers but not all of them. Some were not working.

DM: Did those other ones look for jobs somewhere else, maybe in town?

SM: No.

DM: Do you remember the time when your brothers or sisters did get a job outside the farm? When did that happen?

SM: My sisters were on the farm until they got married, and my brothers only moved from a farm to a farm. They didn't work anywhere besides the farm. It was only me who went out and work at the mines.

DM: So your entire family were farm workers?

SM: Yes.

AV: Did your family have their own livestock?

SM: Yes my brothers had cattle, and my father had pigs.

AV: Do they still keep livestock, your brothers?

SM: Not anymore. The farm owners ordered us to get rid of them.

AV: Why did they tell you to get rid of all the livestock?

SM: They were telling us that there was no grazing place for the livestock.

AV: And for your family, what did the livestock mean? Was it difficult for your father, brothers, your family to give up the livestock?

SM: It was very difficult for my father and brothers to sell their livestock because it made it difficult for the young kids. Where would they get milk? The kids will be starving because you can't eat porridge without milk.

DM: You said to us previously that when you left the farm you were going to be retrenched. What reasons were you given for being retrenched at that time?

SM: We didn't know the exact reasons but what we experienced was that when you join the union you are wrong to the farmer. So that's why I think I was retrenched, because I was a union member.

AV: You said of all your brothers, you were the only one who went to work on the mine. When did you leave to go and work on the mines?

SM: It was around 1976.

DM: How old were you at that time?

SM: I don't remember, but I was still young. I worked for two years on the farm and the third year I went to the mine. I worked there for a year and then I was forced to come back because my mother passed away and my dad was alone. I had to come back and stay with my dad.

DM: What was the difference between working at the farm and working on the mine.

SM: There was a big difference because at the mine the salary was much better than at the farm.

DM: And the working conditions?

SM: The working conditions were bad but the thing that was easy for me was that I was a tea boy when I started working at the mine.

DM: Did you ever work underground?

SM: No, I was a surface worker.

AV: When was the first time that you came across a union, when you saw people struggling for better wages or working conditions?

SM: Where I have seen people engaging with unions is at the mines. People who are working on the farms have fear about doing things like marches but when I saw those at the mines, I was not at the mine, I just saw them on TV.

AV: When you were a young man on the farm, did people use to speak about the ANC or Nelson Mandela on Robben Island?

SM: During that time I used to like to listen to the radio. The problem was that the radio was only in two languages – English and Afrikaans. When I started to hear it clearly it was when my sister bought a radio and they used to broadcast in Sotho during certain times. It was then that I heard about Joe Slovo, Oliver Tambo ...

DM: What did you hear about them?

SM: They used to call them communists.

AV: What did you think that meant as a young man, what did you think it meant to be a communist?

SM: They were saying that those people were coming to kill us. We were told that those people are only going to cause trouble, that they are going to take over the government and everything we own like our cars ... they will just take it. We were told that those people were making war and if they come, we will all be dead. We were always afraid about when will that Oliver Tambo come, that Mandela come.

AV: So were you afraid of Tambo, Slovo and Mandela?

SM: I was afraid of them because of the way they were spoken about.

AV: Did you ever hear someone speaking about them in another way?

SM: Yes, a lot.

AV: Tell us about that.

SM: Some were saying they are coming to fix the problems we have in this country, that the country must be ruled by the black people. But we didn't believe them because we were threatened before.

DM: On the farms where you lived and worked, were there any farmers who belonged to right-wing organisations? Did you see them mobilising, wearing uniforms or things like that?

SM: No.

DM: Did you ever hear about an organisation like the AWB (white racist, right-wing political organisation)?

SM: Yes, but only around 1994.

AV: In 1976 you started working on the mines and there was the uprising in Soweto. Did you hear about it where you were working?

SM: Yes, I heard a lot. Like this black power ... we were told that black power is killing the people ... we heard about that.

AV: What did you think?

SM: It gave us a big shock. We were worried about our parents ... how could our parents run away because these people are coming to kill our parents and they are older and can't run anymore.

AV: When you were growing up, did you see a difference between the way people on the farms were in front of white people or how they related to white people compared to how people on the mine related to white people or people from the city?

SM: There are two different stories. The people on the farm, they can talk to say. Ahmed, today and it will be okay but people on the mine were speaking one language – Fanagalo – they know all the languages but only speak the one language at work.

DM: When did you get married?

SM: 1978

DM: The woman you married, was she also a farm worker or from somewhere else?

SM: No, she was not working but she used to stay on the same farm.

AV: Did you know her from when you were young?

SM: No, we know each other from when we were bigger.

DM: Tell us a little bit more about how it was for you to be working and raising your children at the same time?

SM: To me it was nice when I was working on the farm , growing my own food and raising my kids. I was happy then.

DM: At that time, did you see a good future for your children?

SM: Yes, I saw a good future for my kids because they started to attend school when they were you ... not like me. I was happy with that.

DM: Did your children do well at school?

SM: Yes, they did well. But when my eldest daughter was doing matric she fell sick.

DM: Was she able to finish?

SM: No, she did not manage to finish. Since then she has not managed to go back and complete matric up until now she is still sick.

DM: When you were forced to leave the farm and come into town, how did you adapt to life here. How different was life here as opposed to the farm?

SM: It was difficult for me because I had to leave my children there at the farm and come here to make ends meet and I didn't know what to do. But at the end of the day I realised that I must go back to somewhere near the farms where I could get a job and food for my kids..

DM: Were there difference between the people in the location as compared to those at the farms.

SM: A lot. It was simple at the farm ... you can eat whatever. But in the township money talks, everything involves money.

AV: When was the first time that the unions started coming to try and organise on the farms? Or the first time you guys as farm workers, tried to form/join a union?

SM: You don't get to know those things at the farm. We only hear about the union from the radio, and then we delegate a person to go and find out about the union. When he comes back he gave us the report. The problem was when we were having a meeting to discuss the joining the union, one of us is not going to join he will run to the farmer to tell him about the union. That is why the farmers retrench many people.

AV: Was this around the same time you were getting retrenched?

SM: Yes, they make sure they retrench us before the union comes into being.

AV: Here's the difficult question. When you were growing up, all the farms bosses were white and all the low level workers would be black. Did you think that was natural, that this is just the way things are? Or did you think it was wrong?

SM: That was not right. We didn't know when will the black person get his own farm and maybe hire people to work for him.

DM: But when you guys started forming a union, what was more important for you - getting freedom and recognition for equality amongst black people or just ensuring that you got fair wages and good working conditions?

SM: By joining the union we were trying to make it so that our people mustn't be afraid of their bosses. Before we had unions on the farms, we had no leave, we must just work.

AV: Right now, are there any farms in this area that are owned by black people?

M: No, not around here.

DM: It's now 2008, 14 years after 1994. Why do you think it is still the situation?

SM: We don't see any changes, especially on the farms. Before 1994, they were promising each and every person will get land. But around here in Viljoenskroon/Rammolutsi there is no such thing. In fact, the situation is getting worse – there are no jobs for the people.

AV: What's more important to you – having a job or having your own land?

SM: Getting land. I can do all the jobs and then if I can have land I can do everything on my own and for my family.

DM: We know there are no black farmers but the question was why do you think that's the case? Why is that still the case, 14 years after ...?

SM: When we listen to the radio we hear, for example, that Dale has been arrested as a parliamentarian. So those people on top are not working for the people at the grassroots level, they are looking for their own pockets. So that is why around Rammolutsi there are no black people who have their own farm.

DM: When things did change in 1994, when the elections took place and the ANC came into government ... what did you personally feel was going to happen, your own expectations from that point in your own life?

SM: One thing I was expecting was that I would have my own land as they were promising us so that I can do my own thing and stop working for other people. Right now, there are people in other areas that are having farms but what is happening on those farms is that people must come together. So if we are four, then two of us will be working and the other two standing and doing nothing and trying to get something without working. So that is why the people are fighting and not having their own farms.

DM: You've lived here now in Rammolutsi for a number of years. Tell us a little about life here in Rammolutsi? You have spent much of your life on the farm, but what do you think about living here?

SM: Life here in the township is not the same and people are different here. Some people can make their own small sustainable businesses but most people are the poorest of the poor and they don't have land. Some of them are still living in shacks at the informal settlements and they don't have land to stay. They build house but hey have cracks and before the owner dies, the house will fall down.

DM: Do you think that land is the most important issue for you and this community?

SM: Yes, land is very important for us. Land was created for people and living things. Why can't we have it? Land was not made for the individuals

DM: How have your children's lives been here in Rammolutsi. As a father and raising your children here, how has that been for you?

SM: It wasn't easy because I wasn't used to this kind of life in the township. But not it's easier because I am used to the lifestyle.

AV: When you say you weren't used to the life in the township, what were the things that were difficult for you, that you were a little bit uncomfortable about, that you needed to get used to?

SM: The first thing is that growing up on the farm, I was not used to a lot of people. The other thing here as compared to the farms, this place is very rough. When people pass you start to ask yourself many questions ... are these people not the crooks. The other things is having to buy everything because on the farm we were getting mealie meal and milk from our own cows.

DM: Since you have lived in Rammolutsi, have you and your family experienced bad things happening – from *tsotsis* etc. – or have you been okay?

SM: I experienced that with my child who was robbed of the cell phone, as early as 7pm. They robbed him at gun point/ Those things have given me a worry because one day when I come back from work maybe I can get a message that they have killed my child.

DM: Do you worry specifically about your daughter, given what you have just talked about?

SM: Yes, she stays at home with her mother all the time and has a hearing problem so I am worried about her.

DM: I was specifically asking about her safety in this community, as a woman.

SM: Yes, that's what worries me the most, the safety. I am afraid that if she goes out she can be raped or killed.

DM: From the previous interview, it is clear that you are a skilled man. Why do you think that your skills have not been recognised ... where you have not been able to move into a better job where those skills are recognised and you would get better pay and working conditions?

SM: The most important problem of mine is my education, because I think that when I get to a big company that is repairing cars they will say where is your certificate for mechanics. So, I don't have that certificate.

AV: Is that the kind of job you would prefer to do?

SM: Yes, I love this mechanic job so much, it is what I do right now. People are bringing their cars to have them fixed and I am helping them.

DM: When we talked last time we talked about some of the bad things such as this house but we did not talk about ... you know, in South Africa most people celebrate the democracy and freedom. What do you think of your local counsellors, the people put in positions of responsibility and trust? How does it impact on your life – what they do, or what they don't do?

SM: What I am looking for from the counsellors and local government is that they must give people land so that people can have their own place to stay. There are too many informal settlements and the kids that are growing up there have got naughty ideas and they will end as *tsotsis* and stuff.

DM: What did you think about the recent events when the people were evicted from the makhukus by the municipality?

SM: It was bad because the counsellors told the people that this is your land and when they evict them it was bad and painful to me. The government has given them money for that land, so what are they doing with that money?

DM: What do you think of the recent things having been happening in the ANC and South African politics over the last year? Mbeki, Zuma, Polokwane ... these things?

SM: What I think is that the South African government is creating a war like in the other areas of Africa, especially Zimbabwe. Because Zuma and Mbeki are clashing, at the end of the day people are going to fight. Many people support Zuma for President but Mbeki is also doing his own things and they are creating a war around South Africa.

DM: Is that what you think we are facing in the future ... fighting?

SM: Judging by the way our leadership are doing the things, I see it like that. We are facing a war amongst each other.

DM: When you say 'amongst each other' do you mean predominately amongst black people, or between black and white?

SM: Amongst the black people, not the white.

DM: Does what happens out there ... do they affect you here in Rammolutsi and your day to day life ... are they affecting you now?

SM: Yes, it is affecting us collectively because the government is only one government. Whether you voted for ANC or not, whether you are white or black, it is affecting all of us. Those who are on the top are not affected because they are living in beautiful houses, they are not starving with hunger.

AV: It's a silly question but I'm going to ask it anyway. What's more important for you – soccer or politics ... is your soccer team more important than your party?

SM: I do like my soccer team but I am listening mostly to the politics. That's why I like to watch the news. Even though I am not educated I can hear what they are saying, so I'm listening a lot to the politics.

DM: You said to us previously and I am quoting you – "I don't see anything that the government is doing". What would you say to government to do ... what would you tell them they need to be doing?

SM: Eish! That question becomes so hard for me because, if you are here, you don't have an influence on what can be done. Those people on top won't consider your plans, they won't listen to you. Even if you can tell them that they can do this and this and everything will be fine, they won't consider it. The community of Rammolutsi, they are telling themselves that we can just sit down and watch what they will do, what is going to happen.

DM: Is there anything that you wanted to say?

SM: The government must give us a piece of land, as they promised us in the election period. The government must create jobs for the people even though we know it is difficult to create jobs but really they must create jobs for the poor people Even if they open us some opportunities where we can maybe start our businesses. The other thing that is hurting me is that it seems as if the government is helping those who are coming from other areas of the continent ... why doesn't the government assist their own people in the country.

DM: Okay.

MINUTES: 91:22