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INTERVIEW WITH LUCAS SERAGE AND PINKY KOMANE

Dale McKinley (DM): Ok thank you first of all for coming to talking with us. Please just feel relaxed as possible. What we are trying to do is to have conversations with you ... it is not a formal interview. I want to try and some particular stories around what's been happening with the mine and the protests and what happened to you. Before we do that can you just say your names?

Lucas Serage (LS): My name is Lucas Serage I was born here.

Pinky Komane (PM): My name is Pinky Komane.

DM: OK thank you Pinky and Lucas thank you again. Let's start with the incidents that we have been hearing about with regard to the mine ... tell us what happened, what happened when you two got arrested? What was going on, what did you do and why were you doing it?

LS: First thing that I need to tell you is that when we got arrested they did not tell us why they were arresting us. When we arrived at the police station; they told us that they are arresting us because of public violence. They said I put stones on the road and they gave us 30 minutes to remove those stones and these people who have put those stones have already left the place. They took us at around 2 on Wednesday on the 23rd. They did not charge us the same day, we got charged the following day. We never gone to court because they told us that the court is on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

DM: Pinky do you want to add on that?

PK: The mine did nothing for us and even when they came to us our Chief told us nothing ... we told them to go back and the Chief called the meeting on the 31 December. The chief told us those men are coming and the Chief was not asking us he was just telling us. They came on the 19th January and started warning. We looking for a lawyer and disturb those men not to work. When the police came they found stones on the road and asked us to remove those stones ... we told them we don't know who put those stones ... they arrested us to Moroke police station. Our lawyer came and applied for a bail and they gave us R1000 bail each and our lawyer negotiated about the bail to be reduced to R50 because we are not working. They denied that and the bail was reduced to R500 each ... then we came out.

DM: Can you both tell us why it that you engaged in this protest? Why did you put rocks on the roads and did you feel it was necessary as young people in this

community to have that kind of action knowing that probably there was going to be trouble as result of what you are doing ?

LS: We put the stones on the road, which was used by the miners, to block them.

DM: What we are trying to do here is to get your side of the story ... so tell us a little bit more about why you are feeling strongly as residents to stop the mine to do these kinds of things ... what's the problem? What do you see, as young people here, what is the problem with the mine? What they are doing and what they are not doing and how it affects your lives and the community?

LS: We wanted them to talk to us first and tell us how long they are going to be here for prospecting. And there should be our lawyer who can satisfy the people. They just told us about the lawyers which are in Gauteng, which we did not even see them.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): How did you hear the mine is coming to town?

PK: We heard from the meeting which was organised by our Chief. The Chief told us without requesting us that there are people who are coming to make prospectations of the place. We knew that what they are looking for is available here. We did not agree with the Chief and he (Chief) told us we don't want to get rich. And now those people don't help us with anything. When they are working they left oil at our farms were we make the living from farming.

AV: Can I just ask you a question, just a follow up from that one. So the Chief agreed when the mine came?

LS: Yes.

AV: How did the community feel about the Chief agreeing to the mine coming?

LS: The community became angry because the Chief did not consult them first and they (community) believe he is a Chief because of them as followers.

AV: How did you ... when did you decide you were going to block the roads? Did you decide it at the meeting?

PK: We took the decision at our meeting and we agreed to disturb those men not to go to the drilling point.

AV: So you went to the meeting, then to the mine to go to block the road?

LS: We started at the meeting and we were marching.

AV: How many people were there? Were there a lot of people from the community in the march?

LS: I can't say the number exactly but what I remember is that we were many.

PK: We were many so that we can't even count.

DM: Okay, I want to ask you something personal ... both of you are young students' right? Why is that you feel as students here in this community that you should be involved in doing something like this ... not just involved in saying we don't like the mine in this community because it is not doing what we want, but actually going so far as to get arrested and spend sometime in jail. What is it that makes you feel angry and why do you want to do these things?

LS: We thought the mine will provide us with bursaries because they are many people who passed matric with exemptions and merit but are doing nothing

DM: And what do you think Pinky?

PK: Our school is not up to the standard, we don't have tar roads and our houses have cracked as a result of the mine and the mine is doing nothing about that.

AV: Can I ask you a question. I know they say the mine is here to help ... why do you believe the mine is here to help this community?

LS: There was supposed to be an agreement first that they want to mine here and they would do this and that.

AV: What I want to ask you now is unlike all the platinum here, do you think that it is right that the mine comes and takes wealth from the community without developing?

PK: This is our platinum if they took it they should develop our community and they must provide us with the service delivery.

LS: To add on that, we are the poorest village and we are getting our water from the river and that water is not healthy.

DM: So that makes me want to ask another question for you to tell another part of the story ... Ok you have the mine, they heard what the mine is doing about coming in not consulting you, your Chief making deals maybe you don't like so you do these kinds of activities. But as younger people, as students here, how do you think this problem in your community - the fact that you have to get water from the river - how do you think those things are going to be solved? Maybe you can get the bursary from the mine or maybe that's only good for the students (but) maybe not for the rest of the community ... so what do you think is going to begin to solve the problem (see the poverty in the community) ... not just about what the mine might be doing there to get the platinum?

LS: I think if at first we had an agreement with the mine maybe we should have reached agreement that the mine should benefit us all and it should provide us with water.

DM: Do you agree Pinky?

PK: The mine which came into our yard to drill should provide us with water and electricity because that side of Ga-Mpuru they don't have electricity. We even buy water.

DM: Can I come back to something. I want both of you to tell me how it is that conditions that you live in here - (i.e.) no water, the distances to school - how is it in the daily life? Give us an indication of what it is like for both of you when you wake-up in the morning till the end of the day? What's the daily life for you and how does this poverty and the things that you don't have, affect your life as students and as young people?

LS: We travel long distances to school and when we are going to the river we use wheelbarrows. People wash their clothes with that water and the animals also drink that water.

PK: It took us 30 minutes to school and even to the river it took us 30 minutes but those from Ga-Mpuru took about 1 hour to school. The water which we are drinking

is not safe but they kept on saying we are rich because we have platinum. The miners took our platinum and leave us like that.

DM: So have you or some of your brothers and sisters, your family become sick because of the water, diarrhoea, and the stomach? I mean has there been sickness?

LS: There was the guy who ... got to the hospital they told him to stop drinking that water (because) it is not safe ... but we didn't stop because we don't have a choice. We have to drink that water as it is the only one we've got.

DM: The one thing I want to get you to talk about is why you became activists in the community ... the mine and the things that you want to see the mine do. What do you think as students you are learning about South Africa, about those that are in government? What do you think the local municipality should be doing in Maandagshoek because what you have told us so far is that the mine will come and deliver, provide the water. Isn't the water, roads and transport and everything, isn't that supposed to be with the local municipality? What do you think the local municipality should be doing here?

LS: I don't see anything which was done by the Greater Tubatse Municipality except to pour soil on the roads and when the rain comes it just cleans all the soil and left the roads with stones.

DM: Okay I am asking, I understand they are not helping ... I'm trying to get the sense from both of you here, you are young people, you are going to be graduating from high school, you are going to be trying to get jobs and other things. What do you think the role of those that are elected, those that are put there by government ... what do you think their role is in these kinds of communities? That's what I'm trying to find out?

PK: We should have paved roads, provide us with water and electricity and disabled people should get proper care.

LS: Our school looks old and there is no water. Our principal is trying by all means to get water for our trees.

AV: Pinky I want to ask you just for now. It's a little bit of a difficult question just because it asks you to think about yourself ... but if someone asked you to describe yourself, who you are now and who you want to be, how would you do that?

DM: What are your dreams? (All laughing).

AV: Right now today you know what are the things that makes you a strong woman, what are those things?

PK: I want to grow up and I want to have a sewing company as I know how to sew.

AV: Can I ask, I mean before we move ... to push the focus on you for a bit. How did you learn sewing?

PK: My mother has a sewing machine and I used to look at her when sewing. She used to give me some stuff to sew them.

AV: And how do you see, like you know when you are going and blocking the mine road ... do you see that there is a relationship between what you want to do - owning your own sewing place - do you see the two ... do you see doing the one as helping build the other one?

PK: We blocked the road because we want the mine to build those projects, I want to see my self having my own sewing factory.

AV: And yourself ... same question?

LS: I want to see my self educated, working where I can be satisfied, places like at the mine as a miner and that should be the mine's responsibility to get us educated.

AV: You know me, my name is Ahmed Veriava and today I live in Hillbrow in Johannesburg and who I am as a person it's got to do with ... like for instance because my father was a doctor and my mother she worked in the bank. The two of them worked to send me to school but also when I was growing up I got involved in politics and you know the struggle against apartheid and then at university the struggle there and so when I grew up I wanted to do what I'm doing now, which is to steal people's stories and tell people what we are fighting for ... our right to tell our stories, now that's what I got here right. I'm curious to know how you believe you got to be the person that you are today. I want to know if they got the sense of now they got to be the person they want to be today? When I see you guys I'm inspired by you, you know, you are youngsters who are fighting with great bravery and I'm curious to know where do you think that great bravery of yours comes from?

LS: I was inspired by the miner and that is why I'm saying the mine should take me to school so that I can become a miner one day.

AV: Okay, and yourself Pinky?

PK: I want to see my self furthering my studies and I also want to have my sewing project and selling my brand to retailers.

DM: Okay ... both of you have lives ahead of you, you know you are young ... thinking about being a miner or maybe running a sewing business and the other things. When you look at your community here do you think you will want to stay in this community and contribute or ... as your dreams like I want to go to Nelspruit, I want to go to Johannesburg or somewhere else? Do you think it's possible to realise your dreams here in this community with being here or do you think that you are going to have to leave?

LS: I want to see myself living in Gauteng at the suburbs. (All laughs) The children in the suburbs get better life and proper education. Here in the village children get addicted to alcohol at the young age. No proper education in rural areas.

DM: Pinky?

PK: I want to live in Gauteng because we are suffering here. The mine does not do anything for us, it does not want to take us to school, and maybe if we can be in Gauteng we can get better education.

DM: So both of you maybe, are saying and I understand, I mean I live in Joburg myself and I can understand that you want to go and have other opportunities and a different life. What do you think is going to happen with this community if all the young people leave, if they go and get jobs, then we have older people, children and women? Do you think it's important for young people to stay here in this community for the help of, for the life of the community because if all the young people move away and then maybe the community will die? Ja, what do you think, I'm just asking

your opinions you know I mean you have expressed your opinion, do you think its important ... not you individually but just generally?

LS: There are people who think they are wiser than us who move from here to certain places but still signing our papers as the residents of this community and this makes the mine to make us suffer.

DM: Okay. Pinky what do you think?

PK: I think we are suffering. People from nowhere come to our village and sell our place. We are afraid that this could lead to us being killed or arrested again because we can't stop fighting for our place.

DM: Okay, just two/three more questions that I have. Both of you, did you both vote ... were you able to vote in the last local elections?

LS: Yes.

DM: Pinky?

PK: Yes.

DM: And are you happy with who you voted for because you wanted to elect somebody who is going to represent ... are you happy with that, with what the person you voted for and the party you voted for, are you happy with what is being done since the local government elections? You don't have to tell us who you voted for, I'm just saying are you happy with the way things have gone, how those people have represented you?

LS: I am happy with those people we have elected. Government is distributing the money but there are other people at the lower level whom I think they took our money for their own benefit.

PK: I can say we are happy and at the same time not because we tried to write letters to them but they just throw them in the bin and say we are stupid and uneducated.

DM: You told us about what you would like to do and where you might want to live in the future and everything else, but in the broad sense, you know sometimes when you wake up in the morning and you say haa!!! I had a nice dream, you feel nice or you jump up and you had a bad dream and you are not feeling good. If you look at the next five years from 2007 maybe to 2012, how do you feel about what the future holds for you and for the place where you live?

LS: If we continue fighting with the mine I see bad things happening in the future but if we can negotiate and reach the agreement I think we will have the good future.

PK: If we can continue fighting these miners I think they would be forced to come to the table to negotiate better deals. If we leave them they will just take our minerals and left us suffering.

Emmanuel (interpreter): Because you are still young and students and you have already been arrested, how do you feel about being a prisoner? What was life like inside the prison?

LS: I was hurt, life in jail is not good and the other thing that I would like to say is that Moroke police supports those miners because they told us that they punish us in order to prevent us from disturbing the miners. You can not even get satisfied with the food you eat.

PK: It's painful in the prison. On the 28th they did not give us food saying that they are punishing. I think it is clear that the police supports the mine. When we are going to report a case they don't take us serious ... they just throw away our docket.

Emmanuel: Because the mine is still coming ... are you still prepared to continue to demand your needs from the mine?

PK: We are prepared to protect our land. Those men should sit down with us and agree on what we want then we can agree with them to mine here. And we will continue to go there and if they arrest us we are prepared to stay in prison.

LS: We are prepared to fight even if they can call the police, they can arrest us but we would be fighting for our place. We want to be satisfied all of us ... not individuals.

Emmanuel: Because after you got arrested for burning the machines and blocking the road, the mine has hired bodyguards for "Kgoshi" and the counsellors that they are working with. How do you feel about the mine hiring those bodyguards to protect people who are selling your land?

LS: It hurts because those people are the ones who sold our land and it's just amazing to see that they have bodyguards. We don't fight with them.

PK: Because they know they are the ones who sold our land they hired bodyguards. We are not fighting them. They just realised after we have burnt the machines that maybe we can come to their homes and burn them too and that's not our intentions, we only fighting with the mine.

Emmanuel: What do you want to say about Shariff, a respected person who has been in prison for 14 years and his wife is a minister of education, because you were arrested and jumped classes and the responsibility is in the hands of Naledi Pandor, what do you say about Naledi Pandor and her husband Shariff?

LS: Shariff Pandor was someone which the country respected and with the situation like this it's just amazing to see what his intentions were. We have been in prison for 14 days as school children and we are left behind with the school work. We didn't expect Shariff Pandor to be the one who is causing these problems for us because he had fight for this country and it came as a surprise to hear that Pandor is the minister of the Nkwe Platinum Mine.

PK: Pandor was someone which we respected and he fought for our country, so even us we want to fight for our land and we got arrested and spent 14 days in prison. We are school children and we are left behind with the school work.

Minutes: 65:00