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LM: Lazarus Mawela

Interview with Lazarus Mawela

TM: Today is the 30th of October 2011, I'm in Tembisa with nate [Mr] Lazarus Mawela. Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your time to have an interview with us for the Tembisa Oral History and Photographic Project. As I was explaining that I'd like us to do a life history interview with you, maybe you can start by introducing yourself. Who is nate Lazarus Mawela and where were you born?

LM: Ja, I was born in Alexandra in 1957 – tomorrow is my birthday.

TM: Oh, happy birthday in advance

LM: [Laughs] yes, that's where I was born. I started school in Alexandra.

TM: Which school?

LM: Iphutheng Primary School. We were then moved to Tembisa in October 1969. But before that my parents were allocated a house in Meadowlands, Soweto. But my dad, who was a policeman, felt that he didn't want to go to Soweto because of the situation in the township, especially Soweto during those days. You know, during those days you'd read in the second page of the *World* that at least 21 people killed this weekend. It was very, very rough. So, he said no I'm not going there. But as somebody working for government he heard that there would be houses in Tembisa and when the date we were then moved to Tembisa.

TM: Was he working for the South African Police (SAP) or the municipality?

LM: He was SAP. He had a post in the CID (Criminal Investigation Department).

TM: Do you know when your parents settled in Alexandra?

LM: Well, my mother came to Alexandra at the age of two and my father came to stay in Alexandra after completing college studies.

TM: Where were they from?

LM: My mother was born in Ga-Dikgale, outside of Polokwane. And my father was born in a place next to Thaba ya Modimolle – I forget what that place is called.

TM: And in Alexandra where do you live when growing up?

LM: The place where we lived was at 5th Avenue, next to the men's hostel. That football ground ...

TM: Yes, Rotary

LM: That football ground next to the men's hostel it's on top of the yard where we were staying.

TM: And was that their house or were they renting?

LM: Well, you know there were people who owned stands, so we were staying with people who were owning that stand. We were renting.

TM: So, '69 you moved to Tembisa. What are your recollections of the movement? Can you still remember what was happening?

LM: Eh, really one did not hear any talk about politics. It's only when I came to Tembisa when I was at primary school that scanty information started coming up. I think even older people now wanted to start

talking to us. In Alexandra we once had a strike. But those were issues that were told in hush tones. People didn't want to be vocal.

TM: This is the 60s. So, how was your family moved?

LM: The government provided transport. You know, the GG's [General Government] trucks. In one of the books which show people being moved from Sophiatown to Soweto there are those GG's trucks.

TM: The huge trucks?

LM: Yes. I think they were used for the last time when people were moved to Tembisa, some to Mabopane.

TM: So, when these trucks arrived at your place did they just take out your belongings and load them on to the trucks?

LM: Yes, yes. You had to make sure that you packed your belongings in boxes and so on the night before. In the morning when the truck came you just load your stuff, furniture and all that.

TM: There's the talk that people in Alexandra were resisting to move – of course some people were resisting. At home did they talk about this imminent movement, can you still remember?

LM: Yes. My elder brother and two cousins, who were staying with us, were working already. They felt that they were not coming to Tembisa. There was this thing that Tembisa *ke pleke ya dibari* (Tembisa is a place of rural bumpkins). They felt that they were Alex's people. They won't go. So, they then got their own rooms somewhere else in the township.

TM: So, your older remained in Alex.

LM: Yes. And the two cousins.

TM: Was your brother's name?

LM: His name is Mosotho.

TM: And your cousins'?

LM: Moses, and the other one is Kali. But later they followed us in Tembisa, and got their own houses.

TM: Now you arrive in Tembisa in '69 as a family. Where did they put you?

LM: Kgatlamping section. It was a very good thing to happen. Because you start having instruments like a spade, a rake; you've got your own territory, your own fence. And, you know, you start building ... I mean, planting lawn and trees. Those were things that you wouldn't have in Alexandra. You wouldn't have those kinds of instruments.

TM: Yes. I mean, there was no space in the yard. How would you describe your house?

LM: It was a four-roomed house.

TM: And your parents where were they working now?

LM: My dad went on pension in 1985. My mother passed away five years ago.

TM: Sorry to hear that. But when you arrived in Tembisa, your father was already working as a member of the SAP, what was happening now?

LM: Ja, he was travelling between Tembisa and Alexandra to work.

TM: And your mom?

LM: She was working as well.

TM: Where was she working then?

LM: When I was growing up in Alexandra she used to work what we called *ko dikitchining* (as a domestic worker) as a helper. But, you know, when she began to have a family she left and worked at the firms in Bramley.

TM: So, now they had to travel from Tembisa to Alexandra everyday - that must have been costly.

LM: Even myself and my younger brother, because we were moved while we were at school, we travelled up to the end of the year in '69. In 1970 we started schooling in Tembisa.

TM: And when you got here in mid-69 coming from Alexandra, which was very congested; and here you had your own house and can do gardening and all that, but how did you acclimatise?

LM: Well, people coming from Alexandra usually stayed in one place. Making friends wasn't a difficult thing to do. I had a friend of mine, you know, who on our first day at school in Alexandra we started together in the same class. When we were moved to Tembisa – he was not staying closer to our house - we were neighbours. It was just one house between my home and his home. So, starting friendships was not a very difficult thing. There were others who stayed somewhere else; those who came earlier than ourselves that we knew.

TM: And Kgatlamping. Why were you settled in Kgatlamping – is it because of the ethnic divisions?

LM: Yes. Well, I don't know what the name means. But yes, it was an area where Sesotho-speaking stayed. Some of the people we stayed with in Alexandra who were AmaZulu they stay in Ntshonalanga.

TM: And '70 you start your schooling here. Which school did you attend?

LM: It is Modiopo. But by then in 1970 Kgatlamping Primary was being built. So, I started at Kgatlamping in '71.

TM: Oh, you left the other school and came to Kgatlamping. And from there?

LM: We played soccer. My dad bought a football kit, because he felt that he should the boys busy. If boys are loitering they can get into mischief. So, my home was a club house. And older people then came to him and requested that they should be involved. He was reluctant at first. He just wanted a small boys.

TM: From Kgatlamping or all over?

LM: It didn't matter. As long as boys could juts play football. Then after persuasion he agreed to the other guys to come and be part of his club. And later on with my friend, eh, Greg Malebo lived three streets from my house; we played football until we graduated to the second division, winning cups and so on.

TM: What was the name of your soccer team – your dad's team?

LM: United Brothers.

TM: And who were you playing against – the teams in Tembisa?

LM: There was Black Birds and a few others. Eh, Young Chiefs. But then when teams start getting promotion to other divisions, we then played with other older teams in Tembisa east, like Tembisa Pirates, ... [inaudible] United.

TM: The mood when you were going to play – how would you describe it, say when United Brothers was to play Young Chiefs?

LM: Ja, those were very great teams. Some of the players in those teams like a guy called Pele played for Orlando Pirates. He was a very good player.

TM: Is he from Tembisa?

LM: Yes. Then one other player from Esangweni, eh, he was a goalkeeper of Orlando Pirates. One fellow student – somebody that was schooled with – Machete played for Pirates. We were playing soccer together at Tembisa High School. He was a very good player; and played for Orlando Pirates.

TM: How did these players get spotted – did teams like Orlando Pirates send their scouts?

LM: It was the survival of the fittest in those days. It was not like now where it is easy. Three weeks back I read in a newspaper one of these teams was calling for young people to come to their, you know, function where they had something like 150 players from all over the country.

TM: Oh, they had the trials

LM: Trials. Those days it was difficult. It dependent on who spotted you, and took you to Orlando Pirates. It was quite serious. Like Machete himself he explains that for him to really get time game at Pirates, the captain by then had to fight the other guys, because it was difficult. Guys would kick you: you know, where do you come from? There are Soweto players. Who are you. [This happened] up until

the captain brought a stop to this. Because he realised that this chap was playing good football, and he was going to be an asset.

TM: Is he still alive – Machete?

LM: Yes, he's still alive.

TM: Where is he – in Tembisa?

LM: Yes, he's still in Tembisa.

TM: And from Kgatlamping Primary where did you go to?

LM: Tembisa High School.

TM: When did you get there?

LM: Eh, it was in 1974.

TM: And how was Tembisa High when you got there? How would you describe it?

LM: There was life there. We had very, very brilliant guys, doing matric. We had a very, very good principal, who believed in academic excellence. He wanted to see delivery.

TM: Who was the principal when you got there?

LM: The principal was Mr Seboni – Walter Seboni. He's a pensioner now. Yes, we had guys like Ngoako Ramathodi; we schooled with him. They good guys in debates.

TM: When you got there you started doing Standard Six or Seven?

LM: Form One.

TM: And the school ended in Form Five.

LM: Yes.

TM: As Form One students at the time what sort of topics were you debating?

LM: You know, at Kgatlamping Primary our teachers wanted ... made sure that guys in Standard Six – that was the highest class at school – should speak English.

TM: At school?

LM: Yes. I was appointed by our English teacher to be one of the monitors. During break if you spoke Sesotho within the school's premises I took down your name [laughs] and you were going to get a spanking. So, we were used to conversing in English, which was something students from other schools were not used to. And people were very, very shy to speak in English. They were intimidated by the guys

in JC (Junior Certificate or Standard Eight) and Forms Four and Five. There was that kind of inferiority, but we didn't care.

TM: Okay. So, when you got there already you were conversant in English

LM: Yes

TM: And students from other schools were not.

LM: They were not.

TM: Didn't that cause tensions amongst the students?

LM: No. There were guys who liked our group.

TM: From the senior classes?

LM: No, no, from other primary schools, who felt that 'no, let's associate with this group'.

TM: And now the teachers – this is '74 when you got to Tembisa High – who were teaching you at the time would you describe them as conservative or 'progressive' in terms of their thinking and outlook?

LM: They were mostly old men, you know, elderly people. They were conservative. But in a way also they would time and again try to talk about the harsh realities of life. Like one teacher, eh, used to say if you're a black person make sure that when you leave school you've got a driver's licence, because you might get a better job if you don't go further with your studies. But then a year later in 1975 a number of young teachers arrived like Ralph Mothiba, Ronnie Modikoe, eh, Mr Masiza who was teaching English.

TM: And what impact did that have in the school?

LM: It really changed things. They were raising issues. People like Ralph he would, you know during class debates, identify guys that he could meet separately and speak to them.

TM: Who were some of the students that he met?

LM: People like Greg Malebo, who were doing History. He didn't teach me. But people like Ngoako invited me to those informal discussions.

TM: And where would you meet with teacher Ralph?

LM: Eh, we'd talk during lunch break. Sometimes after school we'd walk with him.

TM: And what did he say to you?

LM: [Laughs] He spoke, you know, 'take your education seriously'. I think when he started he didn't really talk quite a lot. But it was in 1976 when he was in the BPC (Black People's Convention) branch of Tembisa ... Ja, he spoke about black consciousness, Steve Biko, books to read. You know, Frantz Fanon.

TM: Do you remember what he said about Black Consciousness?

LM: Look, I think it was a case to say 'black people have to stand up and do something about their situation'. I think that was the major issue that came out. We were then also introduced to James Moleya.

TM: Who introduced you to James Moleya?

LM: It was Ralph Mothiba.

TM: It was yourself and who else that he introduced to ntate Moleya?

LM: It was myself, Nic Molotsi, Greg Malebo, Mathew Moomakwe, Baba Makhubela, and a lot of guys.

TM: And were all these students at Tembisa High?

LM: Yes, they were students.

TM: What did he say to you when he introduced you to ntate Moleya? Or why do you think he introduced you to him?

LM: You know, he'd say 'meet some of the people that I'm staying with. They can talk to you further about [many] things'. Look, I think he was very, very careful. You know, he worked for the State. He didn't want to be in the forefront, because the State might know about it and he might be in trouble. Look, we had, right up to 1990 when SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers' Union) was formed, very, very conservative sector in education, with those old people like ntate [Leepile] Taunyane. You wouldn't talk politics with them. So, guys like James [Moleya] he was a firebrand.

TM: And your first meeting with ntate Moleya – do you still remember it? What was your impression?

LM: [Laughs] Later on when we had grown up – after the formation of the UDF (United Democratic Front) - we would talk about how suicidal [it was], because he would just take on any white guy, a police or whoever. You know, the first time I got a visit from the security police it was during the trial of [Mosima] Tokyo Sexwale. That was in 1977. Tokyo was arrested with his uncle. When Tokyo and other guerrillas were moving around the country his uncle was transporting them in his car throughout the country. And after they were arrested, eh, in court James Moleya, you know, after adjournment he confronted the prosecutor and said this is a court of law where people should ... I mean, I'm talking about the Pretoria Supreme Court. He made a very big issue about the toilet, you know, why in a place like this we should not share the same toilet'. It was so serious that when the court resumed the Judge requested that people should be allowed to use the same toilet. But that night his home ... You know, a big team of security police ...

TM: Whose home – James Moleya's?

LM: Yes. There was a big team of security police there. They found addresses of members because he was the chairman of the BPC branch. And many of us were rounded up that night.

TM: When you first met him how old was he?

LM: When I met him he was in his late 20s. I think he was about 26 or so when I met him around '76.

TM: Employed or was he still at school?

LM: He was employed. He was an artist. Lots of guys from exile ... There's a Foundation where you can find his art work. [He was] a very, very good artist. He had his own company - the first black advertising company. He worked for PPDO, an advertising company. He left this company and started his own advertising company. He was the one who introduced me to Thami Mnyele. Both those guys were very good in art.

TM: Now you've met ntate Moleya and he's the chair of the BPC branch, what does that mean – do you join BPC?

LM: I joined BPC.

TM: How do you join? What do you have to do to join?

LM: You pay your membership fee, which went towards the cost of the card.

TM: You were then doing your JC and involved in the BPC's politics, and at home your father is a police officer...

LM: [Laughs]

TM: [Laughs] How was your relationship like?

LM: Look, my father didn't talk politics with me. He didn't. Police would come and take me. In detention they would ask me: 'What is the problem with you? You're coming from a family which is not rich but there's somebody who is working and doing a good job. Why do you these kinds of things?' But, you know, you just tell them it's my wish.

TM: Even during your detention he wouldn't talk to you about politics?

LM: It's only once. I was angry with him about something and I just started talking to a cousin of mine about what I wanted to see happening in the coming years. You know, I wanted to fight. I wasn't like other people who didn't want to fight. He was listening, and later on he then said to me: 'Look, I know people who are fighting. I do work at night and I've come across people who want to fight and who are fighting for this country. You, you know, the police come and pick you up [laughs] in your warm blankets. So, if you want to tell me about you fighting I know about you're talking about'. That was the only time, and never spoke about it again.

TM: That's interesting. And joining the BPC what sort of politics do you engage in?

LM: You know, we read books by Frantz Fanon, eh, this other book ... What is it called? I'll remember it. Eh, philosophy of different people, from Kwame Nkrumah. Analyse politics.

TM: How does this happen – do you as an individual get a book, read it and come back and discuss what you've read or...?

LM: Thami Mnyele wanted people to read. He'd give you a book and he'd demand that next week you must come and tell us about this book.

TM: So, there'd be a debate

LM: There's debate and so on

TM: And where did you meet – at Thami Mnyele's place?

LM: Well, you see by then in '77 we were 20 year olds and we'd meet at a place – it wasn't really a shebeen – where they'd buy liquor and drink and talk politics. Sometimes, yes, we did have branch meetings, where there wouldn't be liquor. It was just discussing what's on the agenda.

TM: And what would you discuss when you're meeting as a branch?

LM: Look, quite clearly there wasn't a plan of action. It was just about ... Ja, you'd get angry as young black boys. There wasn't a clear cut strategy, you know, programme.

TM: But what would make you angry?

LM: Like I'm saying you'd get angry about the things that were happening.

TM: Like what, for instance?

LM: For example, the death of Steve Biko, you know, in '77. We were arrested on our way. We were prevented from going there. You know, those kinds of things they really made ... Then people started talking about fighting: 'Let's fight'. Of course in Black Consciousness we would be introduced to the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress). You know, people started talking about the PAC. But that set-up was a terrain of contestation. We had guys who were linked to the ANC, like Thami [Mnyele] for example. It got quite serious in '77 and '78.

TM: In what way?

LM: In '77 James Moleya was one of those guys who were arrested, together with people like Percy Gqoboza, Diliza Mji, Aggrey Klaaste ...

TM: Oh, during the banning [of the BCM]

LM: Yes. Aubrey Mokoape. He was arrested with them at Modder Bee [Prison]. It was that period when ideologies started getting serious: whether we should start another Black Consciousness organisation?; is it relevant?

TM: And these ideological differences, or the debate around them, when do they start – after James Moleya had returned from detention or while he was in detention?

LM: They started while he was in detention.

TM: And how do they start in your case?

LM: I was given a book 'The ANC Speaks'.

TM: By who?

LM: It was given to me by Mathew Moomakoe. I don't know where he got it from. He was a student with us. We didn't have too many open meetings then, because the security [police's] activities were rife. They were focusing on individuals. Yes, we had discussions with people like Thami and others. Some of the guys left the country.

TM: During that period?

LM: Yes.

TM: And the book 'ANC Speaks' what do you get from it for you to start thinking differently?

LM: It outlined the Morogoro Conference and four pillars [of the struggle].

TM: And you were still within ...

LM: The Black Consciousness

TM: And there are these sharp splits emerging – how do you try to deal with them, or you just say whatever happens so be it?

LM: By then we were no longer novices in politics. We were now at the level where we could take our own decisions, where we could articulate our standpoint; we could challenge people on issues. Well, a lot of chaps, like I said, Ngoako Ramathlofi and many others had gone into exile. We would get messages. People wanted to know where you were and what you were doing.

TM: Messages from who?

LM: Ngoako and others.

TM: From exile?

LM: Yes.

TM: How did you communicate with them?

LM: Well, people would receive letters. In the letter there was no serious stuff but you could get something from it. But for others somebody would inform you that there were comrades in Lesotho. There would be people who would come and tell you that so and so had passed this message to you. I had to take a decision. We formed the first branch of AZAPO (Azanian People's Organisation). But it was done reluctantly. So, we didn't stay in it for long.

TM: Why do you say reluctantly?

LM: There was a serious BC hangover, even if you had taken a decision that we should follow the ANC. But we agreed let's form this structure. We'd use it to call people. And then we'd push people towards the direction that we want. It caused problems, because there were guys who were following the PAC. That's why we didn't stay for too long.

TM: And within that organisation who were some of those who were following the PAC?

LM: Eh, Willie Modupo, Bra David Makgaga, and few other chaps.

TM: And these were staunch Africanists ...

LM: Yes. There was Jaki Seroke also.

TM: Then you launched it then what happened?

LM: Well, look differences of opinion and our intentions, you know, caused tensions. But, you see, by then there was somebody that I should speak about, bra Steve Bopape. He owned a shebeen. We'd go to his place and have serious debates. He'd time-and-again engage us. And he had very serious questions. We started having an interest about the Communist Party at that time. He also started getting into politics after going to Alexandra Secondary [School]. He stayed not far from the house of Moses Kotane. But in the yard where he stayed in Alexandra there were lots of guys within the inner-circle of Moses Kotane, who kept engaging him. So, after getting used to us and talking to us we then had serious discussions. He introduced to us books that we should read on Communism.

TM: And who were you with then when you started engaging with nate Steve Bopape?

LM: It was lots of guys: myself, Greg Malebo, Kenny Pasane, Baba Makhubela.

TM: And these were the guys who within the AZAPO formation

LM: No, we had left. We started while we were in the AZAPO formation. We spent a lot of time with him, because he was just out of this world the way he understood issues. And we felt that we didn't have to be in AZAPO to do our work: 'Let's leave'. But we were still friends with those guys, you know, people like Willie Modupo.

TM: But now you didn't have a structure that you belonged to ...

LM: We didn't. After Thami [Mnyele] had left – and we had taken a decision – we went to talk to him.

TM: Where do you meet Thami?

LM: In Gaborone.

TM: Who goes to Gaborone?

LM: One of our comrades was Alex Segale. His younger sister later got married to Thami. Of course they had a big fight Segale and Thami, because they were friends and here now Thamo impregnates the younger sister [laughs]. But after had left he went to talk to Thami: 'Thami, let's talk'. They discussed.

TM: That's Segale?

LM: Yes, Segale. Then Segele came back and a few of us then went to talk to him.

TM: It was yourself and ...?

LM: It was myself, Segale and then Thabiso as a young chap.

TM: Thabiso who?

LM: Thabiso Radebe.

TM: How do you leave for Botswana?

LM: Ja, we took public transport. We took a train to Gaborone

TM: Oh, so you left legally.

LM: Yes, legally.

TM: When was this when you went to Botswana together with Segale and Thabiso?

LM: We didn't go all at once. One would go depending on what Thami wanted to discuss. We were instructed to prepare for the UDF.

TM: Let me get this ntate Mawela. The first time ntate Segale goes and speaks to Thami, then he returned and reported back to you. What did he say?

LM: Well, he mentioned that the guy was quite serious to do serious work for the ANC. Eh, there were things that needed to be done. And everybody had to have a role. And guys go and talk to this guy. And when we went individually we had specific things to discuss.

TM: When you met him in Botswana was that?

LM: It was in 1980.

TM: Were you alone when you met him?

LM: Yes.

TM: When you got to Botswana where did you meet with ntate Mnyele?

LM: There was a place ... Eh, the easiest place was to go a hotel. And once you're there there would be guys who would come to fetch you.

TM: Oh, he knew already that you were coming

LM: Yes, it was per arrangement. When I knew him before he left it was the time we were having discussions and so on. But I was not quite close to him. But later on he kept in touch with Segale. They spoke, they agreed. He made his intentions very clear: Let's stop fighting over this thing. I'm no longer with my first wife. She [Segale's younger sister] was going to be my wife. We'll stick with each other for the rest of our lives. Let's put this problem aside. There's work to be done'.

TM: During this period other than being involved in politics what else were you doing?

LM: Well, after Form Five you start working. I joined a [trade] union. I joined the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union. Of course, yes, during the political discussions, the history where we come from, even some books about our struggle, you know, the formation of the Communist Party, those first 1921 [actually it's 1922] strikes which were organised by the Communist Party, the formation of the ICU (Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union) – you know those first unions – you get information about them. And of course you're political inclination. You know, we were talking about the working class a lot. So, the first thing you do you join the union. I worked behind the scenes to get the union organised in my company.

TM: Which company was that?

LM: It's, eh ... A Swiss company, eh ... What was that company. It'll come.

TM: This brings me to the question that I wanted to ask earlier. You trip to Botswana, who funded it?

LM: Eh, you'd ask somebody for money like James [Moleya]. You'd say 'I need some money'. But you wouldn't tell him that I'm going to speak to Thami. You just asked for money because I've got things to do. But later on I told him when I asked him for money.

TM: And your first meeting with Thami in '80 what was the resolution or what did you decide on?

LM: [He'd ask] where you're working are organising for the union? There was an arrangement you'd receive the ANC's publications that you had to give to people. They raised a lot of issues. There'd some pamphlets that you'd receive in which the ANC speaks to its cadres. You read those pamphlets, you organise discussions with a number of people about those issues. Your December [actually it's January] 8th speech which states that this is the year for this and that.

TM: And the materials did he say how you were going to receive them?

LM: Ja.

TM: And how did you receive them?

LM: Ja, they were dropped somewhere [laughs].

TM: And after your first meeting with Thami did you have to come back and report, or what did you do with that information?

LM: Well, I had this programme and I simply met with certain guys, about 10, and said 'There's this work that needs to be done'.

TM: This was sensitive information because Thami was now working for a banned organisation. Do you meet with anyone or was a select few?

LM: Well, I didn't tell people that I was working with Thami. It was only Segale who knew. Later on James knew. That was enough. So people received pamphlets. I didn't give them directly.

TM: How did you distribute them?

LM: There were other people who assisted. There were quite a number of people who had never been activists but they really worked. You know, those of us who were in open political activity, we just knew that there was a pamphlet and the couriers, those who distributed it, were not exposed.

TM: But at this point now meeting with nstate Mnyele in Botswana had you taken the decision that you were now going to be working for the ANC?

LM: Yes. I was recruited to work for the ANC.

TM: And '80s, especially the beginning of the '80s, this was a period in some of the townships where there was the emergence of civic organisations against rent increases and community councils.

LM: Before that we had to prepare for the formation of the UDF. Quite interestingly one of the people who was appointed, together with people like [Mosioua] Terror Lekota, on Robben Island was Brian Mazibuko – he came from Tembisa ... I'm the founder member of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). So, you also made sure that within the union you tackle political issues, because that union was an affiliate of FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions). Eh, FOSATU [was] very, very conservative but it really did its education union work. But within that that's when you start meeting other people. You know, our office was in Germiston. You'd meet guys from Daveyton, Springs-Etswatwa. You speak to them. Then Brian [Mazibuko] was released after spending five years on Robben Island, in 1982. We prepared for the formation of the UDF in 1983.

TM: So, he informed you about the decision taken on the Island about the formation of the UDF

LM: Yes.

TM: What did he say to you?

LM: He explained that we should start civic structures. He outlined the structure that the UDF was to have: it would a Front and have affiliates. Those affiliates are civic structures, the youth congresses. It would have women's [groups], you know FEDTRAW (Federation of the Transvaal Women). And of course we started with our structures here in Tembisa.

TM: And how did you go about that?

LM: We called people. We engaged the youth, different people. And those of us who were chosen to be in the civic movement ...

TM: Chosen by whom?

LM: By the collective here in Tembisa, with consultation of course with Botswana: 'what role to play?' Because we were supposed to recruit elders, some of us had to be there. You talk about the 'bread and butter' issues, but you know that this organisation was pursuing the objectives of the ANC. So, we had to be there to direct the things. That's why others like [Michael] Figo Madlala played a big role ensuring that he worked on the youth. He had his own people throughout the township who were making sure that the youth throughout received political education. You know, material to read; formed structures; discussed the programme of action.

TM: And in your case, having been chosen to work within the civic structures, what sort of issues did you raise with the people to mobilise them?

LM: The rent boycott. Those were the 'bread and butter' issues. You know, informing people about the wrong things. For example, as part of the Germiston municipality there was a levy – some money that was paid – going into a fund. That Fund was going to get electricity reticulation. So, we talked about those kinds of things; that the government must provide that. Why must we pay for that?

TM: So, you formed a civic and called it Tembisa Civic Association (TCA).

LM: Yes.

TM: Who were in the executive of that civic?

LM: Eh, lots of guys. The former editor of *Tembisan*, Japie Mokwevho. He was the first secretary of the TCA. Ali Tleane, Cleopas Kgaleng, Jan Mosomane, Goba Ndlovu. He was the chairman of the TCA.

TM: You also made note here that, because of political differences, there was a split.

LM: Yes.

TM: What brought these differences about?

LM: Well, Goba Ndlovu was the general secretary of the New Unity Movement; and he's well read. We called meetings around the township. We called people like Terror Lekota to come and address the meetings. Goba didn't like that. He started attacking us; then attacking the ANC.

TM: But what was the main contention for him – what did he say?

LM: Ja, why do you call guys from the UDF to come and address these meetings. We had to do it whether he liked it or not. And we did it. There was work to be done. We had to talk to the masses. We needed to start talking about the Freedom Charter. We'd sing about the ANC's leaders, you know Joe Modise, Oliver Tambo. Those songs were popularising the ANC. So, when he started doing these things we agreed 'Look, we're doing the spadework and he's not. Together with one or two people that were

close to him they were not fieldworkers. He was a person who could run an office. He'd call meetings and ensure that discussions took place. That's all'. His organisation did not have a programme of action. So, we just felt let's leave him. People knew us. And we decided that we were going to form TRA (Tembisa Residents Association). We formed the TRA and informed the community.

TM: But didn't that confuse the community in terms of who to support?

LM: No. We told people that ... You know, we had a way of explaining. We commanded support. Of course we did tell the truth that there were people within TCA who we didn't know what problem they had with [Nelson] Mandela (laughs). So, we have left them. Here's an organisation, the agenda and everything is the same.

TM: Interesting. Now during this period 'till the formation of the TRA – you alluded to the issue of detentions ...

LM: Yes, we got detained.

TM: Your first detention can you remember it?

LM: Well, I've already mentioned that. My first detention was in '77 when James caused the problem at the Supreme Court.

TM: How long were you detained?

LM: Two weeks – it wasn't for long. I never really detained [for long] up until the State of Emergency.

TM: Which one the first one or second one?

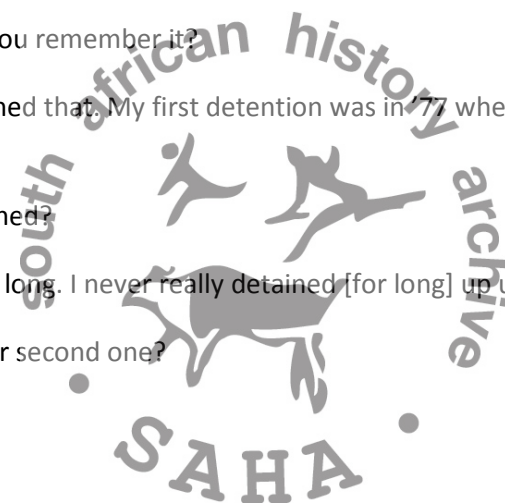
LM: The first one.

TM: In '85.

LM: '85.

TM: How were you detained – where did they get you?

LM: The announcement was made that the President Pik Botha ... Not Pik Botha but P.W. Botha was going to make an announcement and it was expected that he was going to declare a state of emergency. That information that there was going to be a big announcement was made on the night when we were on our way to the funeral Mathew Goniwe and his comrades. In the bus we discussed with a number of guys, people like Amos Masondo, eh, what is a state of emergency. And we knew then that it was going to be tough. We were arrested on our way. If you remember all of those buses from Gauteng, just before reaching Johannesburg but on the high way, there were several cars parked. Those buses were followed. So, we started seeing one car, then two cars and we knew we were not going to reach Johannesburg. That's what happened. We were arrested and the buses were escorted to John Vorster [Square Police Station]. And preparations were done. Guys from Pretoria, Mamelodi, atteridgeville were taken one side. Transport then took them to different jails in Pretoria. Those from the East Rand were



taken to Springs, at the East Rand Headquarters of the Special Branch. They were then taken to Modder Bee [Prison]. There we also met guys who did not go to the funeral, but who were rounded up. Whilst we were coming there was this preparation. Other people were also 'visited' at their homes. Immediately after the announcement people were arrested. One of our comrades when this announcement was made he decided that he wasn't going to sleep at home. He went to a friend's place, police came looking for his friend and found him there [laughs]. And they took him.

TM: So, how long did you spent during the '85 detention?

LM: Five weeks.

TM: And during this period do you get to hear what's happening in the township?

LM: We were not allowed visits. But there was radio in the cells. And as people come in they'd inform us. But we could also get the news on radio. One side of Modder Bee Prison had to be cleared for political detainees.

TM: So, coming out did you take over from where you had left?

LM: Yes, we continued with our work, both in the union and UDF's structures.

TM: Both the States of emergencies, particularly the national one in '86, when most of the leadership or the crop of leadership was taken to prison in some townships developed criminal activities and gangs; there were taverns come up and so on. Here in Tembisa did sort of things happen?

LM: You know, crime was actually reduced after the formation of the street committees. That was one of the issues we had to deal with to get the community to support us. You know, we took action against gangs. We did away with gangs.

TM: At the time which gangs active in Tembisa?

LM: There was a gang like Makwaitos. And, eh, was it the Top 7s or something in the township? Yes, the street committees did their work. People were literally beaten up for committing crime.

TM: And the street committees how were they structured?

LM: You'd have in one street people in that street would have their own committee that dealt with issues in that street. If there was a problem in one family they would come and try to solve it. If there was a message to pass on – if there was going to be a consumer boycott – they discussed those things and made sure that information is safe. It was easy to monitor a stayaway effectively, because everybody would know who decided to sleep at work and not come home. Those were quite effective structures.

TM: And now during this period and ...

LM: During that period I can tell you police ... If you go to the police station and you want to report crime, police would simply tell you that 'Hey, don't you know your street committee?' I think these guys

were now just relaxing in the police station. But that was a very big issue for us. It was one of those that got the community together, in dealing with crime.

TM: Now you were moving towards the late '80s. There was a sense that things were beginning to change.

LM: Look, you know, one very interesting thing ... Oh, yes that company I worked for was called

TM: What?

LM: C.I.B.A.G.E.I.G.Y

T M: Oh, Cibageigy.

LM: They used to do pharmaceutical products. You know, chemical products. Yes, there was the issue of the Black Local Authorities (BLA). We're proud that we got rid of the BLA in Tembisa. You see, Mr Mothiba, the former Mayor, life was very, very bad for him. Some of the youth that had gone out of the country came back. You know, there were grenades attacks on homes of the councillors, police and so on. Of course he did personally gain because he owned houses. Remember in those when a husband passed away then wife could not own the house. And the four-roomed house was taken away from her. Somebody else was allocated that four-roomed house. So, he owned lots of those four-roomed houses. He got land where he built shops. Yes, his shops were shut down. And of course there were serious problems. He decided at the end that he wanted to leave. He spoke to his royal family in Ga-Mothiba outside of Turfloop. The royal house then contacted the UDF through CONTRALESA (Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa). So, one of the people who were planted or deployed in there was this old man, Martin Ramokgadi. That old man spent two terms on Robben Island. He was one of the first battalion of MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe) from Alexandra. When he came out he was involved with Tokyo Sexwale, Naledi Tsiki. So, he was arrested, like I've said with the uncle of James Moleya. He was ANC. I remember in 1985, just after his release from his second term, there was that attack in Gaborone where Thami and the other guys were arrested [TM: Thami was actually murdered]. Others were from Alexandra, you know, the people who died. He organised a forged passport and went to the funeral. But by then he had already contacted the ANC's Headquarters. It was towards the Kabwe conference. So, from Gaborone he went to Lusaka, with the leadership of the ANC that was there. He stayed for something like a month in Lusaka. He went to the Kabwe conference. So, when he came back police rounded him up. You know, there were senior Generals, Military Intelligence, the State Security. They 'welcomed' him and took him to a room. And the first thing they did was to check his passport. They could see it was a forged passport. So, they told him that he was using a forged passport. And he said to them 'Ja, what do you think? Were you going to give me a passport to go to the funeral in Gaborone?' They said take your passport. They gave it back to him. They wanted to know from him where he was staying. Of course in Lusaka he was staying in Tambo's house. He told them that he was staying with Tambo. And he told them 'Well, he's my friend. After the funeral I went and stayed with him'. They wanted to know if he had attended the Kabwe conference. He told them 'No, I didn't attend because I was not a delegate and it was a very, very serious conference'. They wanted to know what the ANC had told him. He told them they were not the people to ask him that question, because he said to them 'You

know how the ANC works. The ANC knew that when I land here I was going to find you here waiting for me. So the ANC didn't tell me what to do. You know very well the ANC would come to my house if it wants me to do something. And if the ANC comes to my house and tells me what to do I'd do it'. So he was that kind of a person. The ANC wanted him in CONTRALESA – he was an old man. The ANC told him to stop his MK activities ...

TM: Against Mothiba?

LM: No, no. They told him to go into CONTRALESA. And he was given the northern province and the area which is now Mpumalanga. As an elderly person; and he originates from Limpopo, he was close to the old man, Nkadimeng.

TM: John?

LM: Not John Nkadimeng. The other old man who was on Robben Island.

TM: [Peter]Nchabeleng?

LM: Yes, Nchabeleng. So he knew about traditional leadership in these areas, even covering the area North West. He knew about traditional leaders in Venda, Gazankulu. So, when the Mothiba royal family contacted CONTRALESA he was responsible for the northern province. He then handled this issue. He then discussed with the Head Office. Mothiba was met by the Intelligence of the ANC and it was found that definitely this guy wanted to resign. But the ANC having its own agenda he was asked 'But why do you resign alone?' He was a father figure amongst the black councillors in the country; and many of them wanted to resign but didn't know how, like Tom Boya. You know, lots of councillors around the country wanted something ... They wanted acceptance but didn't know how they would be accepted. Then he was given a task to politely raise these kinds of issues with the other councillors and his work was made easy, you know, lots of people said to him if you could help us we want to go out. And it spread throughout the country. The councillors were given assurance by him to say 'Look, the ANC is prepared to make sure that you're accepted'. And once the ANC was sure then the old man Ramokgadi came to Tembisa. He actually called to his house in Alexandra.

TM: Called who?

LM: He called James. But James had taken a decision that he wasn't going to be active in politics, but he'd help whenever there was a need for him to help. Because he was not within the structures of the UDF here he then got us to contact the old man Ramokgadi. We were quite angry. At first we didn't take him seriously. We felt he was an old man. We used words such as *trunk dronk*, because we knew very well that the Gaborone killings came because of the MK work that Thami co-ordinated in Tembisa and the East Rand. He did quite a lot of work. We then felt 'hey, Thami was killed because of this guy and this guy got lots of people killed in the township ...

TM: Mothiba?

LM: Yes. He used to move around with security police in their cars. He had a group of vicious friends who were also moving around with the security police looking out for troublemakers. And those were feared. So, he got rid of that. Because we were angry we felt ... After James came and told that us that that old man was fighting I was given the task to speak to the old man. If he says Mothiba wanted to resign could he ensure that we meet with Mothiba. We then agreed that would be our chance. We'd make sure that we met him at a certain place and the MK wing would do its job, because we [thought] he wouldn't come there without his SAP guards. But after many meetings where we were insisting that we wanted to choose the venue and the date, the old man Ramokgadi then realised what we were trying to do. He was quick to see that. I was in 'hot water'.

TM: With who?

LM: Him.

TM: Ramokgadi?

LM: Yes. I mean, he was an MK since the beginning of the formation of MK. Now in 1986 he was staying in a town house, quite a senior person. He told me 'Look, I'm a guerrilla I can see what you and your comrades are trying to do'. It was very, very hot. He then explained that 'Look, ... He opened up, you know, that this is what was done by the ANC. We've double-checked and we're sure that this guy was going to resign and many other guys'. So, we then had to make sure that the UDF ... I mean, when I say UDF we're talking about the ANC inside the country. The ANC should not be seen as an organisation of bloodthirsty mongers. He told us: 'You're saying these black councillors must resign now that they're going to resign why kill them. So, don't kill Mothiba'. I came back and told the guys: 'Let's cancel the other MK activity'. It nearly became one of those MK activities that went wrong. Because after he spoke to me – he was very, very harsh – but after that he opened up. He was accusing us of not being disciplined and so on.

TM: How many meetings did you have with him?

LM: Four. Then after he had opened up I then told him 'Look, I understand your point. You must understand we don't know you that well, but we know that you're our leader. There were things that we couldn't discuss with you. You also didn't open up. But now that you've done this thing this is where we come from and this was how we felt about the whole thing. And because we didn't know these other things it wasn't a case of people being ill-disciplined'. We agreed that was the case. And at the end of the discussion he then called Ma [Albertina] Sisulu at her home. They discussed in their own language to say to her 'Here's a young man, just talk to him'. And she told me that 'Look, the movement wanted this thing done. I am telling you as the president of the UDF'. Of course she didn't go into detail. She just said that that old man was telling the truth: 'The movement wanted that thing to be done and so the responsibility it's your hands. Go and make sure that this thing was done'. And it was a big problem. It was not an easy thing to be accepted. That was the most difficult time, you know, for me. But ultimately it was agreed it would be done.

TM: What was the problem – were some of the guys opposing it?

LM: People were angry. They wanted this guy killed. Finished! But after many workshops at night, on weekends throughout the township sense prevailed. Then we arranged with him ...

TM: Who?

LM: Mothiba. That we're going to make pamphlets and you're going to pay for them [laughs]. We made sure that everybody, particular those living next to his properties, had to do this thoroughly. Because we knew that immediately he made the announcement he wouldn't be guarded anymore. You know, his properties would not be guarded anymore. So, that's how it happened. He resigned at Khotso House, flanked by the old lady, Ma Sisulu, and other senior UDF leaders. Of course he didn't reach home when he came back to Tembisa. The defence force, which was deployed in the township and other who were stationed at his house, were removed. And throughout the country people like Tom Boya resigned. Of course we spoke to our counterparts in the East Rand areas that this was what was going to happen. We had to inform them that councillors in their own townships were going to resign. We told them 'Go and speak to people like Tom Boya that you know about what was going to happen. And let them feel okay'.

TM: It was a huge thing, hey?

LM: It was a very huge thing. After that, I think, already there were discussions between the ANC – you know those secret meetings in London ... We saw those that group of business people meeting the ANC in Dakar. By then apartheid was rendered ungovernable.

TM: In 1990 political organisations were unbanned, leaders were released. Now you had people who had been outside South Africa for a long time coming back and those of who remained inside the country. Were there any tensions between the two groups over leadership or influence?

LM: Look, there wasn't really. I think tensions came when there were supposed to be benefits. You know, after the elections. But in 1990 the spirit was one that said, you know, 'We have done our work! The only thing that was remaining was to ensure that the community that had been supporting us, fighting together with us during the stayaways, consumer boycotts, let's direct that support towards ensuring that the people get their liberation.' Getting their liberation was to vote for their own government and party. We then talked to the people to say that party was the ANC. We were united about doing that. Someone like Greg Malebo, for example, was in the interim leadership of the ANC in Gauteng that was chaired by Kgalema Motlanthe, which had to make sure that it launched branches – aboveground branches throughout – it was not Gauteng – Wits Region. But it was this area which is now called Gauteng. That was a very big responsibility. Yes, we played that role.

TM: It's been a long road, dating back to the '70s. But this period, early 1990s, after battling for so long there was also the development of the infighting between – well it started off as the hostel dwellers versus township communities – the IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party) and ANC.

LM: Well, you know, around the issue that you raised of tensions I think when we were discussing with our comrades from outside, the ANC also did something. You know, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) did not start with the TRA ... I mean TRC. The ANC knowing about the activities that

had happened in exile also had to make sure that the leadership from outside or membership from outside had to focus on building the ANC and its support. And in order for that to happen – things that happened in camps outside of the country people had to forgive each other – came up with the [Sam] Motsoenyane Commission. That was the TRC, which had to start from within the ANC. And the senior guys like Pallo Jordan had to go to that commission to explain how they were tortured. So that people could then forgive each other and focus on making sure that at the end of the negotiations there was a take-over. That was quite good. It also assisted us with the issue that you're raising of the war with the hostel dwellers. That one, you know, the ANC and IFP started before then, you know, where the UDF activists were attacked, especially in Natal. Before the unbanning Natal, especially Pietermaritzburg where Harry Gwala came from, was [TM: in turmoil]. But I think everybody knows it was fuelled by the apartheid regime. We know about the IFP guys who were trained in, eh ...

TM: Caprivi?

LM: Caprivi. It was fuelled. And people were given arms. Yes, we defended our township very well.

TM: How was it resolved here in Tembisa?

LM: We had this gang called The Toasters. Security police would do anything that could divide the township and cause divisions. Those were *comrade-tsotsis*, who were disciplined for their *tsotsi* activities. You know, they would hijack somebody's car and say *ke koloyi ya makgowa* (this is a white man's car). But we were saying no if somebody works and the company gives him a car, that's good because then he's not paying for the car. Instead the money that he's supposed to be paying the car with he was supporting his children with it. We had to deal with those kinds of problems. Eh, they were one of those who were disciplined. The police got to know about this. They were then given shelter at a hostel.

TM: Which hostel?

LM: Eh, it's next to Leralla Station. It's called Enhlanzeni Hostel. They were sheltered there. They had cars; some of those were stolen cars. The police didn't mind. Now that they had shelter they had weapons. They terrorised the community. But also in defending the township there were plans for them. Already their cars were known. And a number of them were killed. It became very, very difficult for them.

TM: So, after that violence subsided

LM: Violence subsided. But then what we had, eh, Vus'muzi Hostel ... We had two big hostels here. We had Vus'muzi and Sethokga Hostels. People who were not Zulu were kicked out of the hostels. Now Vus'muzi if you remember was four-roomed houses.

TM: Oh?

LM: But it was a hostel. So many people were driven out of that area. Then we had Sethokga hostel, which was predominantly Xhosa. And Vus'muzi Zulu. Yes, quite interesting Vus'muzi ... I mean, Sethokga

was Xhosa and ANC. The Xhosa worked with us. We were armed of course by people like [Bantu] Holomisa. They were on our side. We all focussed on Vus'muzi hostel. And the hostel guys (dwellers) didn't do what they did in Katlehong and Vosloorus where they took other peoples' houses. They couldn't do that, because of a co-ordinated defence.

TM: Where was Vus'muzi hostel – which section?

LM: From here I can show you where it was. At one time they planned ... Remember there was that mass meeting at Huntersfield Stadium in Katlehong. And when those guys left the stadium on their way to their hostel in Vosloorus they really killed people. They tried in Tembisa. Security police told them you can't have that. You're going to be mowed down. Because you had in the whole of Sethokga hostel guys armed and people were moving towards the stadium.

TM: Which stadium?

LM: Makhulong Stadium. It was agreed they were going to find armed people in that stadium and they were not going to leave Tembisa. They were told you can't have that in Tembisa. It was a very big issue. [Mangosuthu] Buthelezi insulted us – the people of Tembisa – after he was told your guys are going to die in Tembisa. But then we had ANC leaders who did a lot of work, getting ANC's structures and the hostel to start discussions. There's an old man who passed away not long ago, comrade Cleopas Ntsibande, who was with Buthelezi in the [ANC] Youth League. He played a very big role. He went to see Buthelezi. They had kept their friendship even when there were problems between Buthelezi and the ANC. Remember when the ANC wanted to speak to Buthelezi around '79. Even after he had formed Inkatha when the relationship was bad that old man kept the friendship.

TM: Was a resident here in Tembisa?

LM: He was staying in Wattville. He called Buthelezi and said we must sort out the problem. And so through him meetings had to be held. And of course he assisted the national leadership to get Buthelezi to agree to be part of the elections in '94. He assisted to broker discussions. We had to meet with guys like Themba Khoza. We met with them to discuss peace. There was a road that was not used. On your way out – are you still going to take N12?

TM: No, I'm going back to Joburg.

LM: Okay. On your way out I'll show you where that place was.

TM: So that was a no-go area.

LM: It was a no-go area.

TM: In your discussions with people like Themba Khoza what were they saying? What was their main concern or grievance?

LM: Well, they were saying what have we done? Why do you guys kill us and so on? They played victims. But we told these guys we've never intended attacking people just because they're AmaZulu or IFP.

We've never done that. But we're for peace. We used the discussions we had with Mothiba and others. We told them there were councillors here, some were AmaZulu. When they decided to resign we didn't attack their homes. So why would we want to start that at Vus'muzi hostel?

TM: And where did you meet with them?

LM: We met at the Kempton Park Council offices, because we also had to discuss a number of things with them in '94. Then in '95 ... It was actually at the end of '94 where there were those interim councils, where you had 50 ... 50% was the old parties that were governing before: the National Party, Progressive Party. Then 50% were the other organisations: PAC, IFP, ANC. So, we had to discuss those kinds of things. There were also PAC AND IFP councillors who were part of that.

TM: Ntate Mawela, thank you very much. It's two hours already. I think we've covered quite a number of bases here, especially the politics of Tembisa. Like I said we'll transcribe the interview and hand it back to you. I'm not sure when I'll be able to see you again, but I'll try ...

End of Interview

