

*Translated from Tswana to English



Interview with Victor Mogomotsi

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Nonhlanhla Ngwenya (NN): This is Nonhlanhla Ngwenya, doing an interview with Mr. Victor on behalf of the residents of Mogopa, relating to the forced removal issue.

NN: Mr. Peter

Victor Mogomotsi (VM): Victor

NN: Oh, Mr. Victor, sorry can you please introduce yourself and provide details on who you are and your parents, when you were born and background and Mogopa

VM: Okay, my name is Victor Mogomotsi, born and bred in Mogopa, Ventersdorp. Also my parents were born in Mogopa. I was raised by my grandmother and grandfather here in Mogopa.

NN*: It's fine you can speak Setswana if you are comfortable speaking that.

NN*: How would you say growing up in Mogopa was for you?

VM*: Mogopa is a nice place. It was nice before the forced removals.

NN*: Your education how was it and how did that go?

VM*: I started schooling here in Mogopa at Swartkop Primary School from Sub A [Grade 1] until Standard 8 [Grade 10] in Mogopa, and in 1989 I moved to Randfontein and I attended AB Mkhumbe and completed Standard 9 & 10 [now Grade 11 and Grade 12] in Mohlakeng.

NN*: And then how was the community of Mogopa at that time?

VM*: Okay the community at that time was all right. At that time we had clans. The community was divided into 5 clans, it was Ba Mogopa, BaTlase, Ba Gafeala, Ba Klaas & Ba Roela, in the community at that time... By then Mogopa was a good place and people loved each other and understood each other very well at that time with the clans that were present in the community.

NN*: And how was the leadership in Mogopa at that time? Who were the leaders at the time?

VM*: By then it was under the leadership of the *Mokgosi* [Sesotho for King or Headman] the chief, let me say the headmen at the time. The headman was the so-called counselor. They were the heads of all the 5 clans present at the time.

[TIMECODE – 03m:48s]

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The individual heads of the different 5 clans would report back to the headman and had communication with the headman.

NN*: Before the forced removals, here in Mogopa, were there any organizations being run?

VM*: No there were no organizations at that time. The only thing that was present was the women who ran their own societies but anything related to political organizations there was nothing present at the time.

NN*: And just to bring you back a little, for you how do you think the community of Mogopa came about?

VM*: Okay, the backgrounds of Mogopa when we were growing up there were things being said that the community was divided. It was divided because of the clans and there were two groups, of which one was called, ba ga Selepe [name meaning axe in Sesotho], and the other, ba ga Sethunya [name meaning gun in Sesotho]. Then the issue was leadership problems, but I don't know the real details of how this came about.

NN*: Let me ask you again how this name of "Mogopa" came about?

VM*: The name "Mogopa", I don't know, let me just say the name "Mogopa" there were two places Haartebeeslagte and Swartrand and they wanted one name that would combine the two names to be one. The combination of these two farms to be one name. This was Swartrand and Haartebeeslagte and Mogopa was the combination of these two.

NN*: Do you think Mogopa was under the leadership of the people as a community or under the leadership of the government or ruling parties at the time?

VM*: They were under the ruling of the government at the time. However the ownership of Mogopa is that it is for the people as they bought the land for themselves in 1912 or 1913 and they owned the land because they bought it for themselves and the government did not give them.

NN*: Judging by yourself, who would you say occupied Mogopa? Who were they?

VM*: I don't want to lie it is complicated as there were so many surnames that came up. The people all came from the Free State. There were a lot of surnames but those were the first people that came to Mogopa like Kau but they are no more here. The others are divided and left during the forced removals and some stayed behind.

NN*: Let me ask you again, here in Mogopa what was the land used for?

VM*: Before we were removed the land was used for various things such as agricultural purposes such as mielies, white maize, maize and white maize is for mealie meal and yellow maize and the purpose for this was to feed the animals and beans and the purpose for those were to make an income. There was also sorghum they would sell it but it would also make mielie meal, and vegetables were planted in the individual yards, however this is how we lived.

NN*: The community of Mogopa how united was it?

VM*: The community was good. The relationship was good by then, there was togetherness and understanding although there were those political issues but they did not disrupt the running of the community.

[TIMECODE – 09m:08s]

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NN*: How would you say, like before the forced removals came about, that caused you to be removed from Mogopa?

VM*: Various family fights caused the forced removals from the headmen. Their inside fights, but they were not visible to the people. However at the end of the day these are the aspects that led to the forced removals. The last chief we had, Raseloko More, his leadership was not good and his family and relatives were not happy on the way he was running things and wanted to remove him but he had this thing that he was the headman and he has the right that he has to be a headman and by that time the proposal came for the community of Mogopa from the Government to be moved and this then give rise to the family fights.

NN*: How do you think that the outside Government gained access to Mogopa?

VM*: The South African Government gained access through the Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana] Government. Whereby one of the leaders of Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana] was one of the children of Mogopa, Solomon Radebe, and he was born and bred in Mogopa and he had an influence in our removal through Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana].

NN*: When you say he had an influence, what type of an influence do you think he had?

VM*: At the time when the South African Government made a proposal to be moved here, he influenced other community members that they would live a better life; have a nice life and they would be settled.

NN*: When the removals started, were you all forced to be removed or were there people that left voluntarily?

VM*: There were others that left voluntarily and we resisted and at a later stage we were forcefully removed.

NN*: Before the forced removals started, what methods did the Government use to move you?

VM*: They started first with communicating with the Chief. Then they went onto communicate with the Government of Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana] and then they subsequently used an individual who was a trustee, meaning that Chief Mamogale, who was a trustee, the Government used him to communicate with us to inform us that if we move from there we would live a better lifestyle.

NN*: What ways did they use to move you all?

VM*: We were forced; the trucks came and moved us. During the forced removals people saw the trucks and bulldozers and people that spoke were threatened to be arrested and people did not have a choice or there was no time to say a word about what was happening, resulting in us being forcefully being removed.

NN*: Did they remove you all at the same time as a community or did they do it in portions?

VM*: They did this in a total of 2 days as they came today and removed us and then came back the next day to take what was left like the animals and that was that. Let me say the Government organized their aim and it was well planned.

NN*: When they moved you, what methods of resistance did the communities do to show that they were not happy on being removed?

[TIMECODE – 15m:19s]

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VM*: We used meetings, we talked in the meetings saying we are not going anywhere by the help of the Black Sash, TRAC and South African Council of Churches. They helped us a lot as they assisted a lot with the Government to show that we were not going anywhere.

NN*: What part did the youth play during the forced removals in Mogopa?

VM*: We were young and we were at school at that time and we had not much of a say really at the time.

NN*: What role did the women play during this time?

VM*: They were active as they were interacting with the male figures and saying they are not going anywhere. They even formed the Women's League by then. It was just started and it was new and it was a surprise to them as well.

NN*: Mogopa had a way of doing things and running things at that time, how did the forced removals affect the community as a whole?

VM*: The forced removals affected us in many ways especially the ones who were at school. The youth was affected the most as we were at school and we did not go to school well as we were threatened. Secondly, we were not rich as a community we depended a lot on agriculture but some of our brothers and sisters and fathers worked in Johannesburg. The forced removal affected them as well as they were not there and when they heard that we were being forcefully removed, some of them lost their jobs. The other thing even transport from Johannesburg to Mogopa: they did not spend much but now travelling becomes very expensive and marriages broke, family feuds started and others wanted to go voluntarily and there was resistance and that is where families came apart.

NN*: When they moved you, when you arrived where you were moved to, how did you find Bethel?

VM*: It was not really a good place for us as it fell under the Government of Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana]. For us coming from Mogopa it was a challenge as we did not align ourselves with the Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana] Government and it was difficult for us. We did not have our meetings when we were in Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana] as Bethel was one of the places that fell under Botswana [actually Bophuthatswana] and we started moving to Brits to have our meetings. We started to request space to have our meetings in Brits to discuss a way forward to move from Bethel and how are we going back to Mogopa.

NN*: When they moved you to Bethel, how was life there, did you find houses there or how was it, and did you have to start again to build?

VM*: We started afresh to live in our shacks. We used the material that was bulldozed when we were moved but it was not enough as other shacks were one room and others were two rooms. However it was not enough; it was just a roof over your head really. It was a shelter, but was not a decent shelter where people can live in.

NN*: When they moved you from Mogopa, who moved into Mogopa after you?

VM*: It was the farmers, the white farmers. They occupied the place in a manner, which it was divided up, into camps and they had their cattle there. The farmers though did not physically stay there.

NN*: Okay, you see that you have been removed and you decide to come back to Mogopa?

[TIMECODE – 21m:40s]

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VM*: When they moved us to Bethel, we kept meeting and planned to come back to Mogopa. We had long meetings and we got advice from TRAC and SACC as well and planning to come back but our plan to move to Mogopa was difficult. We were dealing with the white government as they were powerful by then and we were afraid that if we go there forcefully our people would be arrested and killed as well. This is where the plan came through the advice of TRAC and SACC and they negotiated a deal with the Government and proposed getting alternative land where we would be able to live a free life. That is where the opportunity came about to move to Onderstepoort near Ledig in Sun City.

NN*: How was it different from Bethel?

VM*: There was a lot of difference as we found a school. It was a little better and we also found shacks that were there already and it was a little better. Another thing we could do was we could have meetings as we wish. There were so many things we could do, as we were free. We could communicate freely.

NN*: Even after all of this, you still wanted to go back Mogopa?

VM*: The main thing was to move back to Mogopa was because we were forcefully removed so we wanted to go to Mogopa. Second priority people of Mogopa they were more dependent on agricultural farming then: they used to plant maize, sunflower and beans but now Onderstepoort and Bethel, we had to start afresh and learn how to plant other things like tobacco and it was going to take long. For maize it was difficult, as it was not going to come out there.

NN*: When you were there, which idea came to light that made you want to come back to Mogopa?

VM*: Our plan when we were there is that we came up with the youth when we were at Onderstepoort. We started to interact with our parents and the leadership there and showing each other our problems. The Government was refusing and we were there for long and the promise was that we were going to stay there for only one year but it was going on two to three years. Now, what is our next move? We sat down and started thinking and we have to come up with something tricky. That is when we decided to close in on Viljoen to get permission to clean up the graves then if we get the permission then that is how we are going to stay in Mogopa.

NN*: So your journey back to Mogopa to the graveyards, how did you do it?

VM*: We wrote to the Government, they then granted us permission and said we can come and clean the graveyards. They gave us the permission but they made a mistake and they did not include a date as to when we will need to finish or when the work should end there. Then we asked them if, instead of moving in and out, could we put up our shacks? They said yes we can and we got a breakthrough and we put up our shacks. We then moved in and we resisted moving.

NN*: So when you built the shacks and bringing people, were you doing this broad day light or were you sneaking them in?

VM*: No, I was doing this; I was using the truck we had at home. What we used to do is bring their material at night. I was doing two trips. One trip at 6 – 10pm and the other trip from 10 – 6 again travelling like this to bring the material of all the people.

[TIMECODE – 28m:11s]

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NN*: How did the people come back though?

VM*: Let's say if I were taking your material, then one person would come and leave his wife and family to come with me and build when we get to Mogopa so one person would come with me. After that when the majority of the people were in Mogopa, that is when the Government was aware and this side we had organized money for big trucks to go to Mogopa and that is when people said when you take my things, I go with you.

NN*: Let me take you back a little and ask you: when you moved back to Mogopa, how did things change to the way you were doing things from where you were to where you went? Like traditionally?

VM*: Okay, let me say, where they moved us to, it was difficult we could not do anything that we do traditionally. If a person passes away there are ways that we do things. It was difficult to do things traditionally when they moved us to where they moved us. Some of the things we missed - majority of us believed in ancestors and it was difficult because when you do a function but your ancestors are far away. This is one of the issues that forced us to do this was because we cannot be far away from our ancestors.

NN*: When the Government realized that you are coming back to Mogopa, how did you fight this, when they wanted to move you for the second time?

VM*: By then when we were coming in slowly, we found the Government flatfooted. After seeing that the majority of the people are back at Mogopa and they have built their homes, there was no way to remove us because by then the Government was under pressure that Mr. Mandela was being released. The media at large was concentrating on the release of Mandela. That is how we got to continue to sneak into Mogopa. Once we were in Mogopa, at this point it was difficult for the Government to remove us again.

NN*: How did you get permanent papers to ensure that you will not be removed again in Mogopa?

VM*: There were vast negotiations between the Government and our leaders and the assistance of our legal advisors such as TRAC and SACC. Let me say once they noticed that we were back in Mogopa they gave us permission to occupy Swartrand, we resisted because we said we cannot stay there because Swartrand is a residential area. Haartebeeslagte was agricultural area, then we are going to live in Swartrand and how are we going to live? Then there were negotiations over Haartebeestlagte and in the end the Government was convinced and they gave us Haartebeeslagte as well.

NN*: Did all the residents of Mogopa come back or did some of them stay behind?

VM*: Well some of them stayed behind. They just jumped off the ship. Others were influenced and others were not convinced and did not have that their children influenced courage that they will get back to Mogopa and others and they said it was too much. When we got to Mogopa some other families came back one by one but others are still where they were.

NN*: This thing - how did the people of Mogopa deal with this? How did it affect daily living and the division that the forced removal caused?

VM*: It caused a lot of problems as I said education it affected us. We had to start everything afresh. Some of us were all grown up and time was wasted for us through this forced removal. Our main concentration was to have land, we then had to start our lives again and build our lives from scratch and that was difficult and it is still difficult even now.

[TIMECODE - 34m:03s]

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NN*: When you got back to Mogopa, how was life now compared to how it was before you were forcefully removed?

VM*: Life was fine because, what we wanted, we got. What we were crying for, we got. We are used to this place and we got it. The problem was how do we develop it so that our lives move forward?

NN*: Now the women, when you came back, what was their role now?

VM*: The role of the women was still necessary although they were not being forced to be encouraged to be free and be able to do what they wanted. They still have that thing of doing things on their own. They now know their rights and there was lack of encouragement to allow women to be stronger.

NN*: How was the overall unity of the community affected through this process?

VM*: Unity in Mogopa. We started well when we settled and we strategized and made our structures in Mogopa. The problem came about now when the changing of leadership caused problems and especially politically and the developments were not like before and the relationship of people and interactions between people were not the same anymore. This resulted in the spirit decreasing unlike when we started.

NN*: Do you think the forced removals caused a lot of changes in Mogopa?

VM*: Let's assume if we were not forcefully removed by then, we would be having changes but those would be to develop and not political friction like we are experiencing now. We would not have political differences that we have now; we can say we are blaming the forced removal and the apartheid government as they used this issue of rule and divide.

NN*: If you look at the youth of Mogopa today, and the old youth from then, do you think they are taking it forward where it is meant to be or are their ideologies of the youth today... are they different to your ideologies?

VM*: No their ideologies are too different; they are not taking things up and not fighting for themselves. They are lagging behind and they are not committed our youth. In all spectrums sports, political and churches. They are not active. The problem is, what is causing all these problems? They are caused by political differences that we have. The leadership of now does not encourage them to get their space as youth. It is good for us to do this, various things. So they have joined the current government and that means their life is doomed.

NN*: Looking at Mogopa now, would you say it is going forward or are they standing still or are they going forward?

VM*: There is no direction; life is standing still, things that were there then that the previous leadership instilled back then, we built a lot of things we had a vegetable garden that we created, which has been demolished. We also had cattle farming. We managed to acquire some cattle from the government. When we left the office there was something like 48 cattle that we left: at this present moment they were all sold, there is currently nothing left. We managed to come about a new system in Mogopa, let me go back a little bit. Before the forced removals we lived on agricultural things but our main thing was that minerals were there, but now the people that used them were the white people through the apartheid government as they had access to them. When we came back we looked at things and said as leadership: what resources do we have in Mogopa?

[TIMECODE – 40m:04s]

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We then found that for us to use the resources in Mogopa, we need to align ourselves with the big companies that have access to extract diamonds. We then managed to buy shares from them so that we can own and be part of the project. We then managed to open a company, but that company was a community project and it was not an individual project, it was called Mogopa Minerals and was solely owned by the community. At this present time, by the time the directors of Mogopa Minerals were still in process to uplift that company: then there were some distractions that came from a political front. The directors had a vision for the company and a new selection of directors was made and they had no direction. Now that project is standing still.

NN*: That mineral project in terms of empowering community here in Mogopa, job creation and community upliftment, how did it do?

VM*: In our era we had approximately 300 people employed from the community including the nearby communities and people outside Ventersdorp that worked here. It worked well for us as a community but currently through the strikes and the new take-over, which created a big mess, now employment has dropped and I can say only 30 people are employed there now and on a temporary basis only.

NN*: According to you what needs to be done to get Mogopa where it needs to be?

VM*: I will answer that by saying politically, the community here in Mogopa needs to stand up and fight their battles to ensure that things go the way they need to go. If they do not fight this then the situation will stay as it currently is. The other thing is the present leadership needs to be moved out.

NN*: Do you think if there is unity, like there was before, that Mogopa will go places?

VM*: Mogopa will do great, why I say that, is that during our era we had a great relationship with the government especially the North West government. Once a year we had a visit of at least 3 to 4 MEC's per year, and we had a visit of the Premier per year. We also had one visit of one member from Parliament per year during our era. Currently there is no visit and there is no interaction and there is no relationship between the community and the government and there is no way that this community can live without any interaction with the government.

NN*: Looking at the youth, according to you, how much do they know about Mogopa?

VM*: Presently, I can say they don't know much about Mogopa. There is no one who is encouraging them to know. They are not hands on. Their main problem currently, is that they are educated and show them which fields to go into in terms of employment and skills development as youth to allow them to live a good life. At the moment there is no one encouraging them. When we were still directors for Mogopa Minerals, we also managed to talk to the Minister of Education about bursaries for children and the children here at home passed well in 2010, especially the matriculants and we had that encouragement to speak to the principals and the parents of the children who passed Grade 12 and we spoke to them regarding the bursary and we then wrote to the Minister and he then said if the children have passed in that way, you have done a good thing. Go to all the different schools - as the Minister they need to accommodate the children and give them bursaries. After communicating with the parents, then the very same leadership, they wanted to score politically and they came between the whole process and they interrupted the whole process. They did not care about the education of the children; they were only worried about their political standing.

[TIMECODE - 47m:15s]

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That is the reason why I say that our children are not encouraged to further their education. If they can gain education then they will want to be hands on in their future and the interests of Mogopa.

NN*: According to you, how did the forced removals affect you, in terms of your future?

VM*: In terms of my future, honestly speaking, they did affect me. When I was at school, I wanted to be, let me say they affected me educationally. I wanted to do so many things, but I failed to get them as my concentration was faced towards the forced removals. My life currently has been affected because of the love that I have for this community. I was looking at building a community rather than to build myself and I have been affected a whole lot. I am only starting my whole life afresh only now.

NN*: If I could ask, is there progress in doing that, like progress in building your future now?

VM*: At this age, yes, I do have hope that there will be progress. I managed to struggle for so many years, now to build my own life; I don't think that there will be a problem. I am having that courage; my main focus now is to go back into agricultural farming.

NN*: Thank you very much for your time, if we have or need any further information, we will contact you.

[TIMECODE – 51m:25s]

[END]