

INTERVIEWEE: PAKISANI JAMES MOGANEDI

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 20070605

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: JOHANNESBURG CENTRAL PRISON

Mr. Moganedi, thank you for allowing us, the South African History Academy and Sunday Times Heritage Project to conduct this interview about your work here at John Vorster Square. Is it still referred to as that?

Q: What are your full names, Sir?

A: Phakisana James Moganedi

Q: When did you start working here?

A: In 1990.

Q: And before that?

A: I was a Trainee.

Q: Where?

A: In Benoni.

Q: So, thereafter you were brought here?

A: Yes.

Q: When you started how many black people were working here?

A: Quite a lot and some were even older than me, and eventually left.

Q: And, how old were you when you started?

A: 27

Q: And what rank position did you hold in 1970?

A: A Constable trained at the Training Depot.

Q: What was your job description?

A: Patrolling and guard duties.

Q: Where were you patrolling?

A: Around Johannesburg and around John Vorster Square.

Q: So did you work inside?

A: No I mainly worked outside, it was only later that I came into the cells.

Q: Was it in 1970 when you started working in the cells?

A: Yes.

Q: And how did your duties change?

A: I worked on the third floor cells where I was checking body receipts of those who were attending court that day and took all the documentation to court, got them signed and brought them back for filing, which were done monthly and these were called Body Receipts.

Q: And how long did you do that for?

A: So what did you do between 1972 and 1975?

Q: I was basically in charge of the facilities or rather the prisoner's amenities and catering.

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Q: How did you do this?

A: Planning three meals for each prisoner, which was priced at 75c and at the end of the month I would do a total cost of the month and submit the invoices for payment, accordingly.

Q: Before doing body receipts, what kind of prisoners did John Vorster Square have? Politicians or common criminals?

A: It varied, but there were criminals, political and minor offenders.

Q: And on your floor, the third floor?

A: Criminals and petty offenders.

Q: Were they in different cells? Please explain.

A: Minor offenders were grouped together, that is, such as, gamblers and trespassers and serious crime offenders, respectively.

Q: You say checking body receipts was a white man's job?

A: Yes.

Q: So how did the change come about?

A: Some retired and that's when I was trained to do the job.

Q: Do you remember the name of the person you succeeded?

A: They were referred to Adjutant and it was Adjutant Petersen.

Q: How did they train you?

A: I started by doing rounds with the Adjutant who was in that position, until I got accustomed to the job.

Q: And were you the only black person trained?

A: No, but I was the only one who was permanent.

Q: What were the general prisoner's conditions at the time?

A: The relief workers would check up on them almost every hour.

Q: When they checked the cells, did they go inside the cells?

A: Yes, when they were at the courtyards, they would.

Q: Were there a lot of prisoners at that time?

A: Yes.

Q: Roughly that was how many prisoners?

A: 300 to 400

Q: And were there any whites?

A: Yes, but they were in separate cells.

Q: And where were these?

A: Basically it was black and white on either side.

Q: Did you ever go inside the white prisoner's cells?

A: No.

Q: And did you get along with the other workers?

A: Yes, indeed.

Q: How come?

A: We worked together with them even though they were relief workers.

A: We worked together with them even though they were relief workers.

Q: Did the workers and prisoners get along?

A: Yes we got along, even though the few odd ones were stubborn and disrespectful to the police

Q: How did you deal with them?

A: They would just sit in the cells; there were no assaults or anything

Q: You mentioned political prisoners, were you able to meet with them?

A: No, because they were handled by security branch which was operated by white policemen. Black workers could not even reach them because it would seem as if we are conspiring with them, also at that time black workers were not allowed inside the security branch but eventually when time goes on they were allowed.

Q: When was that time they were allowed in Security branch?

A: Between 1979 and 1980

Q: On the second floor there was only political prisoners?

A: Yes

Q: Black and White?

A: Yes, even though each person was locked up in his/her own cell. They were two cells apart so that the police can hear them when they spoke to each other, until cameras were installed.

Q: Was there any law specifying that black workers were not allowed on the second floor? If yes was it written or dictated?

A: No it was not written down

Q: Was there any relationship between the police working in cells and those working for the security branch?

A: No, especially not with black police, even though I suspect there was a relationship between the white police who worked in cells and the security branch

Q: On your way to the third floor did you pass the second floor?

A: Yes, through an elevator

Q: Do you remember the names of the policemen that worked at the special branch?

A: I don't remember their names except Nthate Ithula who was an ok man

Q: How was your relationship after 1980 when the black workers were allowed in the security branch?

A: The relationship was okay, even though we were not friends

Q: What was a reason for you not to get along?

A: The whites didn't want us to get along with the security branch because we could have got some information and share it

Q: What were the names of the black workers who worked at the security branch?

A: It was Langa and Msimango; I've forgotten the others.

Q: Didn't you get together with them for parties, meetings etc. as you were working together?

A: We did but we did not talk about work

Q: Why not?

A: They were not allowed to talk about their work with us. Those were the rules laid by whites

Q: Were you able to see political prisoners who were brought in?

A: Yes we were able to see them, because they were booked on the second and third floor

Q: Political prisoners were they allowed communicating with other prisoners?

A: They were not allowed, others they were even not allowed to the second floor they will just take them straight to the third floor, and even the police of the uniform they were not allowed to see them.

Q: You mentioned that you arrived here in 1970, were there any killings? Please explain the situation at John Vorster there after.

A: It was a horrific experience for us black people and it was my first incident for me since I arrived in 1970

Q: How did you get to know about it?

A: From the policemen I worked with, they said the man threw himself out of the window, but only to find out he had been thrown out.

Q: Were you at work at that time?

A: It was during a weekend, I was not there but all happened at the tenth floor security branch

Q: You worked there for 30 years?

A: Yes

Q: Which floor was this?

A: 1st, 2nd and 3rd floor as they were only floors that were not locked by the security branch

Q: Back to the death issue, how was it when it was spoken about it?

A: Painful, especially to the Indian community

Q: Did you have any Indian colleagues?

A: Not at that time

Q: What were your white colleagues saying about this?

A: They would say that the terrorist killed himself

Q: What type of food did the prisoners eat?

A: Bread, soup or pap

Q: For breakfast?

A: Coffee and bread

Q: How much bread did they get?

A: About 4 slices per person

Q: Did black and white prisoners get the same food?

A: Yes

Q: Were political prisoners allowed to go outside?

A: Only court room and the bathroom, and the courtyard sometimes

Q: Were you aware of any means of communication by the prisoners?

A: They would use toilet paper and suspect they would leave these notes in the bathroom

Q: Did the police ever find out?

A: The cleaners would show the notes to the police

Q: Who were the cleaners?

A: Petty offenders

Q: What distinct memories do you still have about John Vorster?

A: Once I found a prisoner who had hung himself against the window and again one on the cell gate.

Q: What did you do about this?

A: Investigating officers handled those cases

Q: Are there any pleasant memories about John Voster?

A: Very little, except the parties they held for us.

Q: What happened at these parties?

A: We got to bring our families along, and we would feast and be merry

Q: Were the prisoners allowed visitors?

A: Yes

Q: Where did they meet?

A: On the third floor

Q: Would you check when visitors brought them food?

A: We would but some policemen were careless

Q: How often were they allowed visits?

A: About once a week

Q: Were there any escapes?

A: Yes some political prisoners did and they were caught, some they were not caught as they were foreigners

Q: Do you remember any political prisoners escaping?

A: No I don't remember the names

Q: What was the special branch reaction to this?

A: It was their carelessness; they used to talk only amongst themselves as they were the ones on duty

Q: Did you know any of the political prisoners?

A: Yes, Winnie Mandela, Tokyo Sixwale and many others

Q: Were there any women prisoners?

A: Yes, even Indian women

Q: On the second floor?

A: Yes

Q: Have you come across any of the former prisoners?

A: Yes, Bingo who was a singer and wrote stories with Mshefane.

Q: Was he a prisoner?

A: For a very long time

Q: On the second floor?

A: Yes

Q: How was he when you met him?

A: Fine

Q: Were there any quarrels amongst the prisoners?

A: Yes, sometimes they even stabbed each other

Q: Where did you stay during that time?

A: Soweto (White City, Dobsonville and Meadowlands)

Q: How did you commute?

A: First by train then buses and lastly my own car

Q: How did the community react to you as the John Vorster policeman?

A: We didn't wear uniform outside of work and in White city they never use to like policemen

Q: What would happen to policemen at White City?

A: Either they would burn down their cars or houses

Q: When did you retire?

A: 2003

Q: In 1976 were there many people arrested?

A: Yes, if they caused malicious damage to property they were charged and put on the third floor, these included people like Tsietsi Mashinini.

Q: How did you feel like working at John Voster?

A: I was worried about being recruited to work at John Voster

Q: Where was your hometown?

A: Dullstroom

Q: What made you decide to become a policeman?

A: It had been my dream since I was young, which is why I worked well because I enjoyed my work

Q: What did you enjoy about your job?

A: I had a passion for it

Q: How was your salary?

A: 14 to 18 Pounds a month

Q: Were the white people that had the same rank as you?

A: Yes

Q: Did you get the same treatment?

A: Obviously white policemen were treated better than us.

Q: How?

A: When patrolling at night, the whites would drive vans and black would patrol by foot, and the white policemen would monitor us whilst driving those vans.

Q: What problems did black policemen face?

A: Black policemen were not given promotions like white policemen

Q: Is there anything that you would like to add?

A: The dangers and threats that were faced by policemen were severe.

END OF INTERVIEW

