

Transcript of interview (by Skype) with Geraldine Fraser Moleketi, 26 July 2016

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TT To start with, your impressions of Madiba as leader in government?

Private sector in social transformation

GFM First, just a few things before moving back to your question, because sometimes we tend to forget that other things came up at the time.

I was with him not only in government but in the lead up to the first election. I was deployed very deliberately, besides being one of two deputy national elections coordinators, to also work on the Northern Cape. The reason for that was that I speak Afrikaans as a second language and I speak it fairly fluently and was also from the Western Cape. This is just by way of background.

You may also recall that Madiba towards the end of that campaign and in subsequent election campaigns focused part of his time on the Northern Cape. That was because in 1994 we thought we could lose the Northern Cape or that it would be a tie. But unlike the Western Cape we won the Northern Cape and in part of that was, I think, the way the ANC mobilised in the region. But he also went out to a number of these places and communities and I accompanied him to many of these communities.

I want to fast forward now to some of his so-called 'personal projects' and then come back later to the government years. I think his time in the Northern Cape left a lasting impression on him and that he then decided that he was going to build schools, he wanted to get involved in building a hospital and all that, in a few communities, including the Riemvasmaak community where we went with a group of business leaders.

TT There is a recording from the SABC TV archive of your visit with him to Riemvasmaak.

GFM What I witnessed, when I sat with him in the breakfast meetings with business leaders, was the way in which he approached them to invest resources into projects and initiatives. He went into those meetings very clear that he was not

going to take no for an answer, very clear that this is what he wanted and that he expected them to meet it – and it was clear there was no free breakfast, there was no free lunch. There were certain times when they provided the charter planes, and that might have been in the post-government years and there were also times when he went in the presidential plane and he would bring them with him. He was very clear what he wanted from them – and even when some of them felt discomfort in agreeing upfront, he didn't really allow options. That happened in closed meetings and then he took them out into the communities and engaged with communities and the people.

I wanted to make the link that his commitment to that community came pre-election and he took it through his government years to the end of the government years and into his personal projects. I remember there were some issues about the way Madiba was putting forward such projects, because of course they needed to be supported by government programs: you needed to look at staffing, at equipment, at what is required to make sure that the schools are functional and all that. If it was not in the overall plan it did create a bit of tension. But that was also where he thought that the private sector could and should play a greater role.

The link I want to make is that Madiba very clearly saw a role for the private sector along with the public sector. It's just that those projects tended to be seen as his personal projects rather than taking them forward as a coordinated government, private sector relationship.

TT Even after he left government he articulated this relationship between his project and the government in that way. In an interview with David Dumbleby he said that although he was no longer in government he was still doing government work, by getting government, private sector and communities to work together when I was most needed.

Social welfare and children

GFM Just that, we saw that consistently flowing through.

Coming back to government, I came into government in January 1995 as deputy minister for welfare and population development. The call, and I think this is on public record, was made on behalf of Madiba by the then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. He called me and said that he was advised by the president to inform me about my appointment to the executive, [as deputy minister of welfare and population development].

After that appointment Madiba tended to call me and it would either be at his home or in his office, on specific areas related to welfare and population development and particularly his focus on children and youth.

You would see that from that time he institutionalised this focus: firstly he gave part of his salary towards what became the Children's Fund; and secondly, he was very clear that there was a need to ensure that government had the appropriate focus on children. Hence he got our involvement on a number of areas.

The one thing, and this is not in order of priority, was that around his birthdays he involved us in welfare and involved the welfare sector as a whole. He looked at a particular theme that he had developed and he again brought the private sector in and had the Fund involved too. At no point did he expect government finances to be used for his birthday. Our role was to bring the services side in afterwards for continuity. We never paid for the venues, we never paid for transport or anything like that, at least not from the department of which I was deputy minister and later minister: that is my recollection. But the services and what should be done in follow-up was something we looked at in order to take a holistic approach, and we also submitted inputs on the kinds of issues that should be emphasised in the speeches he made. So again there was a continuum, but there was never any expectation that we would contribute towards his 'personal project'.

The second issue – but it should probably be the first – was because of his commitment to children there was very clearly a need that was identified to look at the complete transformation or reform of the welfare system in South Africa, and it was part of what could be seen in the overall ANC policies in both Ready to Govern and later the RDP document. He felt very strongly about that as well, but again with a personal focus on children.

One area that we dealt with, that was quite sensitive and very emotive, much as we knew it was the right thing to do, was when we dealt with what was named the State Maintenance Grant, a social grant for white, coloured and Indian children that they and their mothers could access but which was not accessible to African children as defined in South Africa. We decided to transform it, effectively doing away with it and putting in its place what became the Child Support Grant. If you look at legacy, the Child Support Grant is second in size to the state pension, making them the two largest social grants in the social safety net. When we put it in place, though, it was not simply a matter of putting a grant in place, in isolation. Hence we had commissioned the Lund report, headed by Francie Lund . . .

TT . . . which became a matter of tension between government and the parliamentary portfolio committee'

GFM Absolutely, there was tension with the parliamentary committee, there was tension with communities, communities in the Western Cape and in Gauteng, and it arose because they simply thought that the State Maintenance Grant

could be expanded without being transformed. Now the purpose of the Lund commission was not just to look at that grant, but at the basket of services. It was based in some ways on the Bolsa Familia grant that you have in Brazil and to a degree in Mexico though we never developed it as extensively, inasmuch as we already had the grant itself, and also because it started at a very low level, R100 per month per child and was to be extended incrementally. Francie Lund had proposed a higher figure, but because we were transitioning from the State Maintenance Grant to this grant and because we were looking at fiscal constraints we couldn't do it all at one time.

It was intended to be linked to what we also had in welfare, the flagship poverty eradication programme – the War on Poverty Programme. It covered single mothers and essentially was supposed to be single mothers with children who are on the state support grant.

Madiba was involved in the launching of several of these flagship projects across the country. We had launches in places like Driefontein, Fraserburg, all over the country as the archives would show. The purpose was to look at skilling women, training them to become entrepreneurs, looking at their self-sufficiency so that by the time the child is off the maintenance grant they had some form of sustainable and independent income. This was also to be linked with the department of labour and the department of public works, because we wanted them to involve the beneficiaries in public works programmes. We wanted to link with health and education and so on because we wanted the children to go regularly to clinics with their Road to Health chart which they get at birth, which were also supposed to be cross checked by the department of welfare and population, which in essence became SASSA later, so that they could ensure that these children were accessing the full remit of government services. It wasn't just the grant that they were getting – they were getting healthcare and we also intended that education would follow children's progress because clearly by being on grants they were generally from families at risk.

Now it didn't happen evenly because it was in the early years of our democracy and you didn't have in place a holistic approach in government. We also wanted the social workers and later the community development workers to group the grant recipients in communities so that they could come together, forming something like a cooperative group whose members would put say R10 in to a pool to do group buying or, with the department of agriculture giving them seedlings to have vegetable gardens. The intention was to have a holistic approach.

But in that government it was not easy to work together in a coordinated way, and it is something that bedevils governments or organisations all the time. Even in subsequent years there was always this challenge: 'Who is the lead

department? Who gets the credit? Why should I be as involved as others?' It was also a challenge for public servants to think this way: it was a new approach and it wasn't easy for them to adopt it. It was a government that was coming out of a racially stratified public service that was still being built into one service, and now you are not only telling them you must become one and provide services to all South Africans irrespective of their race, you were also saying to them that you want them to provide more sustainable and holistic services, which was something they hadn't think about.

So that was the intention and Madiba would at times call me if he got calls directly from communities or leaders or the portfolio committee. I never knew what the call was about so I would go along with a case full of files about the most burning issues on my desk or an issue that I thought was a thorny issue because I knew that there were challenges from the portfolio committee. The public hearings were quite intense in Parliament with major attacks personally and otherwise, and some from communities about what they saw as a right being taken from them.

TT Eventually the debate regarding the level of the grant was resolved, and the position changed after an NEC meeting – what role, if any, might Madiba have played in bringing about that resolution?

GFM Part of his role was: one, looking at the resources available; and two, that we had to ensure that access for all children. There was also a great debate whether it should be universal or means tested. There was a challenge around it and we said the budget couldn't carry a universal grant, it had to be means tested and target the poorest, either 20% or 40%.

So he did play a role, but I can't remember his exact Intervention verbatim. We did presentations and looked at access, reach and all, and that was where I think we changed the amount and reached a compromise on the amount of the grant.

There is another area. Under his watch we had an Interministerial Committee on People at Risk. This looked at young people in the residential care system, particularly young people who were incarcerated. He also had quite an interest in that area.

Thinking back, before 1995 we never had the welfare department and ministry being part of the criminal justice system. We made a conscious decision that welfare had to be part of the criminal justice system: correctional services, safety and security, justice and all that. The view was that you could not deal with that without looking at the role of the department of welfare, both within the criminal justice system as well as playing a more preventative and restorative justice role. That is why in the years between 1995 and 1999 we started with particular initiatives that looked at restorative justice and also at

alternative sentencing. We had places like Stepping Stones in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere. We had ways of looking at family support with links between NICRO and government, and in addition to the private sector the overall welfare sector had a role. So the not for profit organisations and civil society also had quite a collaborative role with government. This also linked into his overall focus on children and youth.

I want to conclude with one last thing around that period. There was also a change in the name of the department – it used to be the 'Department of Welfare and Population Development'. It was the White Paper on Social Welfare, and what became the policy, that changed the name to the 'Department of Social Development'. I think that's quite a significant change and it should be attributed to our democracy, and what we looked at as government and his leadership. I think the leadership should also be seen as a collective leadership. Madiba never saw it as being around a personality, but saw the importance of the collective. That collective leadership resulted in the policy change that made a significant move from an approach that was quite a narrow philanthropism within a segmented welfare sector to one that had a more social development focus and was more holistic in approach to dealing with social challenges. The social security system and the cash transfer contributed significantly and in a real sense, and even today, to dealing with inequalities in society.

The second area is his focus on children.

And thirdly, there was also the whole population development question, moving away from population control to population development. So that was under his watch.

Public service transformation

TT Regarding the public service, there are questions about how the nature of our transition affected the character of the public service. In particular, temporary ways of working around the initial constraints of the Commission for Public Administration became permanent, such as the relationships between DGs and ministerial advisers, and the replacement of DGs when ministers change. To what extent did you experience these things as legacies of the transition, when after 1999 you were minister for public service and administration?

GFM The Presidential Review Commission reported in 1998, and an interministerial committee was put together to look at the report and its recommendations. Those recommendations were quite far-reaching, looking even at reviewing the structure of government. It was commissioned in order to deal with issues we were confronting with our democracy including actions that became convention in an unintended manner. The recent National Planning Commission came back to this issue and there is a chapter on it in its report.

A big challenges we confronted in government – and it bedevilled us for a long time - was the subject of a commission headed by Judge Browde. It related to a decision taken in bantustans and in particular the then Transkei where there had been an increase in senior ranks of people in the public service, through automatic promotion out-of-turn. That created quite a challenge in terms of the post 1994 amalgamation, including in terms of whether people were appropriately placed.

Public service cultures

We had a number of realities that one needs to talk about. There was the reality that the public service was governed by different sets of regulations. They were governed by different legal frameworks; there were different salary scales; there were different benefits and this led to a major problem that had to be dealt with over a period of time. I almost think, much as we finally resolved it only post 1999, that in dealing with the issue of remuneration of the public service, benefits and all, including equal pay for work of equal value irrespective of race or gender, South Africa's public service led even developed countries in ensuring work of equal value in the public service.

Now, where the bigger challenge was, was the culture in the public service. Let me take a step back and go to the question of the adviser-DG relationship. In the first two or three years in government between 1994 and I would argue maybe 1997, 1998, because of the sunset clauses there were a number of public servants and senior managers who, unless they took the package that was provided to them, were guaranteed their positions and salaries for a limited period. But that became protracted. I think that because we found directors general in place and couldn't immediately remove them, there was a decision to bring in advisers who would work with directors general. The public service prescripts were quite clear, and this was even post-99, that advisers could not play the roles of directors general. We tried to institutionalise that but it wasn't always easy so there tended to be conflict and tensions between advisers and directors general. One should also bear in mind that you had cabinet ministers come in who were essentially activists and were more hands-on as members of the executive than you would normally have, so that they would also play a role that could be seen in instances as micromanaging in areas that should have been left to directors general. This was also especially where there was not a transition to the new and a new crop of senior civil servants had not been brought in.

The first crop of directors general that were brought in and the change team that came in – and these were lateral entrants--were very much people who were strong in policy development and I don't think necessarily as strong as managers. I think it is necessary to say that we needed DGs who were strong in

policy development because the first five years were essentially about policy development.

But also in amalgamating the public services, and this is a different point, you brought together completely different cultures. The way in which service delivery and service provision was done was quite different, and that is where Paseka Ncholo played a role together with Zola Skweyiya, where they introduced the whole concept of Batho Pele, People First. Although it started there, it was highlighted when I was in public service. We tried to give it much more traction as well as developing sectoral service delivery charters in the sectors to try to change the way people worked. To a degree, that was one thing we never fully got right because we probably didn't always fully appreciate the fact that changing culture is much more complex than changing policy or the regulatory and legal environment. Public servants didn't necessarily change at the pace and speed that was required.

Corruption

TT Apart from the main issues, which you have covered, some others are quite well known, for example, having to deal with ghost beneficiaries and ghost workers.

GFM We had to deal with ghost public servants, we had to deal with ghost beneficiaries in the social security system. That's why we moved from a situation where public servants used to be paid by cheque to more electronic payment systems. We did that also with welfare services, so that where pensioners used to be paid in cash or by cheque, we developed a biometric payment system to try to eliminate corruption and the issue of fictitious beneficiaries. We did so well on that, that it was something we were later involved with in a binational relationship with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The public service department worked with them to put a biometric system in place to check what public servants you actually had as against those that were paid but did not exist.

That was a problem throughout the public service and we had to look at major interventions around these things, and that is why we put in place the National Anticorruption Forum, in 2001, which brought together the public service, private sector and civil society as part of the overall endeavour to get everyone in society involved in those.

The Alliance

TT A final question about Madiba's role in the development of the relationship with the Alliance. He was very forceful in his interventions, both at the NEC and in public. To what extent might there have been a contrast between on the

one hand his emphasis on partnership of social formations and on the other hand interventions that did not always promote unity?

GFM I'm not going to be very dialectic in my approach, let me put it that way. You know Madiba was a lot more impatient than the larger public and the world saw him to be. If he had his eye on a particular outcome he would do everything to make it happen and he wasn't always the great negotiator, reconciler that everyone would like to see him to be. His was almost impatience about getting a particular task done and seeing engagement of the larger alliance at times as an impediment, if he felt that the role they played could be slowing him down in achieving a particular outcome.

He also had the characteristic of sometimes lecturing. He would listen but when he banged his hands on the table that was the end of listening: 'This is the way we going to take this particular thing forward.' And I think this sometimes created a major problem. Much as people could now paint him in a different light we know that once he's made up his mind it is very difficult to shift him on an issue. And that came through even in the Alliance and Alliance structures. I would not take it as an anti-socialist approach, or anti-worker approach. I simply saw it as his impatience, an impatience that I think may have been informed by the way they used to sort out issues, if you go back to the days of the youth league – more than just trying to persuade people through debate, you also had a particular approach.

Even when he was out of government and I was minister for the public service, when there were strikes he would call me – I would go over to see him and I would say to him, what would you need me to do, and of course he wanted to have a background of what the issues were, so when he took a position it wasn't as if he didn't know. It wasn't him simply deciding what is to be done, he would hear but it doesn't mean that he would change his view. And in instances I would say to him, 'These are what the issues are but we are in negotiation and there is no need for you to get involved,' but that didn't stop him if he wanted to summon anyone to Houghton and take an approach.

To go to the Tenth Party Congress, Madiba was always very clear when he took a position, and his position may even be contrary to the script that he had at the given point of time. If he had a particular view, whether there had been a collective decision on an approach, he would still take the route that he considered correct. I don't think the outcome was ever intended to be negative though in instances the outcome may have been.