

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MR THABO FRANS THAPEDI

(The interview was conducted by Khotso Pudumo with Mr T.F. Thapedi through *Whatsapp*, Bloemfontein, on 09 November 2020. Please note the following: **Pudumo**: Interviewer; **Thapedi**: Interviewee. Unclear\inaudible speech is indicated by a question mark [?]. [Sic] in most cases indicates a grammar mistake made by interviewee. Text in brackets [] is added for clarity.)

Pudumo: What are your full names and surname?

Thapedi: My names are Thabo Frans Thapedi and my twin brother is Thabang Fransic Thapedi.

Pudumo: Where and when were you born?

Thapedi: We were born on the 25 December 1986 in Mangaung at Pelonomi Hospital.

Pudumo: And what were the names of your late brother?

Thapedi: [He] was born in 1963 in Masenya Street in Batho.

Pudumo: Who are your parents?

Thapedi: Father's name was *Ntate* [Mr] Malakane Carrington Thapedi, then the mother was Mmanni Qhoshla Thapedi. Both [are] deceased and parents of Lathaba [late brother].

Pudumo: Where did you and your brothers spend most of your childhood years? In house number 1332 Masenya Street in Batho?

Thapedi: We started school in Madikgetla, Trompsburg, in 1992. We came back in Bloemfontein to stay with our grandmother Mme Konki Maria Thapedi in Masenya Street as she was the mother of my late father, meaning she was my grandmother until 2005 when she passed away. [I] have a problem of network, so, sorry Sir.

Pudumo: Okay, Mr.

Thapedi: But we can continue.

Pudumo: Sorry for the passing of your grandmother.

Thapedi: Ok, sir.

Pudumo: So, your brother Abel, he grew up in Masenya Street? And where did he attend school?

Thapedi: He attended school in Mabewane Primary School, then moved to Lereko High School in 1977.

Pudumo: How did the Soweto Uprising affect him [Lathaba Abel]? Or what is it that caused him to join and become an activist to fight for liberation?

Thapedi: He became a member of student movement which was known as COSAS [Congress of South African Students] in 1976 where he met the late Chris Hani and Mme Winnie Mandela reason for all that was he saw [and] participated in underground [activities] in ANC [African National Congress] struggle during the time of apartheid.

Pudumo: What role did COSAS play in making people aware of the injustices of apartheid? By that time the ANC was banned and operating underground.

Thapedi: It wasn't easy for African National Congress and COSAS to spread the word of justice to people of South Africa to be free at that time which lead most of leaders of ANC to skip [the] country as Kamanda was one of the members who went to [East] Germany and Lusaka for training before he was infiltrated back in the country in 1984. Yes, it was banned, everything they did at that time was force and anger towards white people to be free in South Africa.

Pudumo: Coming back here [where Kamanda met Chris Hani and Mme Winnie], Ntate Thabo, this meeting with Mme Winnie happened whilst she was banned to Brandfort?

Thapedi: He met Mme Winnie while he was in exile around 1982 before he received training of youth leadership in [East] Germany even when he came

back still Mme Winnie and Chris Hani were commanders of MKMVA [Umkhonto weSizwe Military Veterans, was formed after 1994] by that time.

Pudumo: That is where Kamanda received his MK training [where he skipped the country and was infiltrated back in 1982]?

Thapedi: Yes, that was in 1982.

Pudumo: What was his [Kamanda's] MK name?

Thapedi: Raymond Pule.

Pudumo: During this activities were you and your twin brother also interested in joining your big brother in fighting for liberation?

Thapedi: It [was] my wish as my late brother's aim [was] to see freedom and democracy in our country.

Pudumo: Tell me Mr Thabo, Security Branch [SB], did they harass your family when they were looking for your brother while he was in exile?

Thapedi: My parents were both working most of the time. They were not at home which my father, a driver at Motovia which was known as convoy at that time. My mother was a maid [domestic worker] somewhere in Bainsvlei [Bloemfontein small holdings]. She only came home on month-ends, so, my granny was [the] only person who was always at home with us sometimes.

Pudumo: When did you and if you can recall your brother, did he become aware of apartheid and the struggle? Was it while in school in Mabewane or Lereko?

Thapedi: Actually it started within the family because my father [Malakane Carrington Thapedi] was the influence of all [which] lead Kamanda to join MKMVA [MK] but didn't want him to be in fighting structure of ANC for reason he knew if Kamanda joined and skipped the country he will never see him again and it happened the same in Lereko High School where he met Ntate White Mohapi, Oupa Molema and Raymond Pule [?] and others which all of them became members of COSAS and MKMVA [MK] during apartheid times.

Pudumo: Was your father an activist?

Thapedi: Not actually but he had a friend of a white person during apartheid where he was working most of the time and he was with him. So, the influence and involvement of my father in apartheid. The name of that person was known as Dampie Borthman [Bothma?] from Bainsvlei.

Pudumo: Ntate Thabo can you tell me what kind of stories did your father tell you and your brother which ended up inspiring your big brother to join, as you mentioned above that it started in the family?

Thapedi: To be honest with you my father died on Sunday was telling me about Kamanda what kind of person he was and how come he joined **COSAS**. He actually ran away from home in Masenya [Street] to become a member... for me to tell you all this will need time because it is a sad story which the late Chris Hani, Walter Sisulu was part of kidnapping of Kamanda to join MKMVA [MK] in 1976. For them to come and take away Kamanda was easy due to Ntate [Thomas] Mapikela which was near Masenya [Street] in Batho Location. Let me write the whole story and e-mail you the information because it needs time and for me that reminds, it is sad, it reminds me of my regret teaching Lathaba about apartheid where he lost his first born son. I never told anyone what my father told me about Kamanda even my whole family knows the name of Lathaba but all of them do not know who Kamanda is until today. It is why I am ever celebrating the contribution of my brother and wherever there is my brother's name it brings tears to me because I become sad because I believe he would have become someone important today in our country because of what he fought for.

Pudumo: We will make time someday for that story, Ntate Thabo.

Thapedi: He became just a member until he met Ntate Oupa Molema who saw potential in Kamanda, he immediately told and introduced Kamanda to the late Chris Hani, Walter Sisulu and other members of ANC. That was when Kamanda ran away from home to join MKMVA [MK].

Pudumo: Part of this interview is to acknowledge him [Kamanda] and his important role he played during the liberation struggle. That is part of my job to write about our unsung heroes for people to learn and about them. Thank you Ntate Thabo, my condolences, I do understand.

Thapedi: So, sir there's tears in my eyes I can't go further. I am reminded of my father and how he died in pain because of Lathaba [Kamanda] made him to suffer until his last day of living. For me it is still painful please let us do this on Thursday I am really emotionally and I am not good at all please, sir.

Pudumo: It is Ok, Ntate we can take a break. I am so sorry. Talking about it will also help you heal from that pain, thank you for sharing this important part of history. My condolences to you and your family.