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Name of interviewee/s: Rev. Phineas Mapheto

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TM: Tshepo Moloi

PM: Phineas Mapheto

LZ: Lucky Zimba

NN: Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

MM: Matjatji Malabela

Interview with Reverend Phineas Mapheto by Tshepo Moloi, Lucky Zimba, Nonhlanhla Ngwenya and Matjatji Malabela

PM: I was born in a place called Polokwane, in the area of Mphahlele, in the village called Malkapan.

Lucky Zimba (LZ): How many children were you in the family?

PM: We were eight. I am the third in the family. My father died when I was still very young. I am not sure how old, about seven or ten. My mother was still very young when my father died. According to our custom, when one's husband dies the brother of the husband takes over all the responsibilities of that family, and also more so he marries the widow. The family decides to appoint the brother of the deceased to take over all the responsibility of that family and create a family. It is the Sepedi culture. The purpose is to avoid prevent this woman from running around with other men outside, so that the family should be one with the same blood. After my father passed away the family appointed his brother but not the one who immediately came after him. He was the one who was supposed to be appointed. But they appointed the one who came after my father's brother who came after my father. The one who came after my father had migrated to Johannesburg and no one knew his whereabouts. So the third born son was appointed. If they didn't do that the family was concerned that my mother would bear children with different men and that would cause confusion in the family. So, in other words, I was the born from my biological father. I had two elder sister, one of them passed away. But in total at home there were eight children, but now only three is still alive. Survived: it's our older sister, who was the first born, then me, and then the last born who is a boy.

LZ: How was life like in the family?

PM: Like I said I am the third born in the family, we grew up being raised by our paternal uncle, who also had taken over the responsibility of guarding his deceased brother's family. Life was very difficult. We were struggling due to the fact that there was no one to take care of us. You see, the younger brother to my father already had his own family. He was married. So we did not exactly have someone who took care of us. In my life I did not go to school at all. Back then we grew up with the notion that the school was only attended by people who attended church, who we called Christians or Majakane. As a result of struggling in the family, I was compelled to work for the boers at an early age, I think I was between the ages of 17 or 18 years, ploughing with cows. Whilst working I was able, as a first born son who was working ... You see, when we were born our mothers and fathers they wore traditional clothes. Fathers did not wear trousers like us today. They wore *dikheso*. And then they sew them a long shirt that comes up to the knees. Mothers wore traditional dresses, cow skin, goat skin. But now when I started working I decided to change the way mother dressed. I bought her a dress. She started a dress.

My brother in-law, who had married the sister I come after, was a dress-maker using a machine. I bought two different clothing materials and asked him to sew two dresses of different colours for my mother. I think I worked for those boers for two years, because then I did not even qualify to come and work in Johannesburg. During those days our people in the rural areas were not allowed to come to Johannesburg to look for employment. If you wanted to come to Johannesburg you'd have to wait for trucks coming from the mines in Johannesburg. They would go to the chief to look for employees. An announcement would be made to inform us that on such and such a day there would people coming to our village looking for employees. We would then go to the chief and queue. We would then register to take up a joint (i.e. contract) to work for nine months at the mines. I worked at a mine in Springs. It was called Kgobololo, just outside Springs. I took up a nine months joint at the chief's place and joined the mine. After nine months the joint expired and therefore you were supposed to return home. If you wanted to return to Johannesburg you had to take up another joint that would qualify you to work for another mine and not the same mine. Now

after I had finished my joint at Nigel we had visitors who were coming from my home village who were older than me of course who came to visit and check on at the mine.

TM: Where were you staying in the mines?

PM: We used to stay in a compound. I think some of them are still there. Different nationalities were placed in the same compound. I mean, there were AmaXhosa, AmaZulu, Basotho – all lived together in the compound. Many of these men were working underground in the mine. I think because of my age I was not employed underground. I worked aboveground.

TM: What kind of job were you doing aboveground?

TP: You see, when we joined the mines there were things we used to call Kolofani, which transported sand from underground in the mine. They travelled through a belt on rail. They would bring up that sand from underground. Now when they were about to go down my job was to release them. Like I said, we had visitors from home who were working at the Crown Mine. They were wearing very beautiful tailored suits (laughs) – quality clothing. Not the kind of clothing people wear today. I was thought to myself these people must working good job and the day I finish working here I am going the Crown Mine to look for work there. Remember I also wanted to go to Johannesburg. So after I completed my nine months joint I travelled to the Crown Mine to look for employment. Now when we were looking for work we'd queue for it. I can't recall how many times did I go there to queue without being offered a job, because there were many of us. I ran out of money and there was no one to care for me, I then decided to look for a job as a domestic worker. I got a job at Mayfair, I forgot the address. I was hired by the owner of the house to clean their house. You see, in most cases we were hired by the woman of the house, but the owner was the man. I was given a backroom to live in. In the morning they would call me to wake me up: 'Hey, Phineas, *kom*'. When I entered their house I was not allowed to wear my shoes – I had to take them off because the shoes would make noise and wake those who were still sleeping. So I had enter the house with my bare feet.

TM: Did they tell you to do that?

PM: Yes. So I'd check the coal stove, clean it in the kitchen; take out the ash to pour it outside the house. Then I'd make fire in the stove. After that I'd go to the front of the house to sweep the yard.

TM: What time did they wake you up?

PM: Well, around 6. It was almost the same time as they were also waking up to prepare to go to work. But they would make their own breakfast. Alright, I'd sweep the yard in front of the house and then go and sweep at the back of the house. Thereafter I'd go and clean the stoep in the front of the house. I'd first clean the stoep with water and then apply polish and remove it. To do this I'd be kneeling. I did that job for the whole year. I'm not sure how much they were paying me. Then we were using pounds. But they giving me a small salary.

TM: Can you still remember the family you worked for?

PM: Mr Bankies. I'm not sure whether they were Germans or not, but that same seem to suggest they were.

TM: Reverend you said you were born at Malkapan, right?

PM: Yes, Malkapan is the village that I was born in.

TM: Which year were you born?

PM: I was born in 1926

TM: What are your full names?

PM: The name that I was given after birth ... You see, according to our culture I was required to attend the initiation school twice. Now I had the name that I was given after birth, which after returning from the initiation school for the first time, disappeared. That name is not supposed to be used ever again. I would then be named after one of the family's relatives. That is why in Sepedi culture when you meet someone and that person introduces himself as so and so, you have to enquire whether that name is the name given to them after returning from the initiation school or not. After initiation one was named after one of the family members. The reason for that was to revive that name so that even if he could die his name would live forever. The name has to live within the family; it does not have to die. The name I was given after birth was Mogwerishane, which after I coming back from the initiation school died. I was then named after my paternal uncle called Makgale. This was a way to ensure that his name survives within the family. I was named after the very same man who was appointed to marry my mother. Remember that I said from my father we were three and the other five children belonged to my paternal uncle.

TM: Makgale

PM: Yes, Makgale. Okay, where were we?

TM: You went back to the initiation school for the second time.

PM: Yes, I went back for the second time. That is the custom in our area. When we attended the initiation school for the first time we were not supposed to be seen by people. We were only supposed to be seen by those who had been to the initiation school. They were allowed to visit us. For example, if we were to go somewhere and had to cross a street – we lived in a mountainous village – say, we were crossing to another mountain, our teachers were supposed to run down the mountain to the road to stop the cars if there were any from driving past there because we were about to walk past that road. We were not supposed to be seen. When it was cleared we would then cross the road and climb another mountain. Then other people could use the road.

TM: How old were you supposed to be to go to the initiation school for the first time?

PM: Then people would go when they were between the ages 18 and 20 years. During that period we would stay there for three months (laughs). And our initiation school was different from the others, who used to wear blankets. Our initiation was not supposed to be seen. I can remember we used to say 'if you see it you would die' (laughs). It also happened that if someone did not go to the 'mountain' and we came across him we would abduct that person; he was not supposed to leave the initiation school before being initiated, because he has seen *koma*. It was not supposed to be seen. Your parents would be informed that you've been abducted by *koma*. That is the first initiation school.

Our *koma* didn't wear blankets. We would take anything to cover ourselves. Even when we slept we did not use blankets. We would make a big fire and sleep in front of it to keep warm.

Nonhlanhla Ngwenya (NN): So when you went back for the second time did they give you another name?

PM: No, when you came back from the second initiation you were not given a name. It's only when you come back from the first initiation. While at the initiation school you parents and family should think about the name they were going to give you. You were supposed to be named after a close family relative. So when we returned home – some times we would accompany each other to each other's homes. We would sleep over at one of the initiate's home. The family had to slaughter something for us to eat. The following day we would accompany the other initiate, and so on. Now during this ceremony everybody was welcome to attend, even non family members. There was a thing called *Kgoro* – meant for men only. Women were not allowed in the *Kgoro*. And in that *Kgoro* only men who were from the initiation school were allowed to sit. Anyone who had not been to the initiation school, even if they were old, were not allowed in. It is the same as in the AmaXhosa culture. Anyone who had not been to the initiation school was labelled *inkwenkwe* (young man). Such a person was not supposed to mix with men. After the ceremony, all men would gather in the *kgoro*. And one of the men would stand up and say 'Please inform us what is the name of this man?' Then the person from the family who had been appointed to reveal the initiate's name would stand up and inform the gathering the name of the initiate. He was named after so and so. Then praise singers would stand up and start reciting poems. (reciting)... (laughs). The Mapheto clan name is Noko (Porcupine). But there are some whose clan name is Kolobe (Pig). So from there on you'd use the new name and your birth name would never be used again.

NN: Is it possible to be named after someone who had died?

PM: Even if the person you're named after has passed on the idea behind this is carry on his name, so that it doesn't disappear in the Mapheto family. We're also named after people who are still alive. For example, my younger brother, the last in the family, is Mafise. He was named after the younger brother to my father, the one I said he left home a long time ago, who I've never even met in my life. He disappeared in Johannesburg. And this name Mafise also has its recitation. When I arrive home those who do not know me when they greet they'll ask about my name and its recitation. I'll say 'I'm Ngwasilati'. And they'll repeat after me. They're not supposed to call me Makgale. They must respect me and not address me with my name. They'll say 'Greetings Ngwasilati (clapping hands). That is a culture. After our first initiation, then entered the women's initiation. But they do not go to the 'mountain'. They gather at the chief's place. After initiation they'd also return home and change their names and receive new names (laughs). The following year we, men, return to the 'mountain' to complete our initiation rite. But the second initiation doesn't take place on top of the mountain. Now people are allowed to see us, but they are not allowed to come near us.

TM: Looking at you talking about your initiation days I can see that you're proud of them.

PM: Absolutely!

TM: Were there other boys in your village who didn't participate in this process?

PM: As time went, we were told, those who attended church, who we had labelled Majakane, stopped participating in this process. They argued that they were born again and therefore did not want to be part of the initiation rituals. And this view is now growing. But, on the other hand, some of the Christian children who want to participate escape and go to the 'mountain' so that he could be abducted, because he wants to be part of *Koma*. ... Oh, the recorder's battery is flat ...

-----End of part A-----

