

INTERVIEWEE: MOLEFE PHETO

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My name is Molefe Pheto. When I came back from exile in 1998, I decided on a different lifestyle. Because in 1997 when I came visiting here at home, for the first time in 1995, most people did not recognize me and it was a bit strange for me. So I thought well, if I should return home, just forget about Soweto and Alexandra township and find somewhere not too far from Soweto not too near neither and the solution for me was a farm and a small farm because of financial constraints and at my age, I was 60 something odd, and I didn't fancy competing for a job with young people. So I decided let me see what I can do for myself instead of hoping that some day I will get some pension and I started on the farm with no knowledge about farming, but I'm fine now.

Q: So in 1975 when you were detained, perhaps you can tell us about what your political involvement was just before your detention?

A: Well it starts really in 1971. From 1966 to 1970 I was in England as a student of music at the Guild Hall School of Music and Drama. When I came home I found a whole lot of turbulence and political organizations were banned and in order to take part, there was no point trying to join a political organization, as I say, they were banned. But the political complaints in me and a whole number of younger people, who were young then, were there. We came up with a plan to go into the arts and used the arts for political gains. That is to say, a theater company was formed and we looked at revolutionary material mostly by Black writers from America, Africa and the Caribbean and we found a program that we thought was powerful, including of course South African poets at the time, and we embarked on that one, to continue to preach political messages through theatre. And we thought it would take them a long time because always the natives are dancing and singing so under that impression we would go on for a long time and to tell the truth we did. We did I think for one and half years to two years when the press got interested and that was our downfall because once the press got interested then they read what we were doing then there was interest in us. Anyway we had made such leeway that we had quite a following of youngsters in the different ghettos, who liked our programs so that by the time I was detained, I mean there were other groups also doing revolutionary work. So to detain me and sort of cause some problems for the theatre company, which was Mehloidi Black Theatre, didn't really cause much of a difference, other groups were continuing. And then they picked me up. But they did not pick me up purely for theatre. Yes, indeed, sometime before they picked me up, I helped a young person escape from going to jail who had been found guilty and was waiting for sentence and so he came pleading to me and I looked at him, he was about fifteen years old, and I thought, "If this guy goes in, it won't sit nice with me", but politically I was on his side as well. So we had an underground at the time and we discussed it and so we decided to ship him out of the country into Botswana. That was successfully done except that I think when he got to Botswana he was quite excited and when his colleagues came he told them who took him out. So when the colleagues came back they were detained

and beaten up right here and they talked of course. Now, when they detained me, I thought it was probably because of the cultural issues. It was much later, the very first question when they said, "Who took Clarence Hamilton out?" it was only then that the penny dropped that it's not so much theatre and so forth, it was something definitely that I had done. But of course you deny, you deny for as long as you can. But then, they don't interrogate you the same day. They just put you down there and forget about you in the cells somewhere around here and at their right moment which is OK for them then they pick you up there and then it begins and you don't know. You just think you are been taken up for one or two questions, which they did many times, then you go back again, so this time round you think, "Well this is the same routine," and then you realize that this continuous and you don't know when it's going to end and they know when they are going to end it but it's a question of two things, when you surrender and when they think they've got what they want. And then of course they don't ask you about that particular thing like Clarence Hamilton this time, they ask about other things that you might be connected with, and I was connected with quite a few things and I was just wondering whether they knew anything about that. I was part of an underground cell at that time, of the PAC, but it was clear they knew nothing about that aspect and that was fine.

Q: What did the name John Vorster Square mean to you before you were brought here?

A: Well it was bad news basically and even as we were working, and we knew that within the framework we could be taken up and taken into detention, you would choose to go somewhere else than John Vorster Square, basically because at the time there had been about 5/6/7 deaths during detention and interrogation. So you didn't want to get to John Vorster Square because you thought it could happen to you and then when the police responded to accusations of torturing people to death their answers were so cold that we thought, "Well there's no chance," so even if we knew that within the realm of one day been detained, but you'd be rather be taken somewhere else, Leeuwkop or somewhere but not John Vorster Square. So when they came to detain me that morning they don't say anything, they search the house and take what they want, it's only when they leave that they say, "We are taking you to John Vorster Square", that's to your family," If you want him, he's there" but of course they will want you for all eternity, they won't tell them where you are, even if you are here.

Q: So how did you feel when you knew you were coming here?

A: Well as soon as they said, "We are taking you to John Vorster Square", I looked at my wife and she looked at me and we thought "Well that's it, whatever happens, that's it, that's a possibility" and we crossed fingers basically but it could go in any direction and that was it so you surrender and you say, "Ok if it happens to Timol or to somebody that's fine and if I make it, that's fine." So its in your hands and you're in their hands

Q: You said you weren't taken to interrogation first, you were placed in a cell, can you remember anything about a cell which you were kept?

A: Ja, I do. They would bring you here first, as I said we arrived here at about four o' clock. They went somewhere, those guys, they went to a shebeen with me to drink whilst they've got me covered and basically also to phone their controllers that, "We've got him." Then they said, "Bring him in," we left at

six from the ghettos and we arrived here at seven and they were already waiting for me. "Oh this is him, this is him", when you arrived, and there's a room upstairs there. "This is him," and so forth, and they all come, a whole bunch of them, they all come then they really begin to threaten you then you feel that now you are not safe, because of, " Oh we've been looking for you, Oh this one, Oh he's been to England," and all that kind of thing. So at the moment you are quite... but you know now this is John Vorster Square and so much has happened. And then they move out and maybe you remain with about three who eventually become the major three throughout even if at certain stages you are with different people, but that core remains. So there's a room upstairs there where they took me but by nine o' clock I was taken to a cell down here. I was taken to three cells here. I think one was cell 230, one was 210, and one was 320. I think 210 was the first one where for a long time I stayed there and you were called up for some things sometimes, just like they want to see you. Then another time they take you up to go and take mug shots and not nice mug shots of you. They do the mug shots when you look real down and your hair is all over the place and things like that and then you can see them taking the mickey at what you look like and then they do the mug shot. And sometimes you sneak a look to see what they look like and you see that really, when they send this out to a street, oh really I do look like a criminal. That kind of thing. Another time you would be called to say, "Here are your clothes" or they take you to give you your clothes from home because they told your family you are here, so they bring the clothes here and some food and then you change with whatever clothes you've got and then they keep them and the next time round when they bring the other clothes, then they get the clothes that you gave them the last time when they brought the last batch of clothes. And that way was the way the family can know that you are still alive. Sometimes you are taken up, there are other police coming from somewhere who are either visiting or they are coming to check you out, you don't know what's going on. You are not told anything. That process continues until, as I say, the day of your interrogation, and you don't know that day. Mine was in the afternoon at about 3 o' clock or so. They come and I'm collected, and I'm taken upstairs and then there's this room, the same room in which I was first brought in. And when you are in there, then they come, a whole bunch of them and they start interrogating you and asking you questions, everybody almost at the same time. So who do you answer now? You just look like a bloody fool in there, that sort of thing. And then they thin out and thin out, and then 3 remain and then you think well it's getting on five now, they will take me down. You realize that it's getting to six now, so well sooner or later they will take me down. You are now hitting 7/8 o'clock then something tells you that you are going nowhere. Sometimes there's a change of shift and the ones who take you usually are the Black ones but they are not told to take you down. The other fellows leave, another team comes with other Black guys, you think they will say to the Black guys you should be taken down, you are not taken down, and then you realize now you are going for ten, and then the questioning begins *seriously*. Then you realize that well this is a series, and you think, "Well *tomorrow* morning I'll be taken down." Then tomorrow gives birth to the whole day and gives birth to the night, then the night to the next day, then the next, and you are standing all the time. You don't sit down, nothing! They bring food, you eat *standing*. And then in my case it took 2 days and 3 nights, or 3 nights and 2 days, I can't remember which was the sequence, standing, no sleep, not a break to sit down. I didn't feel like going to the toilet, so that was it. Until eventually that's it now, whether you like it you guys or you don't like, there's no way I can't stand anymore. My legs were swollen, they were thick, I mean they were all straight from here down they were just straight and they were painful, there were things like needles,

there's no way. Then you have been beaten up from the first day as and when they feel like, for no reason. Sometimes they're coming from behind you, you are facing that way, you are not allowed to face anywhere, you just face that way, and the next thing is a blow on you that wakes you up. Of course it fells you down. A blow coming like that, you fall down and you realize you're down, you stand up and sometimes before you stand up, you are kicked up. So when you are up then they blow you down. They blow you down and they kick you up but it takes all forms of interrogation, mainly physical beating and then certain tactics, like one of them just cocked his gun and shot just behind my ear. Now at the time I didn't know much about guns so I thought maybe it was a blank which I think it was, I don't know. But when he cocked the gun I saw it, then he walked behind me and then he just said, "Don't you turn your head!" and then I heard this loud bang. Then I thought he shot me, maybe somewhere I would feel the bleeding because I don't know, I have never been shot before, but no, I was still standing, I wasn't hurt anywhere so I just thought probably that thing was a blank but it was meant to break me down. As I say until when I said, "Well there's no point, I can't stand any longer, whether they like it or not," and I sat down. They picked me up, very viciously and said, "Stand up!" I said, "I'm not standing up", I just went down, and I just sat down. This time I was just rebellious because there was no way. Then they said, "Are you now ready to write your statement?" I said, "Well I told you what I told you, I don't know who took that guy out and that is what I'm going to tell you and that is what I'm going to write." They brought a pen and a paper and a chair. It was in the afternoon. "Write that you took him out," I said, "No, I'm not writing that I took him out, I did not take him out," then they said "We will write the statement and you will copy it" I said "You write it, I will see it." When it came I said, "No that's not what happened. But I was lying; of course I took him out. But I just felt that if I agree that I took him out, I'm gone, I'm going to prison, I'm going to be found guilty. And they kept on saying, "It doesn't matter what kind of statement you make, even if you incriminate yourself, you will not be tried on your statement." I didn't trust them. I'm not going that way; I didn't take this guy out. We had a deadlock, total deadlock. I never agreed that I took him out. I said I knew about him but I didn't take him out at all but to be frank I did take him out with a colleague of mine, we did the job, but we had decided we are not giving in to this state because we are fighting the state. I have no idea what would have happened if I said, "Yes I took him out." I have no clue at all. And then eventually I wrote out a statement which said I didn't take him out but then they wrote it to say that I agreed that I took him out and I don't want to write that I took him out. I said that is not my statement. More or less it was that kind of statement but I think they just got fed up with me and they had to find another way of making sure that I go to prison. I have no clue what happened but I didn't go there, having agreed. I know that I have agreed to my lawyer, to my attorney. The first time I met him, "Did you do it? Because you must tell me, you know confidentially." I said, "Yes I took him out, we planned it, I was with so and so up to this point." So my solicitor, attorney knew everything. George Bizos knew everything but they did not know that. Beyond that I don't know.

Q: These men that interrogated you, what were they like?

A: All sorts, all sorts. First, there are always two Blacks who are just on your sides. They don't ask you questions, they don't do anything, they just stand there. The ones who are doing the interrogating or the asking of questions are the White ones. Usually three whites and the two blacks, sometimes two whites and the one black. There were all sorts. Some tried to be nice but it's not being nice when you

look at it afterwards. One would say, "You see you better tell us, we are the nice ones, if you don't tell us there are others who are coming who are cruel and they won't waste your time." Fine there's nothing to tell. And then the nice ones will say "Well we keep giving you our sweets and our coffee and then you don't want to talk, and we are also getting fed up!" And then that means that you've never been nice whatsoever. You are just one of the same team. There will be that type. They don't beat you up, they will rough you up but they don't beat you up, in my case. Then there's another team that comes in and these are just beasts, total beasts. Well trained, well developed. You can see their necks, their muscles and all that kind of thing and they don't waste time with you. There was Visser who was one of the worst animals I have ever come across, he just seem to enjoy beating people up, myself included. And then there was another one, Fourie I think, though he was not as well built as Visser but he could injure you, that one because he was just totally unmethodical. He was just a street fighter like, but you don't fight him back. You can't fight back, they will just kill you. So Visser and Fourie and another one called Petou. They would team up like that, but these two, Visser and Fourie, they were the real beasts. They really did a lot of beating of me without stop and I think they came, unfortunately for me I stood for 2 nights, and so they were twice on me and each time they arrived it was beating up time. I came worse out of that because even now this ear is injured forever, can never be fixed. It records sounds and then it plays those sounds back to me each time is quiet. And I know who did that, it was Visser and in a very nasty way because I was facing away from him and with both hands from behind, he closed, with force, both my ears. And the strange thing is that that impact lifted me up and by the time I was going down I had no control of my bottom limbs, I just collapsed. Then he hauled me up, the same Visser, but for some time, something had happened to my nervous system I don't know. I think the body is a computer, which has got all these things, if one goes wrong, another one goes wrong. So then he had to haul me up and later I started regaining consciousness here (legs) but anyway I didn't feel anything. It was when I was already at the Hillbrow police station where there were some machines behind my cells that were sending signals out, like Morse Code or something like that. Fine I heard those things and no big deal about them but later, I think a week later, my ear was sounding those same things, up to now, up to today. Each time it's quiet, it goes. Each time it's quiet, it goes. I think it's on 24 hours but I don't hear because of these noises or I'm working on the farm but once I sit down and it's quiet, at night, everyday I hear that. So you come out with things like that and these are forever. These are the memory. Whatever you do. I could maybe forget John Vorster for two months but as soon as I hear that, it's John Vorster. So if I decide to forget it for two months or one month, I can't, because as soon as it's quiet, maybe at nights, I can't just sleep when I get to bed and when you hear that, John Vorster, so it's forever. It's just a legacy that I ended up with, up to today. I did try to get it sorted out. I remember the doctor I saw was a Joe Seeger and he said, "It'll probably wear off," but if I have a problem, I should come back. I never went back to Joe Seeger, I still have it, I still have it. So then you had teams like that who interrogate you but a whole other bunch of others come in. I mean during the interrogation by this team and then somebody else comes in and says, "What about the PAC, why don't you join the PAC because your black consciousness philosophy is almost the same as the PAC?" Then you say, "No I don't want to join the PAC," or in my case I said, "I'd prefer the PAC to the ANC," that's what I said to them. And then they asked me names of PAC activists and in fact I think I was silly. That's one mistake I did because when I said I preferred the PAC I was quite clear I wasn't in for PAC activities which I was doing here in the country so I could say I prefer the PAC, and it was my preference anyway at the time. So it

was true when I said I prefer the PAC. And then they asked me about names of the PAC. There were names I knew, there were names I did not know and then when I realized that I had escaped that one that's when he said "This fellow is just a kak man he's not a PAC", and I thought just as well because if they followed that line I had no clue what they knew. If they knew something maybe then I was in trouble, real, real trouble but they didn't follow up that line. And this one was picked up by someone who had nothing to do with me, one of the interrogators, who had nothing to do with me. He just came in but then they followed it. But luckily, I think they tried many things. At the end of the day you are complete confused, you are dazed because you don't know who is who and what is it that they really want. You know they keep you like that and at the same time you are trying that they don't get you in for what you actually did. Now I worked on the basis that I don't think they know I did it and because they didn't know I'm not going to say I did it.

Q: How did you cope with the isolation of being held in solitary confinement? How did you pass that time?

A: That one I think was not so difficult, at the beginning. At the beginning, you keep on thinking, "Well it won't be for long." And there is this thing that, for some reason you think, "I'm going to go home very quickly because they haven't got anything on me, I'm going to go home." Especially when you're from interrogation, you know that it's all gone then what you're waiting for, is that if you're not charged you're going home. You are sure you are going home because they are not charging you very quickly, and you say, "Well it's because they've got nothing on me," so those days of being alone, sort of pass. And then in between times they keep on coming in and taking you up, "Do you know so and so?" and that sort of thing. So usually when they come to take you up after interrogation then you think you are going home. So you keep on living on this thing that, "I am going home." They know that you are going nowhere but you don't know that. Then eventually you realize that you are going nowhere and you are in solitary, really you are in solitary because now the days pass even the going home process just begins to leave you, it deserts you. Now you are saying, "What next?" In my case I resolved, "Well this is it, it looks like I'm going to stay here for as long as I can and that's it." Then I sort of engineered a programme that, "Ok I'm going to take them on, I'm going to stay here for as long as I can." I don't let them know that that's my program, I just give in to it and that's it. "I'll just stay here and I'm going to outstay them here and probably they will get tired" and that sustained me, that, "That's it, I'm going to stay here and I'm not going to look like I want to go home. I'm not going to feel sorry for myself" and then I think I got some courage. And then the other thing, you device programs. You must have a day's program. If you are going to sit down I think you will go crazy. I devised theatre programs in there, I was acting some of the time and then I was trying to write poetry into my head because you don't have pen and paper, they don't allow you that. And then after that I got bored with those two things but, I already had three poems, which I can recite back to front anytime, and I would act them and I would have this audience in Soweto and I would act for them. That kept me going but sooner or later I got tired I wanted to write more poems into my head and then also I decided I might as well keep fit. I started doing PT here; I think it was in 210. I had a regime: Every morning I was doing PT for about 2 hours or something like that. This was after torture and everything had gone down. I was literally fit again and I was not going home so it was theatre and then PT. And then there were many of us on the same floor, taken for different things, I

found them here. The other thing was that every evening we tried to communicate. Oh yes, we did. We would bang on the wall and then the next one bangs and then you shout into the corridor and then the next one picks it, it takes time because they don't hear you very well. They keep on saying, "Repeat what you said," and that kind of thing and then eventually you got the message then the next one passes it to the other one until all of us on the floor got the message. There were others on the other floor they also used to get those messages. How those messages went up I don't know but they sometimes started off with me or with Frank and then they go through the floor on which we were but I can bet you, top there, they got the message. So that also was something else we used to do. We had solidarity with each other, we were not in for the same thing but some of the guys who were in, were Clarence Hamilton's friends, so they were in for him and I was in for him at the same time except that I didn't break. They I think told them, that I did. Opposite there was a guy called Frank Molobi and further down was his cousin Eric Molobi. And then we were diagonally opposite with Frank so I could see him and so it was easy to communicate with him. And where he was, he was opposite the corridor diagonally, they bring you in Frank is the first one to see you, he tells me and then relates it. They take you out; Frank is the first one to see you. That kind of a situation. Another program was for us to sing. We would start songs. One cell would start a song, it would come, come, come, pick it up, we are all singing. So day after day, that sort of thing. Then planning escape as well. Ridiculous, we don't belong to the same unit, I come from this, but if we could escape. That was also some of the possibilities we were thinking. We wanted to. Then amongst us there were others who broke down and were co-operating and actually almost working for the system, which was very sad but as soon as somebody broke and did that, they took him away. And that person was one of those who were relaying messages. I remember one day Frank banging down trying to get this guy next door to relay the message until I said to him, "Frank that man is not there," and this was round about one o'clock at night. So eventually we learnt that he was away but he was already suspect that he was working against us, he decided to do a deal. So solitary confinement was kept by things like that. And then also by trying to break the law. It's something you just want to do because you undermine it as well. There are young people they used to take them for passes or for housebreaking and theft and things like that. They were not confined so they run all over the place so you try and use them to send messages or anything, do spying for you and so forth and so on. I remember one time; I wrote a letter and gave it to Frank to read. Now Frank should have read that letter and push it down the toilet pale and then send the message somehow, (or late Frank, he's passed on). One of these young prisoners running around Frank called him, gave him the letter. It didn't get far before they intercepted it. But it was intercepted by an ordinary police, not the security police. That policeman took that document to the security police. And they came for me, "We found a letter that says that you guys must not give state evidence but you say you know nothing about Clarence Hamilton," and so that was real bad for me. And I came and in fact that was the first time we quarreled with Frank, "What did you do with the letter?" "I gave it to the young man to pass it on" "But why didn't you do it with the usual, destroy it?" and he gave a reason. So I told him, "That letter has been caught and now I'm in real trouble." I tell Frank that, he sent that message. They called me comrade MP (Member of Parliament). He sent the message, "Comrade MP says that the letter he gave to me which I gave to that young man has been caught." The next one sends the same message, it was ringing right down and I decided, "No I'm with a careless lot of people" and eventually I owned up, I said, "Yes I wrote the letter but I gave it to Frank." What happened to it is none of my business, but I wrote it. The

questions of why I wrote it, I told them well I just felt we must stand together they said, "You don't know them?" and I said, "Yes I don't know them." But it was part and parcel of hanging on in solitary confinement and so on. The following day I was taken out. They came in, "Pick up your things", and I thought, "Ah, I'm going home at last," and then I was driven to the Hillbrow police station, solitary. There it was not bad, there I was in real theatre. There I really acted, I was alone and there was a big courtyard in front of me. And then I managed to ask the prisoners who cleaned my cell, they didn't want me to clean it, they brought these guys in. So I told them I need newspapers if they can smuggle them in. They didn't know why I should have newspapers smuggled in so I explained to them that also was political work, "Oh, then you must be somebody, are you also a prisoner of power?" they said to me, I said "Yes." I had newspapers like anything else. Under my mattress, there was a little mattress. It was packed solid! So at night, I actually even rationed my reading because I knew it's gonna take me some time. And then there were Afrikaans newspapers and I couldn't read Afrikaans and I try to tell these guys, "Don't bring me Afrikaans newspapers." Some couldn't read so they just brought Afrikaans newspapers and there were more Afrikaans newspapers there than English because the police were mainly Afrikaners, but that's something else at Hillbrow police station, solitary. And then I took another program. I used to play football and I used to get annoyed because I couldn't kick with my left foot. I learnt out to kick with my left foot. One day young women were arrested around Hillbrow. So I think they had a tennis ball and then it fell into my cell. I didn't send it back. When I left prison, I could kick with my left same as I could kick with my right leg. That gave me time that solitary confinement gave me time and I also continued PT. When I went to court for the first time I was very fit and very organized because I came to accept it and look after myself. That's how I spent most of the time in solitary; doing things like that. Also in solitary, bees used to come in and they would die in the courtyard and I would become their doctor. I will try and... but they all died. There's not one that survived my treatment. Ladybirds came, you do something. One day a mouse came into my cell and then three cops came almost simultaneously and I told them there was a mouse in my cell, I wasn't scared of a mouse, but just to keep, and the thing is that it was amusing because then the mouse jumped from where it was and the cops ran. I mean I enjoyed that for days afterwards. I really enjoyed that; I couldn't believe that these guys could be scared of an ordinary mouse.

Q: Could you see anything from your cell?

A: Oh! Yes. Hillbrow I saw nothing, it was too high and a little at the back of the police station, one could only hear the birds and the machines. However, in cell 210, there was a window and it was high. So you had to lift yourself up and hang on, but you couldn't hang on for long. I saw the motorway. You could see cars. But it was dull, you would see the cars and see the sunset but it was tiring. But when I was upstairs, yes, I could see the same cars and motorway, though you still had to lift yourself up to see. Besides that there was nothing. Just one light bulb and out of sadism, it's on for 24-hours. So, basically all you did was sleep and wake up to the light bulb. You go to sleep, its one, you wake up, it's on. So aside from those strenuous exercises trying to see the sunset and the cars passing on the motorway, I couldn't see anything

Q: You talked about hatching escape plans with your fellow prisoners. Do you remember any of these escape plans?



A: Ja. We couldn't conclude, but the idea was to get out and whoever got out had to tell people outside what's happening to us inside here, because some people didn't know where we were. Now, how we would do it was one through bribing one policeman and we didn't have money, so I don't know what we thought we were doing, but luckily he didn't bite and also he didn't report us, but he was removed, so maybe he tried and they took him off. But the idea, as I said, was if we went out, to tell the people outside what it was like. On second thought, it was really silly. But we hoped that if one managed to get out, you could mix with the common prisoners because they were all over. The police here were not the security Police. We were not looked after by the security Police in our solitary cells. We were looked after by the local guys. They don't know us. They don't know us so we could just get away. One of us, Trevor Bloom, had been taken upstairs, I don't know what for, but he was part of that combination. I don't know what happened, but a door was opened and Trevor tried to make it and there was a black policeman, called Makhombisani at the time was looking after Trevor, that's what I was told, and he apparently took his gun out and tried to shoot Trevor, right inside here. How I was told is that he handcuffed me and I said, "Since I've been here, I've never been handcuffed. Why are you handcuffing me today?" and he said, "Because Trevor tried to run and he's lucky we missed him when we tried to shot him." With me what I felt that, if I escape I'm not even going home, but I'm going straight for the Botswana border. I was sure of that.

Q: Did you ever see a District Surgeon or a Magistrate during your time here at John Vorster Square?

A: Ja, I did after interrogation and torture. I told them that I was ill; because my rib was a problem...I thought that it was broken and so forth and he did arrange it. They took me to a place up in Harrison Street and he examined me, but he found nothing wrong with me, which I think was part of the system. Because I was trying to raise an issue that I had been tortured and I am in bad shape, and the military people should be able to bring this out, but it turned out that it was part of the system, because also as he was examining me two black policemen were next to him. So, maybe, if I could communicate to him that I was being tortured he was going to be in trouble, because they never left our side and so I did not achieve what I thought I would achieve. And, in fact I nearly put one nursing sister who was my wife's friend in trouble, because I made signals that I had been beaten up and I realized that she understood my message, because she eventually got the message to my wife, although after three to four weeks from that time. I think that she was also not feeling good or was afraid of passing on that message. But, I eventually managed to get the message out that I had been tortured and beaten, because Raymond Tucker, my attorney on hearing that forced them to produce me, which was the first time that my wife saw me and he also gave them the allegations that I had been beaten and tortured and they refused to get me to see my wife in that state and only after I had recovered, although without any medication, I saw my wife and I was fine. When I eventually saw my wife there were two cops on guard listening to our conversation, but I managed to get the message to her that I was being tortured, hence Raymond Tucker's intervention.

Q: How long had you been here in detention, before that first time that you saw your wife?

A: I think that it was after April. Towards the end of April for the first time

Q: Did you have any kind of regular visits after that time during that time that you were here?

A: She was allowed to see me once a month, but I did not know when that would be...I would just be taken upstairs and made to sit there she would be brought in from wherever she was received and we would be given 15 minutes then she would go. Again, it would be another month, and then of course that's when she would give me new clothes and also another system for her to see that I was still alive.

Q: So, were you allowed food parcels?

A: Yes, food parcels were allowed in, but it would be searched and by the time you got it, they would have made a mess of nice prepared food going through it, but you ate that.

Q: What was the food here like?

A: During detention here, it was good food. They used to buy us fish from a café, which was not prison food, but once I got to Hillbrow I didn't know what I was eating and at the Fort it was worse. Rotten fish brought in soft porridge and wings of the rotten fish sticking out...no spoon, so you had to sort yourself out, as best as you can. So, when the food came, you didn't know what you were eating, but you took it in...what could you do? And there it was not conducive that food could be brought in by the family from outside. That was when I was awaiting trial.

Q: Do you remember anything about the smell or the sound of the John Vorster Square?

A: Here, I remember the shining floors, the metallic gray floors in the corridor...the clanging of those gates...the force and the ringing keys, almost every time there is a ringing key and you would wonder which cell are they going to open or are they coming to my cell? Also the force they did it with and the echoes in the corridors...of the common prisoners or the police, doing their thing. Everything was violent: whatever they do there was anger, shouting, pushing people about. I remember those things. And, then in the offices of the Security police...cleanliness, orderliness, but frightening there. There was a lift and once you are in it you are already in prison, even, if you are a visitor, you're in prison. It's controlled by them, doors open by them, shuts itself and once you are in there another automatic gate opens and that's it, you are at their mercy. Those are really some of the most frightening things that were not okay for me...upstairs order, calmness, but a cruel calmness of people with no souls –dead souls. The person who was in charge of my case and my interrogation...huh, I've forgotten his name now...in his office he had pictures of his family and on the left wall would be the drawing of Van Gogh and obviously my eye would go to it, as somebody who was interested in the arts. He would then say, you are making an affinity with that painting...you see artists are dangerous to democracy, in a society like this one...you and your poets, painters and all the others you can cause revolution. I remember in my book saying, Van Gogh was there and his sympathy with them was somehow helping me out, you know, but really saying, "Van Gogh, you are one of us, why are you here with these guys who treat us like this?" which is what was going on in my head. In other words, I was saying there shouldn't be a Van Gogh painting there, it doesn't belong to them, but he had it there and you could tell that he felt pompous about it, so I don't know whether that was intentionally directed at me or it had always been there. Those are the images that I remember of this place, the shiny floors, the echo, no order etc.

Q: Did you ever get the sense that you're interrogators might have some sort of humanity in them?

A: No, they pretended that, I think so, but it was part and parcel of breaking you down. I remember one time one called Cronwright came along, I had never met him before, but he looked like one of the chief guys, supervising my case, though he was not involved in it. One day he comes along bringing oranges with him, which I thought were from home, but then of course when that was the case I would be taken upstairs to receive them, so he says, "No, this is from my Captain." And, this was towards Easter weekend, so he says, "My Captain says I must give you this, it is towards Easter weekend and you are lonely." Now, you could think they are very nice, but to tell you the truth when I opened that orange I thought it was completely, thinking that it was poisoned. I didn't eat it. I just left it. It rotted there in my cell. I never touched it. Then the same Cronwright, a very cold-blooded animal, he comes in and says, "Do you know Michael Pheto?" and, I said, "Yes, I know him." Then, he says, "He's dead." And, he left. Ja, things like that. So, to answer your question on their humanity, I think it was a very twisted type of humanity, because I don't know how I knew Michael Pheto, but just like that. Sometimes I would think he

was lying, but eventually my wife told me that Michael had died. So, there were schools of them...the other one beat me up (I wish I could remember his name)...it was during this session, together with a fellow called Visser where they were beating me up and his wife or girlfriend phoned him, so they were quarrelling and he said some of the rudest and disgusting sexual things in my ear, but speaking to his partner on the other end. He also threw out the black security cop who was there, shouting, "Get out of here! What are you listening at?" I thought that maybe it's a breather for me, but he quickly shouted at me, "You! Come back! I don't mean you, but that other fellow!" But the main thing from this was the crudeness of his language to his partner that you wouldn't expect from a human being, but then the funny side is that later when they had left; I was mocking the black cop telling him how pathetic I thought he was for being thrown out, whilst I remain behind, "I must be better than you." One would take it out on these guys, because there was one black cop without fail each time the white Interrogators went for tea or something; he would take over. And, as he tried to interrogate me; of course I had no time for him, so he would try to impress me by telling me about Nkrumah, you know, and Communists and they take other people's wives, and that sort of thing. Other black cops would actually sleep whilst I was standing there, so basically it was he and I. And, if I could escape that was the time, but then I thought I wouldn't get far. Anyway, those were the types of black cops we had.

Q: Were there any emotional effects on you after your release, as a result of your detention?

A: In fact I think I am different person from who I was detained. Whether it was because of the discipline or the disorientation or something. Otherwise, generally, my family thinks I'm fine; they don't see anything, but sometimes they don't understand me; they don't know what's wrong with this guy...out of a tangent, he's not a person we know. Even now on the farm I can be there, but not communicate with anybody for two or three days and it's no big deal to me. I think they are the problem, but I couldn't be bothered whether they talk to me or not; it makes no difference to me and I can go on long spells like that. Then, year before last I started writing a book, I told nobody, and finished it in August last year, but only told my family then and we were just sitting around the table with them when I said, "By the way, I have just finished a book." But, of course every night they watch TV, I disappear, but my wife was aware I'm writing something and she says she thought I was writing the Azapo things. Again, even now I'm putting the book into an electronic version and for me it's normal. So, basically I'm not the same person as I was before I went to prison, because even in our meetings as Azapo I look at everyone and when I think about the fact that we've all been to prison and many of us do strange things sometimes. So in a way there are many of us who've lost that normality.

Q: What does the building represent to you personally? Or, what does it mean to you?

A: Since, I came out of this building, that is since I came out of prison; I've always wanted to come back here for a tour from where I went in the first time through the lift, into the chamber, the offices of the Security police, into the interrogation room (but I don't know whether we were all interrogated from the same room or what, because I've always overheard other interrogations, whilst I was in my own) and then down the passage into my cell...I've always wanted to do that as a cleansing process, I don't know, but also wanted to come with my family, then maybe they will understand when I sometimes I disappear into my mind. Personally, I'm fine, but I don't know what they are going through and maybe it will be a cleansing process; and I think it's normal to do something like that. Visually, I never forgot the blue color of the building, the structure, what it looks like. I usually say to an Azapo friend of mine that we should come here and have a 'cleansing', but these are thoughts. I want to achieve bringing my family here, like I took them to the Fort, some of the structures are not there so history is gone. For example, I could see the cell I was in, I really wanted to see the cell I was in ...first there was a dungeon, then a 6X6 cage that I was also put in, which I was told is not yet open for tourists, so I hope it's still there, as I would really like to see those places.

Q: Sir, how do you think the past of John Vorster Square should be commemorated?

A: It's a pity, because the 'new' structure looks rather nice and fashionable, if you can say that. This was not our entrance, this was the common prisoners; we went in from the back and that's what I'd really like to be kept as is, otherwise history's disappeared, particularly the lift that somebody controlled somewhere, because, that's the memory of the revolution and if it goes there's no point in telling anybody what being here was like. The interrogation room. Heystack's office should also be kept, as he was the one controlling the system and giving instructions...especially the spacious and expensive furnishings of it, because those things are exhibits of what they did to harm us, because most people have been harmed by this system and, if you take things like those away you remove the story.

END OF INTERVIEW

