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"VOICES OF RESISTANCE"

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INTERVIEWEE: ASHA MOODLEY

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DS: Good morning and welcome. My name is Dimakatso Shongwe. Today we are interviewing Asha Moodley. Thank you for your time, we appreciate it. Should I call you Asha, is it fine?

AM: You are welcome to call me Asha.

DS: Thank you. Asha could you please tell us a little bit about yourself? Where and when you were born?

AM: Oh, okay, I was born quite a long time ago, in 1946. I've just turned 56-years old. I was born in Pietermaritzburg, which is a fair sized city in the Natal Midlands.

DS: That's where you grew up?

AM: No, I actually grew up in a little town called Colenso, which is also in the Natal Midlands. It's now a moribund town. I think, at one stage it existed because of a hydro-electric Power Station. It wasn't big by any standards. But at least, it was alive. Today there's nothing really going for it.

DS: Okay that's where you started schooling?

AM: That's where I started schooling. I did my primary school education there, then I went onto my secondary schooling in Pietermaritzburg at an all-girls school. And after I had passed my Matric I went to Salisbury Island, to the University College

for Indians. It was one of the many bush colleges that existed for black communities and the university at Salisbury Island was specifically for Indian students. I did a BA degree and qualified as a teacher. I had a very short-lived career teaching career. I think, mainly, because of my politics. And then I think, I've had a very varied career. I've done several things. I worked, for a time, for the Black Community Programmes, as a researcher, and then when the leadership of the Black Consciousness Movement was put on trial in Pretoria, I went to Pretoria for quite a number of reasons, and assisted with seeing to the needs of the prisoners of the SASO/BPC trials together with Vino Pillay. And then when I came back - [interruption]

DS: Can we pause?

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

DS: We are back. Asha, would you like to tell us a little bit about your parents' background and your grandparents.

AM: Okay, my parents. My mother was a worker in the home. I want to recognise the work of women at home. My father also was a worker. I think he did several kinds of things to bring up his children. He worked for a while in a grocery store and then he undertook a whole lot of little enterprises on his own, like selling machines, taking up insurance, working at a bottle store. So he went through several jobs trying to raise us. My grandparents, well my paternal grandparents, lived in Ladysmith. I know they both passed away when we were quite

young. As for my maternal grandparents, I don't have much recall about my grandfather, mainly because, I think, he must have died by the time we were little children. I do remember my grandmother though, but she too died when we were quite young. And all I remember about her was that she smoked a lot, in a very awesome way. I mean I'm not sure why, but as kids, we were always fascinated by the way she smoked. She didn't speak much English, [but] she used to tell us these stories in Hindi. But one didn't really have to understand much Hindi to know what she was trying to say but that's my [grandparents].

DS: Okay, were they born here in South Africa?

AM: I think my dad's parents were, but my mother's, I think, came here when they were quite young.

DS: Okay, the community you lived in, in the Midlands, what were they like, how were they?

AM: I think, the communities there were very small. There was a very small so called Indian community, African community and Coloured community. I have a sense of us all being together because we were all living close to each other. In one sense, we were all part of one community, although at the same time, I think we were aware of certain differences. My overriding sense is that the white community was a community apart from us. And I think this was for several reasons. Although as a child and couldn't quite articulate it, I was quite aware that they were privileged. They were the ones who decided how the town ran. Sometimes when you walked through their particular areas they would set their dogs on you. You weren't supposed

to walk through that area as a kid. And I think as a child you sort of you know, in a very random fashion, catch on to common trends and so you sort of notice that if you are not a white person you were treated in a particular kind of way. And that this white community out there were the privileged community.

DS: Okay, the schools, the school you attended was it mixed also?

AM: It was. I think because it was a small community, it was mixed to a certain extent. I think the school I attended had a fair number of so-called Coloured students, there were fewer African students because there was a so-called African location on the outskirts of Colenso. I think we were together, mixed before the coming into existence of the Group Areas Act. I don't quite have a sense of when that came into effect, but at some stage we all lived in the little town of Colenso and then when the Group Areas came into effect all the communities, tiny though they were, were sort of shifted out of the town itself. So that the Indians were put in one particular area, the so-called Coloured community, and I always remember this. I have this picture of a row of about ten houses, which were there for the Coloured community, and then a further distance away was the African location. So I have a very clear picture of my childhood that at one stage, you know, of our lives all the communities could get together in the centre of town. And then, I think, around the time when I was in standard six the Group Areas came into existence.

DS: Okay, if I may ask the Group Areas Act, did it affect you personally, as an individual?

AM: I think, I was a child then, and didn't really appreciate what it meant. I do know it meant that before the houses were actually established, the school was built out of the town, so we had to walk from the town to the school and that was about a 40-minute walk both in the morning and in the afternoon. So I do have a sense of that kind of thing happening. But ya, you did, I think, at the back of your mind, you sort of questioned why you had to do that. And why [some] people were still in the centre of town where it was much more convenient. I can't say that sort of politicised me, it just created a kind of awareness of inequality.

DS: Okay, so were you talking about primary school?

AM: Ya.

DS: Okay, in high school, how was it?

AM: In high school it was very different, I was in a bigger city, Pietermaritzburg. And I suppose, in a sense, it was far more convenient. There was no question of having to walk great distances. The only thing that I did notice was that at high school, most of our teachers were white women. There were very few Indian teachers. It was an all-girls' school. So I don't think there was much opportunity for political debate at our school, because our principal was a White person. And so were most of the teachers. So I don't think they would have allowed those kind of critical discussions to take place. I think I was more aware, there, of the differences in religion. And the kind of importance people attached to coming from

different religions. And I certainly discovered that if you belonged to the church, whether Catholic or Anglican, then you were supposed to be superior in some way to those who were still Hindus and, you know, sticking to your traditional religion. Not that I was particularly religious, anyway.

DS: Okay, you were not religious person?

AM: No, I used to go temple with my aunt and I think I just enjoyed being with people and not so much interested in ritual, but I think that's the kind of sense of community. But if I have to go and pray every Sunday I don't think I would have done that if I were compelled to I don't think I would have done it.

DS: Okay, sorry, you've got your sisters and brothers?

AM: Yes I do.

DS: How many were they?

AM: I, have four sisters and one brother.

DS: Are you the eldest?

AM: I am the eldest.

DS: Oh, okay. They also went to school with you, where you schooled, basically?

AM: Ya.

DS: Okay, so what made you go to Maritzburg then?

AM: Oh, okay, there is a simple incident. There was a teacher, I think, who actually made me decide to go to Pietermaritzburg. He was quite horrible and I don't know what happened, but I remember him telling me that when I went to Ladysmith, because he eventually went back to Ladysmith, he was going to get me. And also I think Ladysmith was very traditional. We had had several teachers coming over from Ladysmith to teach us, mainly male

teachers. And I think towards standard five and six I was very aware of how, I don't know how to put it but I personally found them quite horrible, the way they beat up the girls sometimes. And sort of, you know, would sort of hit you and then you would sort of dance your way back to protect yourself. And I thought it was very undignified and the thought of going to spend the rest of your schooling years in Ladysmith where you would find these guys, just didn't appeal to me. And ya, I wanted to get away.

DS: Okay, so you matriculated at Maritzburg?

AM: Ya.

DS: After that you went to Salisbury High. Would you like to tell us about life in that college at Salisbury?

AM: Ya, Salisbury Island was quite a discovery. I had always had the illusion that at university you were a free individual and, you know, it was a place where you could really find yourself. But I discovered that at university you were sort of subject to other kinds of oppression. Although, at that time, I wouldn't have been able to articulate it as oppression. But I initially enrolled for a science degree and I always remember this - I've always had problems with men, somewhere around. I enrolled for chemistry and during a practical session there was this short technician, who came to help me, because we were doing titrations, and I turned a tap on and the solution just flowed through, and he came to help me. And then he said to me, "You're a real shorty, aren't you?" And I looked back at him and he was just as short as myself, so I said to him, "You're not very tall yourself." And he suddenly

lost his temper and took off with me, and after that whenever I attended chemistry practicals he was quite mean and nasty and hardly helpful. And, I think, that made me decide that I wasn't going to make it in science and I switched over to an arts degree.

DS: Just like that?

AM: Just like that, but ya, maybe I was ultra sensitive or something, but I just didn't think I would make it in chemistry.

DS: Okay, so the social situation, let us talk about that. I've interviewed a number of people, and since Salisbury Island was basically for Indians, correct me if I'm not right here. How did you view it?

AM: I think, at that time, it was a place where you could get a degree, especially if you came from a background where there wasn't much money, and I suppose in a sense you felt you had no other choice. Should I carry on?

DS: Yes.

AM: Okay, and I think, as a young person you have dreams. You sort of say I'll take my life each step, as it comes. So for me it was a place where I would get my degree and work my way from there. I was aware that one didn't have much choice as to where one could go. But that was the choice I made then.

DS: So who were your colleagues?

AM: In my first year, I had a number of - I think my colleagues were very different from the people with whom I finally ended my college years. There were quite a number of students from the then Transvaal. People like Talib Mukadam, and I think they played

quite an important part in my life because for the first time we started engaging in real political discussions and debates and I don't think we engaged in much political activity but at least those debates took place. And they were very, very important, I think, in really shaping my political consciousness, then. Because, I think, I basically came to university with a very chaotic idea of the politics, not a very clear idea of what was happening. I mean, I did know that Whites were in power and that the rest of us didn't hold much of it. But getting a clearer more detailed picture came from these discussions.

DS: Okay can I say that's when you started to be aware of racial oppression?

AM: Not really, I think I was aware of that during my high school years, but there wasn't much taking place to give that awareness more form and shape. I think, at high school there were so many other things taking place, there wasn't much space for that kind of thing. There were other things that took place during high school, for example there was the Potato Boycott, there was an organisation known as APDUSA that came and held a big meeting. And we sort of attended as students and we raised our fists and, you know, shouted slogans like, I can't even remember what those slogans were. But I'm not really sure that we understood everything that was being said. I'm not going to pretend about that.

DS: Okay so after - you completed your degree in three years time?

AM: No, much longer.

DS: Much longer, and then after completing it you were qualified as?

AM: As a teacher, a high school teacher.

DS: Okay.

AM: However, my first school was not a high school. I ended up teaching at a little primary school, at a place called Malagazi. And Malagazi is a very poor area, and it meant travelling out quite a bit. But I think I enjoyed that very much because I was in touch with a very poor community and I felt that my skills were needed, and that I did make a difference, at least in the life of some of the children. I think some of them had been passed over. There were several students who couldn't read and write although they were in standard one [Grade Three]. And I think, that was a real challenge to my teaching skills, so that year I found very useful. And then, in the following year I was, or have I got it the other way round? I went to Tagore High, where in the middle of this school rebellion -I think at that time, the principal had gotten a student pregnant. And I went there in the middle of various protests, at a time when there were quite a number of protests, both by the students and the community, taking place against him.

DS: Okay, what year was that?

AM: Gosh, that's quite some time ago. It would have been in the late sixties, early seventies.

DS: Can you still remember when you completed Matric, the year?

AM: Ya, I think in 1964.

DS: And when you completed your degree?

AM: It would have been in what 1969, so it would be in 1970/1.

DS: So if I may ask, immediately after your completed your Matric, you went straight to the university?

AM: Ya.

DS: Okay. Coming back to the that school you talked about?

AM: Ya, I didn't realise, as a new teacher that even the teachers were not talking to the principal. And I think, I basically went about doing my teaching, but I eventually did have to. I ended up having to make a decision because I remember this incident quite clearly. I was in the staff common room doing some marking and the principal, what's his name? because he'd done this in quite a number of schools, came into the common room and there was another teacher there, and I think there was an altercation between them. I can't remember what they quarreled about, but later he came and wanted me to sign a statement to the effect that she'd been insubordinate and he wanted to get to her dismissed and wanted me to be party to his move. And I said I wasn't going to because I wasn't really involved. And I noticed that after that incident, every lesson of mine was scrutinised by him. He would come in all the time. And then one day he came to the classroom where I taught English and, I think, the students there had done a whole lot of poetry and writings. I think I taught in a way to create political awareness in the students. At that moment, at that particular moment, in my life I think I was already a member of SASO, so whether you were a teacher or a doctor or whatever, I know one of our missions was

to make people politically aware. And I think, teaching provided an opportunity where you tried to make students politically aware and I tried to do that through encouraging students to write about their experiences, and to write in all kinds and forms, poetry straight prose, whatever. And one of the projects was a weekly newsletter. And I think part of the process also involved critiquing not only, you know, the outside environment but also looking at your school, looking at your teachers, what they said and encouraging them to actually dialogue with their teachers. To be able to say to the teacher, "Look, I hear what you say but I don't quite agree," or you know to, I thought at that time, we thought that the process of questioning began wherever you were situated. In any event, the principal noticed all these writings, and one Friday I came to school to find Mr Zwiegelaar, who was the Chief Inspector of Education I think, in Natal at that time and I underwent interrogation for about two hours. And basically, he said that I was introducing insurrection at the school and that I would get fired and I said that I was an English teacher and part of English was enabling students to be critical, and that I felt that I was doing my job, as a teacher. And well, I thought I would be fired, but I wasn't, except that in the following year, in January, on the first day when I came to school, I was told that I would have to go to another primary school. So I was sent from a high school to a primary school.

DS: Okay, so how was life then, in that primary school?

AM: I didn't mind it because I think I'm a good teacher. And teaching did bring out my creativity and I like children of all ages and I try to relate to them. I don't think I succeed all the time, but sometimes, I do. And I think teaching is one area where you can see whether you are making an impact, almost immediately. I mean you can see it in what the students do, and how they do things. So I enjoy teaching.

DS: How long were you teaching?

AM: I'd say about three years. And then something happened in my personal life, and I had to resign. But I think a large part of it, the reason why I didn't get the kind of support that I required from the principal and the teachers had quite a bit do with my politics. Because when I eventually returned, and went to the department to get back my teaching job, I wasn't able to. And one of the reasons was my political background.

DS: What did you do then thereafter?

AM: Thereafter, I got a part-time job with the Black Community Programmes, assisting in their research project. At that time, the BCP was producing several publications. One of them was Black Review, so part of my job was to get newspaper cuttings, file them into particular subject categories, and isolate themes, which would be written up for Black Review. And then later I actually did writing because the person who was doing the actual writing was banned. So I took over her position.

DS: Okay. Was she banned because of her political involvement?

AM: She was, ya.

DS: Okay so were you ever being harassed or something by the Security Police?

AM: I think we all were, in the sense that the police were always around and, you know, you'd suddenly look around, and there they were. But at that time, I don't think I was ever sort of arrested or anything, at that particular stage. That came much later.

DS: Okay what year are we talking about?

AM: I think we're probably thinking about when's it now 1972.

DS: 1972.

AM: I'm trying to think, when did the Frelimo Rally take place?

DS: 1974

AM: 1974, ya. Look I know there was a lot happening I've really become old now. [laughs] There were lots of student meetings there I really have to probably sit down and write things out in kind of chronological sequence. But there were all these uprisings in the various campuses. And I know that there were student leaders who came across from the Transvaal, the Eastern Cape and there were lots of meetings in, was it the Natal Tamil Vedic Hall? Those were very exciting times, and then as members of the Black Consciousness Movement there were things we protested against. For example, the activities of the Natal Indian Congress. They had several meetings, and we basically challenged them for confining their concerns to the Indian community only, because I think we wanted to open up to the rest of the broader black community.

DS: Okay can we pause.

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

DS: Okay we are back. Asha, you said you were a member of SASO. If I may ask, why was it established?

AM: SASO, okay I think SASO was established mainly because black students on campuses had, had enough of being represented by white students. Basically, they found that white students, through the white student body, the National Union of South African Students, didn't really represent the aspirations and hopes and fears of black students. And, I think, at the level of the universities, that was one reason why the South African Students Organization [SASO] was formed. But on a broader level, I think, students who were members of the broader black community realized that there was a political lull within in the black community. And that there was a great fear, on the part of communities, to engage in political discussions and action. And in a sense, that was only natural, because the other liberation movements, the Pan African Congress and the African National Congress had been banned and the Movement that came after them, the Unity Movement [APDUSA], I think most of the members, at that time, in the early seventies, had been put on trial, and just been sentenced to prison. And I recollect that we did go to Pietermaritzburg to attend part of the trial so that's my sense of things, then. I did mention that there was a great fear on the part of people to express themselves politically. And we had some very clear-thinking people then like Steve Biko, Harry

Nengwekulu, Barney Pitiana, Strini Moodley, Rubin Phillip, Vuyi Tshabalala, Mamphela Ramphela, who sort of analysed the situation of black people. And I think, one of the things they identified was the kind of psychological fear that black people had. And I think, there was also analyses of the previous liberation movements, that while we spoke about physical liberation we hadn't really addressed the question of psychological liberation. And I think, one the assertions of the Black Consciousness Movement was that perhaps one of the reasons why the liberation movement, as a whole, wasn't progressing was because our minds really weren't free. That perhaps our aspirations, the kinds of political solutions that were visualised were always sort of steeped in a kind of context defined by white people. That psychologically we had imbibed a lot of western values. And I think the idea was to deconstruct our own conditioning to, to look at ourselves as human beings. To look at our past, look at our roots, our own communities and look at the values that had guided the communities to see what we could extract from that, extract what was valuable. And also to, to value ourselves as black human beings who could also think creatively. Because one of the things that struck us was that white people had intervened at certain steps in the liberation Movement and sometimes it seemed that the black community was taking its lead from the kinds of things expressed by white people. I mean we can mention for example, the South African Communist Party, which was made up of quite a number of white people, and to us, it seemed that

somewhere along the way they had hijacked the national liberation struggle of the black people. Those were some of the ideas that we dealt with, but by and large, we wanted a kind of struggle that would be really initiated by black people and be the creation of black people. And when it came to political solutions we wanted political solutions which were those as articulated by black people because we felt that black people were best suited to define what kind of political situation they needed. Now that's looking at it, at the broader level, but at the student level, one of the first steps to take I think at that moment was to extricate the black student body from this white student body and I think that's why SASO came into being.

DS: Okay we talked about early 1970's/72, so now I just want you to tell me, you said you were involved as a researcher with the Black Community Programmes. So how long did you work there?

AM: I was on a part-time basis. I would say it was 1972/3, even into 1974. And then there was the Frelimo Rally and life seemed to change dramatically after that.

DS: Would you like to talk about the Frelimo Rally, why it took place?

AM: I think quite a lot was happening on the African Continent at that time, quite a number of African States with whose struggles we identified were making a bid for freedom. And the Frelimo Rally was seen as important because we saw that as the coming into being of the Frelimo Government in the new state of Mozambique, as the fruition of the struggles of the Mozambican People. And for us,

that was really great encouragement. It was what we hoped to sort of see in South Africa. And I think the idea of holding the Frelimo Rally was to encourage South African people to also go on with the struggle and to also pledge our solidarity with the people of Mozambique.

DS: What happened during that period, I mean in your life?

AM: You mean after the rally, during the rally? Well I just remember that it was a time when most of the leadership of the [SASO/BPC] Movement was arrested and after that the police were really looking for people, and it was a time when several of us were arrested quite a number of times. Just picked up by the security police and interrogated about things and treated quite brutally. I mean these guys would pick you up and, I remember once, walking down Grey Street and I turned around and there were these two security cops,. two very big guys. I've forgotten their names. But they just sort of hauled me off the street and when I protested in the car I remember this guy giving me such a hard shot [slap]. Sorry, Du Toit was his name, ya, he was a hell of a big, burly guy. I was actually dazed. I think I only sort of came out of it once we arrived in Fisher Street. And I just had on jeans and a very short top and these guys passed the most terrible insulting remarks. You really felt quite degraded, exposed and vulnerable. And I suppose deep inside you there was also a kind of anger because you couldn't do much about it. You wanted to do something about it but you really couldn't do much about it. But at that time, ya, there was quite a lot

of police harassment and I think quite a number of us had to lie quite low. Also meant getting rid of a lot of books, scouring our rooms getting rid of all the SASO publications, whatever BCP's material you had. Because they were also looking for that and we did have a lot of valuable reading material. So this, in a sense, sounds bit odd now, I mean its seems to have happened - it has happened such a long time ago, but it was quite an intense time. You're sort of living on edge. You think about it now, you I suppose, you say well I could have done this, I could have done that. But at that time, it was quite different.

DS: Okay when was this, can you still remember the year?

AM: Well it happened, when did we have that rally? September 1974, and the guys were arrested shortly after that. And then we went to Pretoria, that would have been in early 1975, ya. I remember Vino was it, yes, Gwen (Mokoape) and I travelling by train. Gwen had just had her second child, Mangi. Mangi was about a week old. And we took this long trip to Pretoria because the guys were making their first appearance. I think it was quite a heavy trip particularly for Gwen because this baby was just a week old, and going to Pretoria was quite terrible too. Going to court was horrible. There were all these police on guard. We weren't sure whether we were going to see the chaps at all. And there was a huge crowd, and when we met with families of the other detainees, there were those dogs and we had to push through with the baby and Gwen. And there were hordes of people because there had been quite

a bit of publicity around the detention of well, the SASO trialists the SASO/BPC trialists, as they were known. It was quite rough because I don't think we were very used to Pretoria. We eventually became quite fond of Pretoria, in an odd way. But at that time, it was a totally new city for us, and it was a very, very military town. There was a heavy - you could see lots of soldiers and policemen, that's one thing that struck you about Pretoria then. And all these Alsatians that accompanied them. So definitely, there was a lot of hostility but eventually we did the see guys coming in, all looking quite well, they looked quite skinny and lean. But they were, shockingly in the most amazingly high spirits, and I think that boosted our morale because I think the period prior to that had been one of great anxiety and stress. I think, particularly, for the families because it was difficult to get information. But the only source of information was Shun Chetty who was the lawyer representing, who had been asked by the families to represent them to find out what was going on. But because they were detained under the Terrorism Act which, I think, was one of the most, one of the harshest acts we've ever had in this country. It was very difficult to get an idea of what was happening. But I think, based on the experiences of people who had been detained before, we were pretty sure that they had been subjected to all kinds of harshness and torture et cetera. And I think, later on those fears were borne out by what the guys told us.

DS: Can you still remember the names of those people who were tried?

AM: Okay there was Saths Cooper, there was Aubrey Mokoape, there was Nkwenkwe Nkomo, there was Zithulele Cindi, Rubin Hare who was the youngest trialist, I think. Which in effect, I think, how old was he? But what it meant was that as one of the persons charged he would have been fourteen when he started. I think one of the things (charges) was conspiracy, so it would have meant that he would have been 14-years old when he participated in a conspiracy, alleged by the state. And I think that was one of the reasons why he was eventually discharged because the charges of the state were shown to be absolutely ridiculous. Who else was there? Oh Mosiua Lekota, who actually got married in the course of the trial. And I was his witness, at the wedding, which took place in Pretoria Prison. And gosh, I'm terrible, Lingum Moodley who was eventually discharged. I think I got most of the names, but I think I've left out some.

DS: No it's fine. So your parents by this time, were they supporting you?

AM: Oh no, no, no, my parents were typical parents. I don't think they wanted me to be involved. Mainly because they were scared about what would happen. And I think parents, of that time, didn't support your activities precisely because of their fears for you. It wasn't anything else, they just didn't want you to get involved.

DS: Okay can we pause?

AM: Ya, sure.

RECORDING INTERRUPTED END OF TAPE

RESUMPTION ON SIDE B

DS: We are back. Asha, I believe you were in the theatre. Would you like to tell us about that?

AM: Ya I was. I do think I was a terrible actor. But anyway, I don't think one needed to be particularly star material to participate in these productions. At university, I did say that the students who played an important role in my life in my first year were people from the Transvaal. But in my second year, I met people who actually came from Durban. People like Strini Moodley, Ben David, Dennis Pather, later on Kiruba Pillay and Sam Moodley. And I think I got involved in university theatre because of my relationships with these people. Generally, the student body, I think, was quite apathetic and didn't want to get involved in any kind of student politics. And we thought that one way to engage them would be something that would be student friendly like, you know, a kind of theatrical production. And I think it was mainly people like Strini, Dennis, Kogs Pillay and Sam and Kiruba who got together, and devised a review called "Black on White" or firstly we called it "The Clan" because they categorised themselves as The Clan. And we had a whole lot of sketches produced, which generally satirized life on Salisbury Island. It satirised the authorities, also the attitude of the students. And the idea was to stimulate debate et cetera. But they went down really well because they were quite funny on the one hand, quite political in content, but very funny. So much so, that people said that we should carry on producing them. And usually during Republic Day, I think the authorities tried to hold some kind of official ceremony, but we never attended that. The

Clan basically used to have some kind of event usually a production and students would attend. But we would hold these outside the student hall. There was still a lot of fear on the part of students because I remember, at one stage, we had a kind of mock Republic Day ceremony where we had a dirty hanky on a broom and we said this was the Republican Flag. And there we were, in the centre ,and the rest of the student body was around us, in a circle. But what was striking, was the kind of distance between us and them. To a large extent it reflected the kind of fear that people had to engage in politics, at that time. In any event, like I said, we were encouraged to take that out of the university, so we did. And I think for - was it about three years, we regularly produced a review called "Black on White", in which we satirized the broader South African situation, and those were extremely popular. But I think, at that time too, people were starting to say things through theatre. Exploring communities and their fears because there was also another production by Ronny Govender, called "Talking Turkey" which I think also attempted, but I think, within the Indian community to look at certain things. Eventually, well at that time, we produced "Black on White" under the name of The Clan and the person who was our director was a very eccentric chap called Subash Maharaj. He is now in Canada, I think. But "Black on White" I think did extremely well in promoting a kind of awareness because we went to most of the campuses. And then that was also a time, I think, when some of my gender conscientization started taking place. I'll

tell you about that a little more. We went to most of the campuses, Fort Hare, the University of Zululand, we even went to Rhodes, we participated in some event at Rhodes, but ya, we really became, I think we were actually in demand. People wanted to see this thing. And the way other theatre groups as well, eventually I think, some groups in Durban got together and formed the Theatre Council of Natal [TECON] together with I think people like Ronny Govender and I forget the names of the other groups. However, there were some disagreements, and eventually it was just one group which sort of retained the name the Theatre Council of Natal. And I think the Theatre Council of Natal was very much part of the Black Consciousness Movement because the idea was also to, to promote Black Consciousness and what it stood for through the medium of arts and culture. And for two years running we had theatre groups from all over the country, black theatre groups, coming together, in Durban. And I think very few people actually recollect that part of our history. And they were very, very important because we had groups from the Western Cape. there were the Serpent Players and I think that was the first time people had actually seem them in Kwa-Zulu Natal. People like John Khani and Winston Ntshona, they all came down - it was fantastic. And it was just fantastic to see that there were people who had similar ideas, you know and I think what one got was how sort of isolated we were from each other. And I think these festivals were important because they sort of gave you the sense that you were not alone and that what

we had was the beginning of the growth of kind of movement. Ya, so, ya I said we had those festivals going for two years. We also went to Rhodes University, where we, I think, made a real impact. Eventually again, I think, because the state intervened the theatre movement also collapsed. Through the theatre, the festivals, we also established a kind of national theatre union, the South African Black Theatre Union [SABTU] which I think, was headed by Saths, Strini, John Khani and a whole lot of other theatre personalities. I think there was eventually, that festival also moved to the Western Cape. I think that's where, in 1972, ,that's where it happened, I wasn't there at that particular time. Ya, so if it did eventually come to an end, that was because of state intervention. Ya, so that was one branch of the Movement. At the same time there were lots of youth Movements, there were the South African Students Youth Movement, there was ANAYO the Natal Youth Organisation, TRYO the Transvaal Youth Organisation. In my mind, there was a lot happening. There was the South African Students Organisation, the Black People's Convention, then the Theatre Union, and your variety of youth organisations. Your community development organisations, so at that time BC had really spread and I think that was the Movement, the consciousness of that particular moment in history, and I think it was really revolutionary because it did speak about black people being the architects of their own destiny. And that slogan "Black Man," although it's sexist in a way, "you're on your own," was important, because it did put the responsibility

of political liberation et cetera on black people and said: "listen, no white savior, no other person from outside there or wherever, is coming to save you, you've got to stand be on your own."

DS: Okay, you said earlier on, you are going to tell us about your gender awareness.

AM: Oh ya, right. I don't think it was highly developed then. But look, there were certain things that you noticed, at odd times. I must say in SASO, women were given a lot of space. I mean if I there is one thing I recall and that's people like Vuyi Tshabalala who's sadly deceased now, and Mamphela Ramphela, who were really outspoken, and I mean really did a hell of lot to give direction to the Movement. But I'm talking about when you went out say to campuses, then you'd sort of get a different kind of thing. I mean you'd sense this kind of male outrage, if say some of us stood and I know who, particularly, Vuyi, because she was very strong and very forthright. If she stood up and made a statement the guys would actually say: "look at this woman telling us what to do." And of course, she smoked and that was a primary sin then, and they said "she's smoking, going against our culture." And "she's wearing jeans, even worse." But Vuyi would just deal with them, you know, in a very perfunctory, direct way. But ya there was this other thing, you were safe in certain spaces like conferences and so on, you were free to say your bit. But I think when you went out, at other meetings, you were also aware of this other, other thing, this kind of prejudice that these were uppity women, you know. And I suppose that's one stage,

some stage it would have raised itself but given how things happened, the fact that there were all these raids, people were being banned consistently, every time one set of leadership was banned and a new leadership arose to take its place, they were also banned. So there wasn't much time to sort of engage in that.

DS: Okay let's go back to the BC trial. You were still telling us how you managed to be there in Pretoria and...?

AM: Ya, I think in Pretoria, basically, the first people we met were, were quite political in a sense that the friend I stayed with was someone I had known during university days. So they were quite willing to provide accommodation and to assist you in whatever way. Then there was also the Naidoo family who have always been politically involved. One of their sons, Indres Naidoo had been tried politically, and I think at the time, when we went to Pretoria, he was already serving his sentence on Robben Island. So there was that kind of support, mainly because members of people's families had been involved politically. So ya, and I think, although people might not have participated politically there was always sympathy for people who were active in politics. So people showed their support in a number of ways. Eventually I think, there was this very kind old man - what was his name? but we were given a little place to stay in. We were asked to sort of prepare the food for the guys. See to their needs get their books and when their families came down see to the families

and so on. But ya, the community there was very supportive.

DS: Where was this?

AM: This was in oh in Marabastad.

DS: Marabastad, okay.

AM: Marabastad at that time was quite an interesting area. I think I remember having visited Marabastad when I was a child, and the Marabastad that we lived in, I mean came to in 1975/6 was very different. I mean it was, in a sense, not as lively as it used to be prior to the Group Areas. But still, it was quite a lively place. Although parts of it you could see were deserted. It was quite a good place to be in eventually because we came to know everybody and I suppose people were very much aware of the trial because every time there was a court appearance, the papers did cover it. And so people came to know who we were. Even the skelems [gangsters], hey, [laughs] used to come to us and say if we needed transport, we could approach them.

DS: Who was that?

AM: Well people we came to know. Some of the guys had who had cars and so on used to come and say if you wanted transport we could use them.

DS: Okay, I believe Winnie visited the BC trial, would you like to tell us about that?

AM: Yes, Winnie did come to the trial, and I think it was one of the most encouraging things for us. It was great. I think, the one thing that I must emphasise is that the BC Movement has never seen itself in opposition to any of the liberation Movements that came before. Rather, we saw ourselves, as part of a

continuum, there's always been for us, there has always been the Liberation Movement. And the Liberation Movement has been either sort of personified through the ANC or the PAC or the Unity Movement, at different stages. And of course, it's being attacked by the system. So we see that the Movement, as a whole, has had very live moments and then there are other times when it's quiet, because it's been under attack. So certainly when we came in we saw ourselves as part of a broader liberation movement. We might have been critical of some of the positions taken, but that was par for the course. I mean we were also subject to criticism. And I think our dream always was of all the Liberation Movements eventually coming together to iron out, to thrash out a political blueprint for this country. We certainly didn't see that the destiny of this country would be defined just by one Movement.

DS: Okay how long did you stay in Pretoria?

AM: I think it was about two years.

DS: Two years.

AM: Two years.

DS: Was it which year was this?

AM: 1975 and 1976.

DS: Okay 1975 and 1976. Okay, would you say, like you know, there is this misunderstanding of exactly who were responsible for the 1976 uprising? You hear people saying ANC was involved and by that time obviously ANC was banned, so in your opinion?

AM: I think the uprisings must be seen in the context of those particular times. I would, I don't know whether any Movement, any organisation per se, can

say that it was because of them. I would certainly see it as an expression of black consciousness, though. But at the same time I'm not going to say that it was the Black People's Convention that was responsible for it. Nor will I say that it was the South Africa Students Organisation, but certainly I think, it is a result of the kind of awareness, political awareness that was created that was re-awakened by the Black Consciousness Movement. Because I think if we look back in history, quite honestly, the other liberation movements had been banned during the sixties. There was a political lull and understandably so, because there were very draconian laws passed. The Terrorism Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, people were detained indefinitely for hell of a long periods of time. And I think one can understand that those things would have a kind of deterring effect on any kind of political activism that people might want to engage in. And certainly people will tell you that they worked underground. I think the difference between those organisations that worked underground, you know during the 60's, and the BC Movement that came into being in the later 60's and was at it's height in the early 70's right up till about 1978, I'd say. The BC Movement worked overtly and was heard quite openly at conferences and I've mentioned all those movements to you so I would say that the uprisings were a kind of expression of black consciousness without specifically saying that any organisation was responsible for it.

DS: Okay after the trial what happened?

AM: After the trial, well people went off to prison. I came back to Durban. And I must say it was strange coming back to Durban, because on reflection, it was two whole years out of one's life. And then I received a call from Mamphela and Steve who asked me to come to King [King Williams Town] to work in the research department of the Black Community Programme. So in a sense, it was like, you know, going around in a circle and coming back to where I had been before going to Pretoria. So I worked, I think, I had just only started and then in August, I'm always very conscious of August 26th because that's the day when I was arrested. Well two weeks before that, Steve (Biko) and Peter (Jones) went off to Cape Town. Steve was banned, at that time. The purpose of their going to Cape Town was to meet with members of the other liberation organisations. I think to engage in talks and I think, at that time, I don't think I'm not, I'm not saying that I was party to anything. But I certainly know that there was the idea certainly amongst all the Liberation Movements that it was time that they all came together and started working out things for the country. I'm just putting it in very broad terms but I know one of the purposes, the prime purpose of that visit of Steve's was to meet with members of other Liberation Movements in Cape Town. And that was going to be part of a process. I don't have details of that process.

DS: Okay so you worked closely with Steve Biko?

AM: Well I worked with him on the publications, the publication section and whatever was happening in

the Eastern Cape, ya, I certainly worked there, attending some of the many conferences, and so on.

DS: Would you like to tell us about your arrest?

AM: You mean the details and everything? Okay when, when I was arrested, it was quite terrible actually, because after Steve and them were detained, Steve and Peter. I suppose most of us felt that there wasn't much to worry about that, the most to worry about was the fact that Steve had broken his banning order. But I think a day or two after their detention things became very ugly because the police in King William's Town started coming over and, I think, over the next two weeks they basically arrested members of staff, and started confiscating a whole lot of stuff from the offices. And in the end, I think, there was only myself and Malusi Mpulwana who were left in the office, so it was quite a horrible feeling to see the offices, which had once been quite full, empty of people and of most of its equipment and publications, and well, I think they had taken, the day before I was arrested, they actually told me 'we are going to come and pick you up tomorrow.' It was difficult to know what to do with that because Malusi said, 'well maybe you should just skip, go away.' And I think I didn't want to do that because I actually believe I said to Malusi, 'look, I think maybe just detention for a few days or maybe they just frightening me because this is what cops do.' And I actually I think when the guys had been arrested after the Frelimo Rally, when I first went to Pretoria, I was told to lie low for about a month, which I did. And it was horrible. So I said I wasn't going to go through that

experience again. And I must say I didn't believe that anything would come out of this arrest of Peter and Steve. Well, on that Friday, I remember they came and they arrested me and that was in the evening.

DS: What year was this?

AM: 1977.

DS: 1977.

AM: And it was dark, and it was cold, and there were it was two policemen from Uitenhage. So you get quite an eerie feeling being driven along in the night, and then I was taken to Uitenhage, put in a cell. And all I remember was that I had on these boots and coat and warm clothing and I wouldn't even take off my boots for the whole duration of that weekend, because you just sort of felt you had to keep yourself together. It's difficult to recollect all that, but I know I did feel isolated and that feeling of isolation had already started to grow because of what had happened at the offices, you know, with the arrest of people. But on that Sunday of my arrest, it was quite late at night when two very short and mean-looking white men came into the cell and they said: "so you are Asha." And I said: "yes." And they said: "well listen, you better make up your blessed mind to talk or else." And well they came into the cell and this guy sort of, while talking to me, you know, sort of pushed forward, so that I eventually sort of backed into the wall. But there was something terribly menacing about these guys, small as they were. Later on I realised that they were these cops from Port Elizabeth. In fact, their parting shot to me was

"don't think that we are like the police from Durban or King William's Town", because I'd also been picked up in King William's Town on one or two occasions. Because all these people wanted to know what they called me a Kerriekos Meisie. What a Kerriekos Meisie, a so-called Indian woman, was doing in King William's Town with African people. I think that was something highly unusual for them. But by and large, they basically said they were going to teach me a lesson. And then, you know, I remember that one day. My cell had been full of mattresses, you know, these thin mattresses. But they came, the warder's came that day, and cleared it up and I was left with just two mattresses. I think that was on the instructions of the PE police and whereas during that weekend I had been taken out to a small quadrangle to get some fresh air, from that time on, I wasn't allowed to get out of that cell at all. And then I wasn't allowed to wash or anything. There would be a woman prison warden who would come to see if I needed sanitary pads or something. And but there was no place to have a bath or a shower or anything. I wasn't given any change of clothing, nothing. I do remember that, sorry, I think it was on the 12th of September. I remember that very clearly because of what happened later. I used to keep tabs on the dates by scratching on the wall. I was picked up by two guys and taken to PE this time, to that Sanlam building where I think some detainee had been thrown down the stairwell, because that's the first thing they do anyway when they take you there. They take you up to that stairwell. I found this out later from other people,

and tell you, 'you see,' and they make you look downstairs, and they used to tell you that's where you are headed for if you don't co-operate. Well, I was interrogated about a pamphlet that Steve was supposed to have drawn up. And according to the police, I had been at the office on the Saturday when that pamphlet had been drawn up and photocopied. And essentially, what they wanted me say was that I had seen Steve firstly, that Steve and I had sort of drawn up that pamphlet. And that Steve had photocopied it for some group or other from PE, and actually no such thing had happened. So it was the easiest thing in the world for me to say no, but I just remember saying, 'no you're wrong.' I think the next thing I just felt this horrible, horrible pain and then I realised that there was a guy behind me with a piece of green hose. And then there was another chap in front of me with his open palm and essentially they beat me up with a length of green hose. And this, you know, every time you sort of...

DS: Can we pause?

AM: Ya.

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

DS: We are back. You were still telling us.

AM: Ya, I think it was a very traumatic experience for me because I was badly assaulted. And if you think about it was, on reflection, over something that really wasn't true and I didn't know anything about it. Apparently there had been some pamphlets circulated in Port Elizabeth, at that time, which were supposed to be highly inflammatory, but by

then, and I think, I think it brought home to me, how deadly this system was, in a way. How you could just be killed in total isolation and I think, I think it also brought in a sense how lonely the other, the other people must have been who died in detention, like Mapetla Mohapi, a comrade. I think you know, that period was particularly characterised by a number of deaths in detention. There was also the death of Imam Haroon, I think, which sort of impacted on your consciousness, ya, but the brutality of the system, I think, on one level really comes home to you, at that kind of stage. Because you really discover how alone you are, and well, and what sort of licence these guys had. By the end of the day I couldn't see a thing because I think my eyes - I could just see a teeny-weenie bit of the world, that's how bad it was. But I think I was kept there the whole night. I think somebody else was also being beaten up and assaulted. Because eventually, I just said out of pure sense of survival, oh no, no this is what happened. They brought one of my colleagues to me, Inzangu, who used to work at the Zanemphilo Clinic, that's were I stayed when I was in King William's Town. And Inzangu was bleeding he was bruised there was blood pouring out of his nose and he just looked at me and he said, "Asha," I think this was the tactic of the security cops. "Asha, why don't you tell them that you had the keys to the office." And that well basically they had obviously asked him the same questions about the pamphlets. And I think the idea was to let me know that if I didn't sort of confess, he would suffer. And he actually said to me "why don't you

tell them that you had the key and that you saw the pamphlets." And it was quite a, I don't know, it was traumatic looking at Inzangu. I suppose we both traumatised each other and I never really met him after that. I'm not sure what happened to him. When I went back, I just said well maybe one just has to say that one saw this thing. But at the same time, at the back of my mind I was very aware of the real reason that Steve and Peter had left. And I was really worried about that. And, I think, psychologically, if you feel that if you say yes to one thing, then you might sort of weaken, and say yes to a whole lot other things. I was very anxious about not letting on about that. Amazingly they didn't question me about the purpose of that trip, although towards the end, I think they were saying things like I mean in their Afrikaans that "this one knows things." I know a little elementary Afrikaans but I think by that time they had beaten the hell out of both me and Inzangu and probably other people. And maybe they were, I'm just conjecturing now, but perhaps it was quite late at night, they must have felt that they had done their day's work. But I stayed there in PE overnight and then the next morning I was taken back to Uitenhage to the prison cell, and then about an hour or so later a magistrate was brought. And the magistrate looks at me and he was a white guy and he says: "are you okay?" And any fool could just see that I was obviously not okay. And that's another thing that just made you realise how really alone you were, that you could be killed and nobody would know what had happened to you. And in a sense, I think, it made me realize,

like look, I think there is something happening out there with the rest of the people who had been detained. What it is I don't know, but I just knew then that it wasn't going to be just a few weeks of detention. So ya, the magistrate came, I think a doctor came. I was given some sedation and I think - I don't know how long it took for me to recover from the sort of physical wounds, but certainly I knew I was on my own. But about a week and a half later I was taken again for interrogation. This time it wasn't about - well they did ask me about the thing that I was really worried about. This time they said: "well, you did say that you saw the key and so on and you know about the pamphlets." And then I said well, by that time I had had time to think about what I would say if I went back to interrogation. And then I told this guy I said: "well listen, I actually lied to you." And you know if anything floored them it was that. And "no but you said" I said "yes I said that because you beat me up." And he says "you're telling me that I beat you up, but I wasn't here. This is the first time I'm coming." And that's how they sort of played around with you, pretend that you, you know, you're making a mistake and so on. It was the same guy who had been part of the interrogation team. And I said "no it was you." And he said "I never saw any such thing. It was you who actually put words in my mouth" and I said "I just thought to stave off any more beating, I'll have to say what you want me to say." Well there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing and I just remember sitting there for the greater part of the day and then in the evening I was taken back.

But I had a feeling that there were other people also being interrogated, at that time. And then I was taken on the third occasion, but nothing happened I just sat in that office and I was just taken away. But on reflection, I think by that time, they were trying to probably concoct a kind of story because by that time Steve was dead. I didn't know about that. I think I only came to know that Steve had died late in December. And during the time I was taken into interrogation, I think the cops were trying to attempt to put together a plausible story which they could sell to the public and perhaps because of what all of us had said maybe they realised they couldn't. But the long and the short of it is that I didn't know what had happened to Steve until December when one of the Uitenhage police came and just said, very starkly "by the way do you know that your friend is dead." By that time I thought that if anybody, you know, would be really killed to that it would be Peter. Because I sort of believed Steve when he said, Steve used to always used to tell us "you know what, you guys you must really prepare for detention." And we used to ask him what about yourself, so he say's "well me, look, they won't really touch me "because and it's true he was internationally known. During my stay in King William's Town, he used to get all kinds of visitors from overseas so it's ironical he was recognised. His teachings et cetera, the BC Movement were recognised overseas. And he says "they know about my international connections" and so on. And so I thought if anyone would die it might be Peter. So it was a hell of a - not that Peter is of any lesser value

- but I think it was the stark way in which it was said. And I actually thought that maybe they were trying to, you know, blow my mind because I was kept in isolation and it's very difficult to keep yourself together while in isolation. So I thought maybe this was one of their ways to try and break me down. But there was one Uitenhage policeman who was in charge of me. I think he used to come on Sundays just to see how I was, and then I asked him. I said "listen, can you, I mean is it true that Steve is dead?" And he said "it is." And I said "well get me something." He was at least approachable. And then he brought me an article, a newspaper clipping which sort of confirmed to me that Steve was, was dead. But it was very, very difficult after that. And I had a kind of routine to sort of keep together. I could tell you a bit about that.

DS: Can you tell us.

AM: Yes, they would come in the morning bring your breakfast just two slices of bread and coffee. And then I would sort of just sleep for an hour and then I would sort of draw on a kind of chessboard on the floor and I had made my own version of chess. I had made my own chess pieces out of bits of toilet paper and sort of say, okay I'm going to play, you know, two games because that helps to pass the time. We sort of get to know the time because they'd bring, would bring you the meals regularly at fixed hours. And then I'd exercise, walking up and down the cell say taking 5000 steps that's your exercise. And then you have another little sleep and then they would bring you your lunch and then you

play games again and exercise, it's a hell of a routine. I just wonder whether I would be able to do that again. But sometimes you do sort of wonder whether you're daft, or what. But there were some hilarious moments too because I think after the third time I was taken for interrogation, from what I gather there was a lot of concern expressed by our friends about the welfare of...

DS: Oh, can we pause?

END TAPE 1B

TAPE 2A

DS: We are back you were still telling us about how you managed to, you know, to pull yourself through, while you were in detention.

AM: You mean keep myself together?

DS: Yes.

AM: Ya, well I think I had lots of models to draw from too, because other women had also been in detention, other people. I mean they had Vino, there was Cele Bridgette Mabandhla. She is our deputy Minister for - gosh this is disgraceful, Arts and Culture, she played an important role in getting back Sarah Baartman's remains. But from all accounts she underwent a harrowing experience and eventually, she was the only prisoner, woman political prisoner, in the women's prison in Pretoria. And I think, at one stage, we used to actually take her, her books and meals. Ya, so whenever it got bad, I mean you always, it was useful to think on other people. But then you also had to use these other strategies too, to keep together. And I suppose one of the questions you

always ask yourself is whether you are 100 percent or what? You never know.

DS: Okay, how long were you detained?

AM: I'd say just under one and a half years. I went in August and I was released in August 1977, and I was released in December 1978. But not all of it was in solitary confinement. I think I spent about six months in solitary confinement, and then I was transferred to the Grahamstown Prison under Preventative Detention. And that if you can call imprisonment better, was certainly much better. I went there and found Dimsa Pityana. She'd been detained, so it was great seeing her. Actually we had lost contact with each other for years, after she and Barney left Durban. So it was great meeting her, even if it was in prison. And she had also been in isolation and, you know, for her, meeting myself and Nohle Mohape, who had also been detained, it was a sort of good reunion, even though it was in prison. But that was for a short-lived while. I think eventually, there were other women who were brought in because they were detaining women under the Preventative Detention Laws. There was Bandi Biko, and gosh I've forgotten the names of the other people. But for a while there were about four or five of us. And eventually they were released, and then I was on my own for several months before I was eventually released. I must say after having people and then being in isolation again, it was a period of re-adjustment. But at least it wasn't as difficult as the solitary confinement part because this time I had books and a little transistor radio, so if you have that I think you can

survive anything. Especially if you have been, anything's better than solitary confinement, I think.

DS: Okay, so did you go to trial?

AM: No, not at all.

DS: They just released you?

AM: I think with all of us who were detained, we were just kept there, I think, because there was tremendous publicity after Steve died and I think there was also a great amount of concern expressed about the rest of us. But I think they didn't want to release us soon, possibly because of what we might just say, at that particular moment. Perhaps their strategy was that if we were released later, you know, the whole storm would have died down so we wouldn't have made much of an impact, if we were released later. I can't really say what their strategy was, but that's my own explanation of it. But ya, all of us who were detained didn't go on trial at all. I think the idea really was to get Steve. And if I recall the words of the policeman from Port Elizabeth, basically they did see that see the King William's Town Police as being weak and ineffective. Because Steve had been arrested a number of times, but he'd been able to argue his way out of most of the cases brought against him. So I think their idea was that they were really going to get him, and see him go to prison. On the other hand, of course, there have always been questions about whether Steve's death was a pre-meditated thing, and whether it was their intention anyway to kill him. I've never really been able to get much on that.

DS: Can you, are you able to recall how other people who were detained were killed?

AM: Well there was Mapetla Mohapi who was supposed to have hanged himself. You're talking about people from the BC Movement, or just generally? Other detainees are alleged to have slipped on a bar of soap, while having a bath. (Ahmed) Timol's is always graphic. I mean they tell you that he attacked a policeman, and then tried to escape by jumping through a window, on the seventh floor. I mean they really must have taken the public for being absolute fools if they wanted to sell a story like that. But, ya, people died under horrendous circumstances. It was always a joke when people were being arrested and if you sort of warned them "make sure you don't slip on a bar of soap" or something like that. But it's impossible, you know, hanging yourself and so on, because when you go to prison they strip you of your belts et cetera. You've got to be pretty innovative to sort of reach up to the windows, which are very high above, to hang yourself. So it's just a ridiculous, the kind of things they came out with.

DS: Okay, so after you had been released, what happened?

AM: Oh on release again, all these things seem to take place in the night. I just remember, one evening two guys coming and saying "okay, pack your bags, you are now going home" and well I was handcuffed and driven all then way from Uitenhage to Colenso. Well, before we set off I was given a five-year banning order. It was read out to me in prison. So I found myself coming back to my hometown Colenso.

Dependent on my parents, it was very hard because like I said, Colenso was a very small town and there is no work there. And I was confined to the magisterial district of Estcourt so there wasn't much opportunity for work in that area. It would have meant travelling out and coming back and I don't think many people are very keen on giving employment to someone who was banned and marked as political. And even though Colenso is a small town the security police were there. They came regularly, they sort of asked the community about my movements, and so on. And I did get charged with breaking my banning order. I went to Estcourt, to a party, and someone spoke about that and well I was charged and found guilty of breaking my banning order. I don't think people took banning orders seriously, and if you take Steve, if you take Tenjiwe Mtintso, who was banned and restricted to Johannesburg,those are prime examples of how seriously people took banning orders. Like Steve used to travel out quite a bit - very few people knew about it. He used to go to Johannesburg and I believe he made a few trips down the Eastern Cape and Tenjiwe used to travel all the way from Johannesburg to King William's Town. And that's quite a distance, spend the week and then go back, so we had a very good networks. People used to know how to deal with that. And even at the time, when Steve left, I mean he just told me "please tell Mama" that's his Mum, "that I'm off, and that she's not to worry, I'll be back." And his Mum knew that he went out. But that's, those are the last words that Steve said to me and

that's my last recall of him in his brown corduroy coat and pants, which we always teased him about. And then, ya, just driving off into the darkness with Peter. Quite a number of things happened in King William's Town, you know, Mamphela Ramphela was the resident doctor there at the Zanemphilo Clinic. The Black Community Programmes did quite a number of things in the community. The clinic was a great example of the kind of community development work the Black Consciousness Movement believed in, because people would come for health care needs. There was a place for women to have their children, there were regular classes for women nursing children. There was an agricultural officer, who went around the communities and spoke about basic food growing, sort of taking care of your needs and using the best agricultural methods. And we had a mobile clinic, which went out into the villages in the outlying rural areas. And I remember one occasion when I went with the team just to observe and we had to sit with the Chief and the Chief decided that we should have lunch with him. And I think there was Malusi, myself and who else was it, Nohle, and Malusi warned Nohle and myself. He says, 'listen, whatever happens because eventually we realised that we were being served with sheep's boiled, boiled sheep's heads, right. And Nohle said, 'I don't know how I'm going to eat this', because both of us couldn't stand it, but we had to eat that. We had to take pieces of it and then eat because Malusi said if you deny, you know, the hospitality the Chief's offering you, that might be the end of the project

and our visit here. So ya, but a lot of good work was done. And where was I, talking about Mamphela. Ya, about her work.

DS: Okay.

AM: And she was really instrumental there, as well. Right, and I think, because she was such a powerful figure in that area the police decided to ban her. And so while I was there, they served the banning order on her, which sort of restricted her right to the North of the Transvaal to Lenenia, I think, and I think it was one of the worst things that could have befallen the project, at that particular time. It was so unexpected. In any event, the banning order had her name spelt incorrectly, so technically she felt that, we decided that they had banned the wrong person. So she came back and the police couldn't do much, because they were told actually if the spelling is wrong you've got the wrong person. So she was able to come back and spend I think just over a week before they got the banning order right. But I think what I'm trying to illustrate is the kind of spirit that people had, you know, people were basically determined not to be cowed down by a banning order et cetera, and to go on. I mean if you look at the Black Community Programmes office in the Eastern Cape, at that time, it was a sort of tribute to the kind of strength that people had. Even before Steve had been taken away from Durban and restricted to King William's Town, but that didn't stop him from sort of reviving the whole programme in that area and getting it to spread. And I think, part of the effects of the work the evidence, that people were being made aware of

things was in the kind of songs they sang. And the poems they read out at some of the community gatherings because I think every six weeks or so at the clinic, there would be a big party, sort of getting together of people from the community. And there would be a lot of singing and speeches, but from what people sang about et cetera you could see that what the projects were trying to achieve, people working together, being self-reliant, and so on, was getting home. So ya I think, when one thinks of what the clinic was like later, I don't what it's like now it's very sad because it was really a vibrant place at one stage. I believe eventually this Ciskein Government took over the clinic. But it was a ghost of what it had formerly been. I would like to visit it now, because Steve's son Nkosinathi and his Mum are trying to get things going in that area through the Steve Biko Foundation.

DS: Okay so you were given a five-years banning orders.

AM: Ya but I didn't sort of, I think, after the third year my banning order was lifted. I think it coincided with the release of a whole lot of people from Robben Island. And quite a number of other people who had been banned also had their banning orders lifted. So I came back to Durban to look for a job.

DS: What year was that?

AM: That would have been in 1979.

DS: 1979.

AM: Ya, I think so, ya it's difficult to keep track ya.

DS: Okay so where did you work?

AM: I tried to get back into teaching, but it was still quite clear that there's no work for you. No, that's not 1979, sorry that would have been 19... I was

banned in 1978 so I spent about three years so that would have been, 19 beginning of 1982, I'd say. Ya so I came back to Durban in 1982, looking for a job. And it was quite dispiriting, and then quite by chance, Strini, my husband and I bumped into Chris Nicholson, who is now a judge. And, you know, someone we'd known, sorry.

DS: Speak up.

AM: Okay and well he generally asked us what the both us were doing and, I think, we gave him this story of our woes et cetera. And he said "listen if you can go and learn to type, I'll offer you a job. And if you'd like to do some administrative work for me, I can offer you a job." And he told me about the Legal Resources Centre that he had already started setting up, but it was going to be formerly launched in March. So any job was better than no job. I just thought that I would use that, take it, and then see where I could move on. But I'm still with the Legal Resources Centre, twenty years later. And so I went to learn to type, and I must have been the world's worst typist. And then I got to grips with administration work and eventually I started doing paralegal work and that's basically what I'm still doing at the Legal Resources Centre.

DS: Okay so after the, can I pause?

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

DS: We are back if I may ask in the 80's, or when you started working at the Legal Resources Centre, so did you continue with your political activism?

AM: Oh ya, I did. I think while in prison I read about the formation of AZAPO and I recognised it for

what is was as a continuation of the Black Consciousness Movement. And I think while I was banned I read quite a bit about the way it thought. And I think for me it signified that the Movement had changed somewhat. That, you know, where we'd said the beginning with spoken a lot about the doing away of psychological oppression and so on, which I think was important, self-help et cetera. The difference of the with AZAPO was that it was talking more openly about socialism, which is something I think we had sort of alluded to in the earlier days, we had spoken about communalism we had looked at African communalism. But here I think things were much more clearly defined. People were actually talking about scientific socialism and what it meant. So when we came back to Durban, I was introduced to AZAPO and I thought that the organisation was my political home so I became a member of the Durban branch of AZAPO. And I think it was very different from working with the Black Consciousness Movements of the past. Basically the people were younger, very intellectually inclined, lots of fierce intellectual discussions and debates. And for me, the one difference was that where is in the past people basically worked together as a team and really thought about power. You know power within an organisation there was that kind of a certain kind of lust for power within the organisation. Which differentiated AZAPO for me, from the old BC Movement. I'm not saying that those things are negatively bad I'm just trying to focus on the kind of differences. I was glad that, at least, there was a

movement there to relate to. And to sort of, you know, act around the issues of the day, but I think what I missed, was the kind of involvement with the community. While I appreciated all the kind of intellectual debates I think they are necessary for any organisation. Sometimes I got a feeling that people were rather fixated on the idea of being intellectuals, for the sake of intellectualism and that can be very sterile for any movement. I think that has happened in certain individuals would claim that they were the persons who really understood Black Consciousness and that the rest of us didn't really know what it meant. And that, for me that was personally very disappointing. And I think what really struck me to was the position of women. Sure there were women within AZAPO, but they weren't as many women as before and they didn't really participate that much in debate. Sure they attended meetings et cetera but they didn't vocalise and articulate their sentiments. As I think members of the previous generation of the Black Consciousness Movement had done. However, the basic guiding philosophy was still Black Consciousness and for me that was important and there were some very good people that I had encountered within the Movement. But I do think that in a sense that the, the emphasise on too much of debate has caused the splintering within the Movement I think you do know about that. We now have AZAPO and the Socialist Party of AZANIA, and I think, one of the manifestations of that lust for power that I have spoken about is, is the split within AZAPO. You know, for a long time we

debated whether we should participate in, you know, discussions with the government and so on. Some people felt that we should others felt that we shouldn't and I think there were a lot delaying tactics used. Mainly because people were jockeying for positions. I think one of the most disappointing things for me has been the return of the BC exiles. Many of us looked forward to the return, I think, the idea was that we would all work together but I think there was a clear desire on the part of the exiles to actually take over the Movement and that has happened. Because at the last conference that I attended a few years ago, I mean there were actually criticisms of the people who expressed particular points of view and statements like "we must exorcise, we must purge the organisation of these revisionists" Now that's sounds like something out of Stalinist Russia. So ya that was a hell of a disappointment to me. At the moment, I don't really have a, I don't really belong to an organisation. Because I think I've decided that I want to be part of an organisation that is disciplined, that is clear about where it's going and that's not going to engage in endless debates that don't materialise in anything effective. And I sound rather a traitor to my Movement but I think I have the right to be critical about it and I do say that openly to who ever I meet.

DS: If I may ask which individuals have influenced your political thinking?

AM: You mean within the Movement.

DS: Ya, or in general in both?

AM: I think most, most people, I think, one of the most obviously there has been Steve, there's been Strini, there's been Mamphela. I think I have always admired Vuyi because she was so fierce and strong and brave. Mind you after she qualified as a doctor she didn't engage with the Movement and we rather lost contact. But I always remember her then she, she was our Antigone. She, you know, in one of our productions was Antigone, which was an adaptation of that play which was based around resistance. It was the TECON production. And she took the lead role of Antigone, and in a sense, I think that role symbolised who she was. She was very strong and quite clear about what she stood for. And then there have been also other people like Debs Matshoba, she is still around, and there's Nomsisi Krai, who died. She was also a very powerful figure. And I think that's, I think ya quite a number of women have impacted on me because of their fearlessness and credibility to stand up and speak and say things outright.

DS: Okay which writers have impacted on you?

AM: Well I think Franz Fanon, "Wretched of the Earth", which I need to read again. The SASO newsletter that always contained "I write what I like", which was written by Steve that's also played quite an important role. And there have been any number of books, quite a number by black American authors. People who were, like James Baldwin who's been criticized, lately. I'd say ya, I can't name all of them. Oh ya, Malcolm X. It's difficult to remember all the books. I wasn't prepared for that kind of

question. Ya Malcolm X's biography was quite moving reading but I think Franz Fanon's is...

DS: Your favourite?

AM: Ya, and "Black Skins White Masks", and there was Paulo Frere on the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed."
Oh well, basically ancient books, hey, but I think they have got to be brought back because they still say very valuable things.

DS: The unbanning of the political organisations what has that meant to you?

AM: I think in one way it's been a big disappointment. I've always I think I said earlier that we've always as the Black Consciousness Movement seen ourselves as part of a bigger Liberation Movement. And one of the dreams we had was to sit with all the other liberation movements and work out something for the country. We felt that, that needed to happen strictly within the black community first, and that the black community, through its representative organisation should be laying the cards out to the other side composed of the various interested parties and not the other way around. My personal feeling is that the 1990 bannings were the outcome of negotiations that had been arranged before. If you look at all those trips that various parties made, big business, people like Van Zyl Slabbert and company taking initiatives, arranging meetings in Dakar and so on. Those were all prior meetings to what transpired in 1990, and I think, the real powers international and maybe local, had already decided that things had to be changed in South Africa. And, in a sense, the impulse for the situation didn't come so much from us. Oh I know, there were lots of

demonstrations and marchings et cetera but in the end, I think, where we are today is a result of what was decided by the big powers, powers outside of South Africa. And I'm not sure that the arrangement is to the benefit of the South African Community. Which is making quite a serious accusation but our government is not really the instrument of power in this country but may actually be an agent for forces much more powerful and stronger than us international capital.

DS: Okay, if I may ask why do think the National Party has agreed to a negotiated settlement?

AM: Why has it?

DS: Ya, why has it?

AM: I don't think the National Party was also told "look listen my dears we can't carry on with grand old apartheid as before we are not getting the necessary profits. We have got to try new methods of capital accumulation so we have got to establish a new kind of arrangement where we get black people in government." And of course black people are given certain powers et cetera. But ultimately the arrangements that will really benefit us will be defined by us and I think we can see it today. I think this country for example needs to define a kind of socialist programme of development but we are heading rather the opposite way. We are relaxing Exchange Controls; we are liberalising a whole lot of arrangements so that international capital can invest in here with most of the benefits going to them. If you read about the arms deal, for example, as an example of that kind of arrangement, you will see that it is outside powers who benefit

more. Outside multi-nationals who benefit more than the country itself does, and then all that talk about so many jobs being created et cetera have not come to fruition. And, I think, we the statistics in South Africa the situation itself speaks for itself there is growing unemployment, there is a bigger gap between the rich and the poor. We've seen a new kind of apartheid coming into existence. I mean if you look at Durban and Johannesburg, we find that the central business districts are collapsing because business has moved out, mainly white business they have moved out. And attracted other kinds of business to these huge malls, which benefit mainly, white businesses. Then you see all these new residential complexes coming about which are occupied by very rich people. And they're walled and have security guards, so it's just like a white laager has moved out of areas it occupied before. And they have moved into, well if you take Florida Road for example, if you go outside of Durban North you'll see examples of what I am talking about. And then a lot of these places are so expensive that's it's only those who have money and jobs can live there. So we are looking at a new kind of apartheid that's what I say. And if you look at the areas where money should be really pumped in there is nothing, there is very little happening.

DS: Okay, if I may ask, you can correct me if I'm wrong, as this interview progresses I can see that you are gender sensitive or should I say you are feminist, especially because of your badge or whatever. Do you think the government has addressed gender issues adequately?

AM: Let's see, we have got wonderful laws in place for women. We have a wonderful Constitution but that applies to everything else. I mean all kinds of socioeconomic rights, and rights for women; we've had any number of progressive laws but you the implications of all that means that you have to have your necessary infrastructure. You have to give resources, financial resources, all kinds of resources to make those things work. And I think that's where the government's plans fall short, and I think if there is a real commitment to change on behalf of women then those things have to happen. But we find a body like the Commission for Gender Equality complaining that they don't have sufficient resources to carry out their work. So I think an indicator for me, about the government's commitment, would be if it really looked at what these institutions need; the kind of training that people need; and supply the money for that to happen. That would be an indicator of its commitment but we are not seeing that happening. If you take the maintenance laws, for example, they have been changed, and they are quite good. But you actually need training for magistrates so that they know that there's the laws have changed and that they can't sort of have the same attitude towards women, that's not happening. And there's also, if you look at the maintenance laws, they also propose to have investigators to look for the recalcitrant spouses but that's not able to take off because there aren't enough resources given over in budgets for that to happen. So ya, rhetoric is all very well but they have to be matched by action and,

I think, one of the important actions would be resources of all kinds.

DS: If I may ask, the role of women in parliament is it, does it have an impact on the community, at large?

AM: Ya, I don't want to be hard on women in government because, I think, in one sense, it is a new institution for them. And let's face it the government is a very male institution. And I think it's been very hard for many women who are there, for women to do the things that they'd like to do. And I'm talking about this from the experience of some women who decided to resign because they've had a very difficult time. Some of them have been quite effective in actually getting certain laws changed. Like if you look at the New Maintenance Act, the Domestic Violence Act that has been the result of a lot of effort that has been put into changing the laws by women parliamentarians. But it's come at a great cost, because in getting some of the laws passed, they've had to be critical of their own parties. And, I think, anyone who's critical of their own party has a difficult time but I think if you're a woman and you critical of your own party it's even worse. So ya, I think I want to look at it that way. I think, Government as an institution has to be made more women-friendly. I do believe they have childcare facilities but that has to the women have had to fight for that. Those may seem paltry things they are important. I want to believe that most of the women have made an effort. But I don't think it's true of all women and sometimes there is a debate about whether you want women to only address women's issues, and whether you know you

don't want them to be able to engage in everything. I mean that's a critical question I think women should be able to participate in anything, but I think in this moment in our history alongside with that you also want to focus on women's issues. Wherever you are located because the position of ordinary women needs that kind of commitment.

DS: Okay I heard that you've got a publication named AGENDA, would you like to tell us about that?

AM: Okay there is a feminist publication AGENDA which is Durban-based and I think which we should be very proud of because I think it's actually the only feminist journal going maybe in Southern Africa. It's very, it's one of the very few feminist journals produced even through the whole of Africa we've been able to discover that. So I'm particularly proud to be on that. I serve on its board and I'm on its editorial advisory committee. And I think I am particularly happy about some of the things we have been able to achieve. At one time AGENDA was seen to be a journal mainly for white feminists and it was dominated by white women writers but we have been able to change that and to get quite a number of black women writers especially young black women writers to write for AGENDA. And I think that's a big achievement I would actually like to see more journals and publications like AGENDA because I don't think one journal is sufficient, given that there's so many women in South Africa.

DS: Okay I just want to ask about Umtapo, yes can you tell us what it is and all of that?

AM: Oh okay, Umtapo would define itself as a community service organization. It carries out quite a number of training programmes aimed at the youth and women. And I think its emphasis is on self-reliance and self-development so it sort of expresses the ethos of the Black Consciousness Movement. It's had a Women and Development course, which has become very popular over the years and I think part of its success is that it is very mobile. The course can be taken from Durban to any place. We've had an extremely good facilitator, Oshadi Mangena who's really someone you might interview, at some stage. Ya, and I think its had its impact because we have seen both youth and women in various areas setting up their own projects as a result of the kind of training they've gone through. I must point out that Umtapo came about after some of us broke away from the local branch of AZAPO.

DS: Can we pause?

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

RESUMPTION ON SIDE B

DS: We are back. Yes you were still telling us about Umtapo?

AM: Ya, you know like I said Umtapo came about because some of us couldn't continue working with the local branch of AZAPO. And I think that's partly because of that kind of intense focus on, you know, "I'm a better intellectual than you are" phenomenon that was pretty rife in AZAPO. But I think the break was necessary because basically nothing was coming through our involvement in AZAPO, at that stage, it has been several years now. And Umtapo has actually achieved quite a lot

because I think again its focus has been on the community, which I think has always been generally a focus of the Black Consciousness Movement. Your words must be matched by your deeds. And if you have too much of the one, without the other, then it's pointless.

DS: Okay now we will focus on the TRC issue. I just want to find out from you whether you submitted any testimony to the TRC?

AM: No I didn't.

DS: Okay. How do you view the TRC basically?

AM: Generally?

DS: Yes.

AM: I my general view was that the TRC didn't really benefit the people it should have benefited. Basically the black community and that it was really there for white people. One thing that's I'm very cynical about is about how the whole process has generally has been managed by white people. I mean I have seen Commissioners who were basically white who really had, didn't really know the intricacies of the struggle as a lot of black communities did. And to me the most striking thing is this whole thing of amnesty. A lot of people have literally gotten away with murder. And have been allowed to do so through a kind of legalised institution like the TRC. I know people have said that it's used to heal the nation but my personal view is that a lot of people actually came to accept – well, not accept, reconcile themselves with what had happened in the past. And would have been quite happy to get on with life to move forward. I don't think the TRC was a necessary process and,

all in all, I mean, with the fact that so many murderers had been allowed to get away with things means that for the future I just don't think it augers well. It means that people can commit the greatest crimes of human rights abuses and then at some stage, later stage, through an institution like the TRC claim that they were mere puppets or cogs in a wheel and not responsible for their actions. And I think my general impression is that the, the TRC has enabled people to exonerate themselves, to say that they weren't really responsible for what they did. And it makes a mockery of the kinds of struggles that black people have engaged in and the tremendous prices they have paid to attain liberation.

DS: Okay, now we have come to the end of our interview but before we finish this interview I just want to ask you two questions. Firstly, looking back in your political history, your life, is there anything you would have done differently?

AM: Maybe what I would have done is kept a diary. But actually that's not a joke because when I went recently to the Women's Day celebrations and one thing that struck me is that okay there is an important history behind Women's Day. What I like about the one celebration was how certain women ordinary women were brought to the function and you know given due respect et cetera. Except that the events seemed rather stuck at that particular point when women went on the 9th August 1956. And it was to focused on one party the African National Congress. Yet time has moved on and many more women from various political tendencies,

communities all kinds of organisations have actually taken this struggle forward. And I think we need to do that to pay respect to all women and not to make events and the creation of South African history, well, we certainly shouldn't portray them as a result of just one political organisation or part. The political struggle this year has been conducted by a range of organisations and a range of individuals some of whom weren't even members of any political organisations. And then it struck me that maybe as some one who has come from a different kind of organisation I need to actually go and record some of this history of my movement, particularly the women. Because I think women do have a kind of different perspective of struggles. They notice things that others don't, because I think when struggles are recorded as history, you know 'his story', the focuses are all on powerful leaders and, you know, maybe philosophical disagreements about different individuals. But women have a greater sense of the kind of day-to-day activities. The little things that eventually come to a big whole and really made a solid impact on struggles. So ya, I think, if I had to, then I would have kept a diary which might eventually have gotten into the hands of the Security Police. But still I wish I had recorded things in much greater detail. I'm not sure if I would have done things much differently I'm glad that I participated, I have been part of that Movement.

DS: Okay the last question, just the words of encouragement from you?

AM: For? For everyone?

DS: For everyone, for the youth, in particular.

AM: Ya I think we must all sort of start listening to each other. You know I mean I know I have a bias towards particular individuals and organisations. But I want to listen to what people have to say. And I think that's the general message that I want to give to anybody that we should talk to each other irrespective of where we come from. Irrespective of age, background. Because I think we just work on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices and we don't really know each other. And I think it's time we broke through some of our stereotypes and misconceptions. And I know life is so hurried, so quick, we don't really have time sometimes. But it's about time we made that kind of time. I suppose again that's something that's struck me at some of the August 9th celebrations. There was someone there I really admire Misa Malanje I don't know if you know her. But Misa is a fantastic person, she doesn't just focus on people who have become icons and so on she focuses on ordinary people. You know people who aren't really taken into account by most of us. But she has got that fascinating ability to bring them out and to talk. And they bring out so much that you don't think about.

DS: Okay, that now we have come to the end of our interview. Thank you very much, Asha, for your time.

AM: You are welcome and thank you for giving me the opportunity.

DS: Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS

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