

**KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED WITH YUNUS CARRIM, MP, IN  
PIETERMARITZBURG, 14 TAYLOR ROAD, ON MONDAY, 23  
OCTOBER 1995, CONDUCTED BY RUTH LUNDIE.**

**(‘L’ SHALL SIGNIFY THE INTERVIEWER, AND ‘C’ THE INTERVIEWEE).**

L: This is a recording of an interview with Yunus Carrim, MP, in Pietermaritzburg, 14 Taylor Road, on Monday, the 23rd of October, 1995. Yunus, please tell me where were you born, and when.

C: I was born on the 9th of April in 1956, here in Pietermaritzburg.

L: And you grew up in ‘Maritzburg?

C: That’s right.

L: And you went to school in ‘Maritzburg.

C: Very much, yes.

L: Was it Woodlands?

C: That’s right. Well, I would have gone to primary schools before that and it is then necessary to mention that at all it would be Slamear?, Lewitt? Mountain Rise, and then the high school career, was undertaken at Woodlands High School, yes

L: Yes, I see. And your first political influences, Yunus? Did they happen at school?

C: That’s right. I’m not sure what precisely motivated me politically. I was born in a lower middle class, Muslim family, brought up to believe that, well, I’m superior to Africans and Coloureds, but inferior to Whites. Also as a Muslim, a slight disdain for non-Muslims. That was my condition. I think to some extent, if I have to site early influences, interestingly amongst the influences on me would most certainly have been the liberal press, curiously enough, the Daily News, the Natal Witness and Sunday Tribune and so on. My father used to read the newspapers and I would buy it for him and you know, slowly I also began at a very young age to read newspapers and after he passed away, I would have been in Standard Six and that would mean I would be about twelve or so, I continued to read newspapers. And the focus of the liberal press on petty apartheid, on

1 separate park benches. on the notion that people of colour are inherently inferior is  
2 something that influenced me. As indeed, strangely enough did my very conservative  
3 history text books. AM Bouys? And Van Jaarsveld and so on, but focusing on the French  
4 revolution, the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity and the Russian revolution as well.  
5 Although they portrayed the Russian revolution certainly in very negative terms, one had  
6 a sense of ideals there that appeal to one. You know eliminating social inequalities and  
7 so on. Obviously I didn't have a formal sense of that an instinctive feeling that there are  
8 many good things about it. My first political activity that I can remember as such would  
9 be in 1971, I would have been in Standard Eight then. We organised a protest  
10 demonstration against the tenth anniversary celebration of the republic. Yes, it was an  
11 Indian School, I'm sure the same happened in White and Coloured Schools, but not real  
12 African Schools? And I don't know why it is exactly, and how it precisely happened, but  
13 I came to have organised that. I remember having bought stink bombs from a shop in  
14 Church Street - where old JF King used to be and I remember urging my colleagues in  
15 class, my fellow students to assist in getting some sort of demonstration expressed. About  
16 six or seven of us took part in that. That would have been obviously on the 31st of May,  
17 1971.

18 L: And would that have been at school, or ...?

19 C: Yes, at school. No it happened at school, the school assembly. We were subsequently  
20 alerted that the Security Police were very interested to know who was behind it and a  
21 month subsequent to it happening. Of course, some of us were taken to the School  
22 Principal, but there was no evidence that we were responsible for that action. But the  
23 Security Police were very interested to know who was behind it. And about a month  
24 later, on my way from school, back home, one afternoon, I was intercepted by the police.  
25 And interestingly taken to Alexander Park here and questioned. They were very, I must  
26 confess, very amiable about it. They were? Yes. They were not convinced that I could  
27 have been responsible for that. They wanted to know who was behind it and they  
28 mentioned prominent Indian politicians of the past, people who were banned and house  
29 arrested and so on. One of those names, very clearly was AS Chetty. They were  
30 convinced that he might have been behind it. I think they also asked about Basu Chetty,  
31 Dr Joto Motlala, but I certainly remember AS Chetty was mentioned and they were trying

1 to see if there was any link with Durban - the Natal Indian Congress. Of course there was  
2 no such link, but they - after several hours, released me with a strong suggestion that I  
3 don't tell my mother that I have been questioned by them. Around that time also, together  
4 with a group, a very small group of students in that class, and other classes. ? We formed  
5 youth movement today, which was concerned to bring about changes in the education  
6 system. But very shortly after we formed a friend of mine who had been to Cape Town  
7 and who had met Malan Farhid Isaac, who subsequently became a well-known through  
8 the call of Islam, he is now a lecturer at the University of Western Cape, came back to me  
9 and said he met a guy who shares very similar views to mine and he belongs to an  
10 organisation called NYA, National Youth Action. Which was a high school student off-  
11 spring of NUSAS, a non-racial student organisation of school children, aimed at organise  
12 schoolchildren to protest against the racially-divided education system and fight for a  
13 single, non-racial education system. And in particular, the focus on the disability suffered  
14 by school children who underwent Bantu Education. So we did the sort of things you  
15 would do, which is raise funds for school children from African schools, try to assist with  
16 Saturday morning classes and the like, and so we formed the Pietermaritzburg branch of  
17 National Youth Action, which I chaired. And I did so for over eighteen months. We  
18 were at our height, had about 120 school children involved, almost all of whom were  
19 Indian. There were about one or two Africans, one from Sobantu, Vincent Mshengu, I  
20 remember his name, yes. Who, interestingly I met just by going into the library, in  
21 Longmarket Street, now what is the Childrens' Library. That's right, the small, what is  
22 the childrens' library, next to Upper Crust. I just went in there, I saw this chap in the  
23 library and he was the only African boy of my age so I just went up to him and told him  
24 that 'Look we've got this organisation, would you like to join?' And he said 'Yes'. So  
25 he came to a few of our meetings and he once brought somebody who looked very adult,  
26 but in fact was in Standard Nine, or something. It's the first time it struck me that you  
27 could be very tall and big, but possibly looking twenty-four, and you're still at a school...

28 L: And you're still sixteen.

29 C: That's right, yes, so he once brought somebody else and I think once there was a young  
30 girl who also came, maybe from Sobantu, I can't recall, but we were primarily an  
31 organisation of Indian school children.

- 1 L: Was it flourishing Nation-wide. this organisation?
- 2 C: Not at all. there was a branch in Cape Town, and because I used to take part in debates,  
3 I went to Estcourt High School , the Indian School there and during the subsequent, you  
4 know. after the debate is over. they have you for tea? I sat next to the leader of the  
5 opposite debating team, who was very keen. And we maintained some contact with  
6 letters. It was only years later we met at University, at Durban-Westville that I discovered  
7 that they had in fact got a branch off the ground.
- 8 L: At their school?
- 9 C: ...yes, they did, but we had very little contact with them so we only had a branch in Cape  
10 Town, a branch in Pietermaritzburg and a branch in Estcourt. What's interesting about  
11 the Pietermaritzburg branch was that, you know, I've got some of the leaflets and so on,  
12 and I must show you some day - very interesting, for - you know I look back at it. we did  
13 quite a lot actually. Of course, you obviously had a hard core of about five, six people. the  
14 rest were not very enthusiastic, but I remember we had a big band, a cultural thing at the  
15 Iberian Hall ? It was absolutely full. we had, we raised about a hundred and fifty, a  
16 hundred and sixty rands, which was quite a lot for the school children in 1971. We even  
17 had a little office in community centre. It was actually an office belonging to the secretary  
18 of the Natal Indian Congress, at that stage, it was his private office. He was an  
19 accountant, sort of, a consultant and he had a little thing upstairs which we used, we paid  
20 him rent. Which was paid by a doctor, whose daughter happened to be a member of our  
21 executive. So I think the rent was about five rands a month. or ten rands a month.
- 22 L: ? It was enterprising for some ?
- 23 C: That's right, we had property as well, we had table, and we didn't have a telephone, but  
24 we had raised quite a lot of assets over the eighteen months because we subsequently sold  
25 it. We also went to the national Youth Association. Natal, National Youth Action, sorry  
26 congress, in Cape Town. We used money to go third class by train interestingly. It's  
27 quite fascinating the ...
- 28 L: A very long journey.....
- 29 C: Very long, it's about two or three times longer than the normal journey and you have to  
30 break off at various places. and I can recall we got off at De Aar, it two in the morning  
31 and the subsequent connecting train would have been around ten I the morning and you

1 know it was quite long and arduous, but some six of us attended that congress. There  
2 were two others who joined us who were here on holiday anyway. That would have been  
3 the end of 1972.

4 L: You see, at that time SASO were burgeoning.

5 C: yes, now that's ....

6 L: ..quite near to where you were living...

7 C: That's right. Interestingly we were an alternative to SASO. We, interestingly, rejected  
8 Black Consciousness.

9 L: Did you?

10 C: One of the very clear aims of the national Youth Action was to unite White and people  
11 of colour, Black people to use the collective generic term. And we rejected Black  
12 Consciousness, and that remained with me throughout my subsequent political activities.  
13 Although I must confess that my criticism of Black Consciousness when I was at  
14 University of Durban-Westville, looking from hindsight, was somewhat crude, you know.  
15 I mean I only dismissed it and said that it is distracting from the class struggle. But  
16 obviously it need not distract from the class struggle. The National and class struggles  
17 are interlinked and even to focus on a notion of Black unity, we look back at it today, was  
18 very useful in trying to at least bring Indian and Coloured people together with Africans,  
19 which as we all know is far from the case today. And was far from the case even then.  
20 I regarded myself as Black, and rejected with contempt any notion that I was Indian. I  
21 would always say Indians are from India, I'm a Black South African. But it's not true  
22 certainly, that the vast majority of Indian people saw themselves as that. And it's not even  
23 true that I'm not Indian. My own view of my identity at the moment are that I am Indian,  
24 I am Indian, I am Black, in the sense of not being White, and I'm South African, and I'm  
25 a democrat and a socialist. So we have multiple identities. And I think many of us who  
26 were politically aware, who came from the Indian community, almost rejected our cultural  
27 background in a way that is not productive to our own sense of vocation in the society.  
28 And there's nothing wrong in being Indian, as long as it's also accompanied by identities  
29 that are more national, being considered Black, being considered South African, you see.  
30 So I think we were apologetic and defensive and we just said 'No, we're Black, we're not  
31 Indian.' But in fact we're both. And we are also South Africans, and we have other

- 1 identities.
- 2 L: (Inaudible) one's rights?
- 3 C: That's right. So that was National Youth Action, you know we raised money for education,  
4 we had various political education classes, we also organised Saturday morning classes  
5 for school children. For example the set works. English texts that you had to look at on  
6 the eve of your exam. The difficulties of course were we had different texts for different  
7 education departments. Nevertheless, for several Saturday mornings, we had teachers and  
8 professors from some of the universities. I think Colin Gardener, in fact Colin Gardiner  
9 addressed one of our major public meetings. Our very first public launch, we had Sachs  
10 Cooper, of the Black Consciousness background, we had Colin Gardiner, we had Tim  
11 Dunn, from the SRC.
- 12 L: I remember him, yes.
- 13 C: And I clearly remember that Colin was there and we had a newsletter called 'Why Not  
14 nationally? Which was funded, I think, by NUSAS, and we also had our own little ? Styled  
15 newsletter which we had about four or five editions of. It was about four pages of A4.  
16 So that too we did, focussing on various things about education. We had some contact  
17 with SRC at this university, I think they assisted us a bit. And - so we did various things  
18 and we also...
- 19 L: You must have been extremely adult for a school, though..
- 20 C: Yes, but we were also a meeting point for girls and boys. You know, people were  
21 interested in relationships across the sexual divides and it was not just political. People  
22 came there, there was another meeting point, like a youth group.
- 23 L: ?
- 24 C: ? Yes, so you know there was all that there and I know when I've sometimes looked  
25 through my files and have come across that in the last fifteen years, I would have looked  
26 at it at least once or twice carefully, I am quite taken aback at - at you know, what we did.  
27 And I also know that I was previously interviewed by a woman from Britain, looking at  
28 identity and political activism. I was quite struck by how she indicated we were in the  
29 stink bomb demonstration we organised. That I must have been reading detective novels  
30 or something, because I can clearly remember not buying the stink bombs myself, for fear  
31 that I would get identified. I can also remember that standing outside the shop and then

1 seeing a very young boy go by, a young Indian boy and I said to him 'Look can you do  
2 me a favour, could you go and buy this for me?' Now I can't recall where I would have  
3 raised the money from, but certainly not - in those days, I mean we were - not people of  
4 means, and my father was not alive, so you know we were on a welfare grant, my uncle  
5 was helping out, so I couldn't then have had, you know, when I said earlier I came from  
6 the lower middle-class, I mean more in a sense of values rather than in terms of material  
7 circumstances and when my father was not alive, we were sponsored, or funded, financed,  
8 if you like, by an uncle of mine and my sister must have just started working. So I don't  
9 know where we would have got the money from. But anyway, I certainly remember  
10 stopping this young boy, he couldn't have been more than ten or so - very abusive, you  
11 might say, and I said to him could he go and buy them and I was worried that they  
12 wouldn't sell it to him...

13 L: Because he was too young.

14 C: Yes, but amazingly they did sell it to him and he said to me 'What do you want it for?' I  
15 said 'No, I'm playing a trick with some people.' But he was totally oblivious of you  
16 know, the consequences and I was abusive, I suppose, when I look at it, but I asked him  
17 to get them for me and then that evening, I got my sister's friend to write out little notices  
18 to say 'If you get caught, bursting these stink bombs, do not admit to who you got it  
19 from, you have to be loyal', and I got my sister's friend, wrote me, and my sister,  
20 Shareem, to write out these things on little pieces of paper and then I put one stink bomb  
21 into an envelope with the notice. And the next day, I must have had about twelve of them  
22 and I gave them out to different people, one each, and I remember I got three. There  
23 were also instructions about, you know, you must trample them and then walk away from  
24 them, because they leave a stain. And if you are standing next to it then you become  
25 identified as possibly the person and when the school teachers - I must say that we did not  
26 disrupt the assembly entirely, it was disrupted slightly, but the service continued, the  
27 assembly continued but what had happened was some of us were pulled out of the  
28 assembly line as being people standing next to these stink bomb stains and I was next to  
29 one of them as well, so I was held out, yes. But of course one of the people was there  
30 was nothing to do with us, three of us were identified. The one person, ? Was totally  
31 innocent, as I pointed out to the school principal, 'If I had done it, do you think I would

1 stand next to it?' He subsequently suggested to me that he was absolutely sure I had done  
2 it and he felt there were very few people who could have done it in that class and he was  
3 very clear that I had done it - he told me that a year later. Although there could be no  
4 evidence for that. But, you know, whoever? That event, it struck me then that we were  
5 quite sort of you know organised to have done that.

6 L: And it was your first brush against authority, deliberately chosen.

7 C: Well, I didn't want to get. I was scared. I must state that I am no hero, I was worried.  
8 But I was surprised at how the headmaster was so willing to accept my story and I think  
9 it's because he knew it was me and I think he realised that it's not right of him to take this  
10 plenary action and hand me over - oh they did? To the Security Police. Both the Principal  
11 and the Deputy Principal, but neither of them meant it. I think they were more concerned  
12 to establish exactly who it is, and they too, I think were concerned that there might have  
13 been some outside influences. They merely wanted to know what had happened, who had  
14 organised it. I don't think they really meant to hand us over to the police. That was used  
15 as a threat, although, subsequently, of course, a month later, I was in fact approached by  
16 the police. I was subsequently, in the subsequent year, when I was with the National  
17 Youth Action Chairperson. I was approached two or three further times by the police -  
18 once in fact outside my house, as I came back from table tennis practice. Just before I  
19 went upstairs, we lived in a flat then, I was taken again. This time to one of the streets  
20 in Northdale. In a sort of cul de sac street and I was questioned for an hour and a half,  
21 about National Youth Action.

22 L: (Ruth asks something??) A car, had they? The car?

23 C: Yes, yes. I was never afraid of them, because to be fair, they never once threatened me.

24 L: And they were a bit embarrassed, because they said 'Don't tell your mother.'

25 C: Yes, and in fact they, they once went to see my mother and said they were ordinary police  
26 who were wanting to see me. That he did knock on the door, I was in the house, my  
27 mother opened the door, the police said, 'we would like to see Yunus. we are Mountain  
28 Rise Police,' I think they said. And she was very anxious, so they said to her 'No, he is  
29 involved in this organisation and their property has been stolen.' But when I went to the  
30 door, I saw it was a Security Police. I was equally concerned not to make my mother  
31 anxious, I didn't want her to know, so in fact, I went voluntarily them, and in fact, we -



1 outside the flat they then told me 'No the property hasn't been stolen, they merely wanted  
2 to ask me a few questions. They wanted to know, I remember very clearly, whether I was  
3 going to this Gandhi Youth Camp in Durban. And in fact I had been asked to go by AS  
4 Chetty, but I was not going and they wanted to know who had organised it and so on, and  
5 I wasn't able to give them any information. I - they knew, AS Chetty, I think had  
6 organised it. So there was nothing I could say to them. I constantly stressed to them that  
7 what we were doing was legal. Professor Joan Dulep? Was our legal advisor and I kept  
8 using that as a sort of, you know...

9 L: Well, it was a weapon.

10 C: Yes. I kept saying to them 'that look, you must, if you - if you ? You must speak to our  
11 lawyer, or I will.' I didn't know how to contact him actually, but in any event I kept  
12 saying that. And then there was a guy who was a security police informer in our class,  
13 whose brother was a security police informer and he - you know - it's quite bizarre, there  
14 isn't time to cover it, but I, I mean I was teasing him about his enthusiasm, for the NYA.  
15 He was not the sort who would join, and I teasingly said to him one day 'Are you, don't  
16 say you are interested in us because you are spying on us.' And he broke down and  
17 admitted, although I was just teasing him - I had no idea. I mean you know, I was just  
18 teasing him, it was like a joke, I hadn't realised that in fact he really was - he was really  
19 spying...

20 L: He was actual?

21 C: He was really spying and it was utterly amazing, I just teasingly - you know, in the toilet,  
22 would you believe, we were urinating. And I was in the toilet. I mean it's - it's quite  
23 bizarre and he came you know, into the toilet and said 'hello..' I shouldn't mention names,  
24 it's off the record, it's a guy called Dylan Pillay, but that couldn't be mentioned,  
25 obviously. But I said to him.. He said 'hey when's the next meeting?' I said "why are you  
26 so interested Dylan?" You know 'Don't tell me you're a security police guy informing on  
27 us?' And then he burst out crying, noting he said 'How do you know, how do you know?'  
28 And I suddenly realised there was something to it, in any event he told me that he was, his  
29 brother, I think it's his brother, he'd been asked by him to keep tabs on me and on the  
30 NYA people, then the - you know, again. I'm just mentioning names, but it's off the  
31 record, this name. Sergeant Naidoo's niece, who was in one standard above me, she told

1 me Sergeant Naidoo would be head of the Security Police in his division: he's deceased  
 2 now. His niece told me that she had been asked to find out everything about me and so  
 3 on. The school principal sent the Acting Deputy Principal to go and see my mother to ?  
 4 Me. And she was very upset that I was involved in politics and she's constantly opposed  
 5 it, even now.

6 L: Really?

7 C: She would rather I wasn't involved in politics. But, anyway, that's National Youth Action  
 8 for you, it died a natural death, almost, when I was about to have exams, I stood down  
 9 and unfortunately the person who took over from me had various difficulties and wasn't  
 10 able to continue it, but it also dissipated nationally. It split into a Black Consciousness  
 11 wing, led by Farhid Isaac, and a non-racial wing, led by Michael Bakusky, who then  
 12 subsequently became a PFP prominent figure, and so, within two years the organisation  
 13 had petered out.

14 L: But it is interesting to me because the difference between Black and White students,  
 15 Africans, and Whites, is that your White students, politics was student politics, but for  
 16 African students, they were real politics, they were adult politics and it seems to me you  
 17 had entered that field as well.

18 C: Yes.

19 L: You were ..

20 C: Although I was not the only one (They speak at once so that neither is audible)...ja...

21 L: .. with the Security Police, you were into real politics.

22 C: That's right. Now, you see also, it wasn't just me, it was - there were other people  
 23 around, now one of them was the daughter of a banned person. Then there was a guy  
 24 called Vishnu who was politically aware, too, so there were about three of us who were  
 25 really about what was happening. The other people who were involved in that, that you  
 26 may know - I don't know if you know Mrs Manju? Coratio Manju?? ? she is an English  
 27 teacher at the bottom end of town, her children were involved. Then there was Ishak  
 28 Motlala, Dr Motlala's son, but essentially there were three or four of us who were really  
 29 aware. Ishak would be one of them as well, where the rest were like - you know it's peer  
 30 pressure as well. And you know people get involved because their peers are involved, like  
 31 in every other organisation. Our contact with African school children was extremely

1 limited. And we - we were active saw ourselves as Black, and it didn't strike us, acutely,  
 2 as it does to me now, of how separated we were, and in a way how little contact we had  
 3 with African people and African school children although we came to speak on behalf of  
 4 all school children. So the questions of mandate and so on that would now raise, would  
 5 certainly apply to that period.

6 L: But you see you were still soon, about to be catapulted into it, when '76 came about.

7 C: That's right, yes, yes. It's very shortly after that.

8 L: It became actual. So in 1976, you were demonstrating against government activity.

9 C: Yes, you see, well that's right, after school I spent a year working at Creamline Dairies  
 10 and that year I began reading quite a lot, I read 'Class and Colour', HJ and Ray Simons.  
 11 I also read Eddie Roos' "Time Log with a Drip"? And I used to also get books from a  
 12 chap who was a very avid reader. It's a terrible thing to say, but we would also - we  
 13 would put it this way - 'appropriate' books, from the University of natal Library. And his  
 14 justification would be as crude and unacceptable as it is today, well those liberal whites,  
 15 what do they care, and anyway, they have access to the international community, they all  
 16 fly over the suburb and so on and these can read these books there. So this chap  
 17 appropriated 'Class and Colour' from the University of Natal Library ..

18 L: And got it to you...

19 C: Yes, now in fact it had the Natal University stamp on it and he also made me a copy of  
 20 Edward Drew??and he used to also appropriate books from book shops in Durban and  
 21 Pietermaritzburg.

22 L: Oh really? Yes...

23 C: So he had quite a large collection of books, and I used to borrow from him.

24 L: And was he happy to have his books returned to him?

25 C: Yes, no, in fact he was quite, he was quite determined to get them back and often he  
 26 would lend me books that I wouldn't read. I mean, you know I was not such an avid  
 27 reader, he was a very avid reader and you know, I think that I read quite a lot in that year,  
 28 compared to previously.

29 L: Was that your matric' year?

30 C: That's my post-matric' year, that was in 1974 when I worked in Creamline Dairies, ja.  
 31 But I was also very active in the sporting world. I was Secretary that year of the Northern

1 Natal Tabel Tennis Union, and I played very actively in the table tennis union here, so I  
2 began to travel a lot to Durban and the South African Council of Sport was very  
3 prominent then, so I became very, very involved in sport and the issue of sport and  
4 politics. And I think my understanding of broader national politics increased through my  
5 contact. But again, it was largely Indian/Coloured Sports Administrators. But I was very  
6 active in the sporting world. We were vigorously opposed to as we put it then, normal  
7 sport in an abnormal society and we were clear that you had to fundamentally re-structure  
8 South African society, change it, establish anon-racial democracy, if you wanted to play  
9 non-racial sport. So those years, '74, I spent a lot of time. my post-NYA days would be  
10 mainly involved in sport - SACOS and a whole lot of other sporting-related activities and  
11 I read a lot, well compared to previous years.

12 L: Well then they were very informative years.

13 C: Yes So, I see that, you know, somebody once put it, once put it to me that you know,  
14 race would be - when would I say I became a socialist? Well, I would say I was also very  
15 influenced by DH Lawrence and his critiques of, you know, industrial existence, the  
16 emptiness, solelessness of industrial life, you know, trapped with a society. So the roots  
17 of my socialism, curiously, would be DH Lawrence, his critique of industrial life and also,  
18 curiously enough again, AN Boyce and his focus on the Russian Revolution. And I loved  
19 history, history was my favourite subject. So I read a lot around the Russian Revolution,  
20 the French Revolution because I had to write exam answers for them. So I think, I would  
21 say, from Matric', we had DH Lawrence to read as one of our texts and AN Boyce,  
22 another - an curiously enough those two influenced me quite significantly. But also my  
23 reading and my writing in '74 year, and my critique of Black Consciousness, was  
24 developed in that year. A very crude critique, because it was very crudely classist and  
25 then I went to the University of Durban-Westville and because of my ?

26 L: How old were you then?

27 C: Well, you leave school at the age of seventeen - I would have been eighteen, no I spent  
28 a year - I would have been, yes about nineteen when I went to University. I went a year  
29 later. I in fact joined a group of people at the University of Durban-Westville who were  
30 socialists of various persuasions? Who rejected Black Consciousness and then I became  
31 active with them. But again, it was mostly around reading, we were not practically

1 engaged, we had no student representative council, we opposed having an SRC at the  
 2 University unless it was on our terms and that we couldn't secure. So in fact I became  
 3 active in the anti-SRC dynamics of the University and in the year 1976, around April, May  
 4 an attempt was made by certain students to revive the formation of the Students'  
 5 Representative Council, and I opposed it together with a whole lot of other people and  
 6 so I suppose I first became overtly and publicly politically active at the University when  
 7 I spoke out at the anti-SRC public meeting which had the whole student body present.  
 8 So, in a sense, together with two or three others, I became identified as one of a group  
 9 of politically aware activists who were prepared to openly come out and provoke, and  
 10 contend with a lot of the university administration and the security police. And in fact,  
 11 in 1976, very much soon after that, as you know, the Soweto Uprising occurred. We  
 12 were on holiday, July, but in August, twelfth, I remember, I was arrested for speaking  
 13 publicly on the platform in support of the boycott of classes that we had organised. It  
 14 started on a Monday, I can recall, at least three of us, Lloyd Padayachee, Rashid Meer,  
 15 who unfortunately passed away in a car accident about four months ago, he would be  
 16 Fatima Meer's son, and myself, were arrested in the early hours of the morning, of course.  
 17 We were held in Durban. I was held in ....

18 L: Where was the prison?

19 C: Fisher Street, where was I held now? Was it Point Road?

20 L: Oh, yes.

21 C: I think it was Point Road, we were taken to Fisher Street by a ? And then we were held  
 22 in Durban for ten days under Section 10(1) (a) - of the Internal Security Act, I think, and  
 23 then transferred to Modibi? Prison in Benoni, together with about forty or so others.  
 24 There were lots of people - there was Swangalisa Mokatchwe, Ntate Motlana, people like  
 25 that - Moss Chikane and so on - so we were there - from Peter Magubane, the  
 26 photographer, Duma Ndlovu, the famous world newspaper journalist who subsequently  
 27 went to New York and became a playwright and so on. Lots of people from Natal were  
 28 detained were the three students and Norman ? From here, Shorts Sithole from Durban,  
 29 Peter Simbalass? Who subsequently joined the IFP, David Gausser, Govan Reddy, who  
 30 is now on the SAFM, Bobby Murray who has become a well-known trade unionist for  
 31 NUMSA, and we were in fact transferred there and we were there for about four and a

1 half, five months, we were released, I recall, on December 21st.

2 L: Tell me, what were conditions like and how freely were you able to talk

3 C: No, in fact the first ten days we were in solitary and we were each - in fact - kept apart  
4 from the other, although I had caught a glimpse of Lloyd Padayachee once when the door  
5 was left ajar and he walked past. During the first ten days, we were assaulted, but not  
6 severely, we were pushed around and my hair was pulled and we were made to do  
7 humiliating things. But there was no electric torture, there was no - well it was veritably  
8 petty assault compared to what others suffered as we gathered when we were informed,  
9 when we got to Modibe ? Prison. So we were questioned repeatedly, the same old line -  
10 firstly, 'Who is behind you? You couldn't have done these things at the University without  
11 some external connections? Secondly as Indians, your future is insecure in this country,  
12 you can cooperate with African people but they will do to you what Idi Amin has done  
13 to Indians in Uganda and what has been done to Indians in Kenya. The third point was -  
14 we as security police, we are not political, we will serve any government, even if the ANC  
15 were to come to power, we will still be here, detaining people like you, and amazingly  
16 those people are still here.

17 L: Yes, they are

18 C: They are still here. They said that to us in '86, too, interestingly. So, in short, we were  
19 not assaulted really, I mean I would really not focus on that. I was quite surprised at how  
20 - I think, essentially, you know, people become political in this country partly because of  
21 intellectual experiences to which they are exposed. You know, at some stage or the other  
22 they recognise it's intellectually untenable to believe that some people are superior to  
23 others. I partly because of a moral impulse, you know it's wrong, but I think, partly it's  
24 also a quest of character and personality, some people are drawn to politics because they  
25 are who they are in terms of their structure, or personality and character. And it wasn't  
26 South Africa, they'd be in some other society and play some other role and I think it  
27 applies to most activists, that we are people who are somehow naturally ? Who are  
28 naturally questioning, who are often very forceful personalities and we are also usually  
29 quite brave, not all of us, some of us more brave than others. But I think it also requires  
30 a certain fortitude, and a self confidence.

31 L: And perseverance

- 1 C: Yes, so I mean I know that I was not afraid, and neither were my two comrades, I  
2 subsequently spoke to Rachid and Lloyd and we all shared very similar feelings. And I  
3 think that if you spoke to most of the people at Modibe Prison, the 48 or so of us who  
4 were there. Most of us, to some or other degree, had exactly the same feelings, it's a  
5 combination of anxiety and contempt for the police. Fear and contempt. You know and  
6 a strong belief in your moral ...
- 7 L: What one feels and one is indeed morally superior
- 8 C: Ja, and I mean, to us, we were not really tested, let me stress, because those abilities were  
9 not fully challenged in the way they would be if we were, you know, really tortured. If  
10 we were given electric shock treatment, and there you can collapse and it doesn't  
11 undermine your moral commitment, it doesn't undermine your disdain for them, it just  
12 means that you know, you are frail, as a human being, so I am saying this thing in a  
13 specific context. That, I think, in general, one can say, to some or other degree, we all  
14 coped with the detention very well and in fact I think, in a way, by the very nature of being  
15 a political activists, you are usually prepared to cope with such situations, and it went fine.  
16 When we were at Modibe, we were able to talk to each other for half an hour in the  
17 morning and half an hour in the afternoon, we were out in the sun, to play football or  
18 whatever, in cells we were in groups of about 16 to 18, we could juggle around, so if you  
19 got bored with the 15 people you were with, you went to the other side. It was my first  
20 experience of having to fend for myself, being a spoilt, lower middle-class Indian child,  
21 I had never to do anything for myself. For the first time I had to clean toilets, I had to  
22 take responsibility for handing out the food one day a week, I had to clean the cell, I had  
23 to wash now and then, my clothes, you know handkerchiefs and what have you and I had  
24 to live with others and learn to cope with that, where previously I had just my brother in  
25 my room.
- 26 L: And this, and the frugality were all terribly strengthening influences
- 27 C: Well, I mean when we came out we were even more committed to change, and it was my  
28 first protracted, concerted, interaction with African people and it was wonderful to have  
29 that contact and I really grew through it and we used to have education classes. I also had  
30 the opportunity to help others - there were people in my cell who were studying Standard  
31 Eight, through correspondence and doing courses in English and History and so on, so I

1 was able to help. I also was very privileged to be exposed to some very senior political  
2 activists who gave us instructions and lectures in the history of the ANC and the  
3 Communist Party and anecdotes about the past and they were very inspiring about what  
4 happened in Soweto in '76, and we were full of confidence when we were released. Some  
5 of us were banned, I wasn't in fact, but others were and we continued to maintain contact,  
6 despite the restrictions, it was wonderful. The contact was very limited of course, but it  
7 was there. Particularly amongst the people in Natal. We soon drifted apart through  
8 various personal and other circumstances, and of course, I left not very long, not very  
9 much later, for England.

10 L: Yes, because you would have had another year at the University.

11 C: Well, I was allowed back under probation...

12 L: I see.

13 C: There were certain terms set for my, well, not terms, what they in fact said was that  
14 'should I be caught undertaking any political activity' at the University, I would be  
15 summarily expelled. Now I remained in the country for another six months and then  
16 through a United Nations Scholarship, we left for England to study journalism for a year.  
17 my scholarship was then renewed because I sought a renewal and so I stayed on for a  
18 further four years, at the University of Warwick, in England, and I studied for an Honours  
19 and a Masters degree in Sociology there. So I spent, in all, close on to six years in  
20 England, because I took a bit of time to finish my Masters and I was also politically active,  
21 so I had a very interesting six years in England, very interesting, very rewarding.

22 L: Tell me about the influences and the effect of those years, and the different society.

23 C: Yes, well, you see, you know, as a political activist in this country in those days, without  
24 access to television and CNN and so on, I think we were all very insular, to some extent  
25 we still are. You know, the international isolation has lifted so the conditions for that  
26 insularity are, you know, fast being eroded. But in those days we thought we were the  
27 only country in the world which was waging a major struggle against minority rule and  
28 against repression and against social inequality. I knew of Chile and so on but I didn't  
29 fully appreciate how much of Latin America was under the heel of - you know - very  
30 authoritarian, almost fascist regimes. I had no idea really that throughout Africa, people  
31 are still waging struggles. That 'though they had got independence, the social inequalities



1 had been still very rife. and are. of course. still rife. I had not known about struggles  
 2 elsewhere in the world so I think the first wonderful thing about being in England was the  
 3 cosmopolitanism, the internationalism. that being in England possible. You met ? Exiles  
 4 and you met the far left who were hounded out of Nepal and you met the Malaysian  
 5 Communist Party. .

6  
 7 (The tape fades and it is the end of the first side).

8  
 9 (Second side)

10  
 11 C: ...and you met the Malaysian Communist Party, students and you met Malawian exiles  
 12 who were fighting for democracy and (?) Socialism. It was wonderful, London seemed  
 13 exiles from throughout the world and when you think about it, it's's partly true. I mean,  
 14 Lenin was there for a while, Trotsky went for a brief while, I am told. ...

15  
 16 (The tape fades and the sound then returns again)

17  
 18 C: ...of social upheaval, you know. in Europe. ...

19 L: Student Demonstrations...(they then speak at once so that neither is audible)

20 C: That's right and also, ja the alternative cinema, the alternative theatre and the arts and  
 21 cultural activities funded by the municipalities and so on, so it's actually a broad-  
 22 mindedness. a the notion that gays are people who have rights and who actually could  
 23 organise openly at the university where I went - to Warwick, I mean they had a club, and  
 24 it was fascinating for me. So I would stress internationalism, the undermining of  
 25 insularity, the undermining of parochialism, and opening of the mind as well - the access  
 26 to books. You could walk into a bookshop and you know, in those days, unlike now, you  
 27 had these little Maoist? Bookshops, which amazingly had books almost largely to do with  
 28 China and Chairman Mao and you had the Trotskyite? Bookshops that had a range of  
 29 books but focussed mainly on Trotskyism and you had other bookshops that were linked  
 30 to the Communist Party Orthodox Leninists and Stalinists and so on and it was wonderful,  
 31 the ability to read.

- 1 L: And Yunus, also to speak openly.
- 2 C: That's right.
- 3 L: Here we all spoke nervously over our shoulders.
- 4 C: That's right, it was wonderful. So it's internationalism, and I think the open-mindedness  
5 that it made for. The second influence I think on me was the gender question. For the  
6 first time I came to terms with the need for a struggle for gender equality and the notion  
7 of the personal is political, and that you know, men have got a responsibility for  
8 housework, a responsibility for domestic labour and I got to understand the notion of  
9 unpaid housework and the sexual reproduction of labour. You know, how weak  
10 Marxism and Socialism has been on understanding the role that women play in the  
11 household as a way of sustaining capitalism without being paid for what they do. And I  
12 was very influenced by the Womens' Movements of ?, the Gender Struggle and the need  
13 for equality in our personal lives between men and women. The third influence on me, I  
14 think, is the notion of tolerance. You know, Hyde Park was wonderful, you can sit there  
15 and listen to anybody say anything. Of course brawls would sometimes break out, but it's  
16 wonderful. You could just get your soap box and stand on it and say what you want to  
17 and I think that's a notion that I would love to see in the townships of South Africa and  
18 the rest..
- 19 L: ..in the street.?
- 20 C: Yes, that people can stand up and say 'I am ANC, and this is what I think.' or 'I think  
21 Nelson Mandela is a fool.' Or I stand up and say 'I think Chief Buthelezi is a fool.' So  
22 what, they're not Gods, I think it's wonderful if people could have the freedom to say  
23 that. Although I would hope that no one would say that Nelson Mandela is a fool, but  
24 they should have the right to say ti if they want to.
- 25 L: We must take this from the British, the freedom of spirit.
- 26 C: Yes, so I was very impressed and I would often take visitors there and I myself was very  
27 narrow-minded, I think, and very intolerant.
- 28 L: Were you committed to Russian Socialism at that time??
- 29 C: Yes, yes, I was just going to come to that as another major influence and I think very  
30 intolerant because partly I was a student and young and arrogant. And not prepared to  
31 listen to other points of view, and thought that Marxism was non-negotiable and that's

1 that, and that Marxism had all the answers. But the fourth influence, and I think this is  
2 a pervasive influence too, is I came to understand in the Soviet Union was not what I had  
3 imagined it to be. I had understood within this country that there were many restraints  
4 and restrictions on human freedoms, that the party elite had certain material luxuries, that  
5 the masses were denied and so on. And I had not really believed that those things were  
6 true, certainly if they were true, they were considerably exaggerated, it was my view, by  
7 the South African Press and I would, like many of my comrades at University of Durban-  
8 Westville, rejected contempt, these criticisms of the Soviet Union as being CIA and  
9 Western Imperialism inspired. But when I got to the University of Warwick, when I got  
10 to England, even before that, while I was a student at the Dalton? College of Technology,  
11 I was quite taken aback watching the BBC, watching television, which is another  
12 fascinating thing about Britain, I came to know that even if half, even a third of what was  
13 being said was really true, it was had enough, even if it was being exaggerated, you know  
14 Certainly one time must be true and if it's - just even one time, it's really bad. So I was  
15 considerably influenced by a non-Stalinist version of Marxism, partly Trotsky, but not  
16 solely Trotsky. At one stage, yes, I was significantly influenced by Trotsky, but in my  
17 later years in England, as I began to come home, I began to also see how Trotsky was  
18 both useful and limited in use to our country. But I like a lot of things about Trotsky as  
19 a person, you know, his literary abilities, the range of issues that he deals with, so - so I  
20 think, you know, the fourth influence on me, and I haven't set it out in any order of  
21 importance particularly, and all of these are interlinked, as you no doubt have gathered,  
22 is non-Soviet socialism. I must tell you I went through also quite a period of  
23 disappointment at the Soviet Union. I mean little things, I remember it might sound  
24 bizarre, and I laugh about it - I was shattered to hear that, you know, Flot is it? The  
25 Russian Airways, had two classes..

26 L: Oh, aircraft?

27 C: ...had two classes, a first class and a second class. NI was quite shocked. I mean, I though  
28 it's unthinkable, then I also heard that Russian trains have got two or maybe three classes  
29 and I was shocked - little things like that. I can't explain why it made such an impact, I  
30 was deeply disappointed

31 L: Yes, hut you expected...

- 1 C: I once bumped into a Cuban guy, very soon after I came to England, not even, about six  
2 weeks subsequent to my being in England. I stayed in London with a friend and opposite  
3 was a Cuban guy who was studying for six months in England, I think. And he came into  
4 our room and he spoke English fairly fluently and I was quite shocked as to how similar  
5 he was to any person, in a Capitalistic society he was interested in discos and women and  
6 drink and he was quite superficial in some ways, I mean I'm not saying to have those  
7 interests means necessarily superficial. .
- 8 L: No, quite, but you don't expect it with earnest intent???
- 9 C: Not so much that, but I expected a slightly different moral structure. I expected somebody  
10 with greater intellectual depth, greater knowledge of the world, certainly, a greater  
11 sensitivity to what's going on in South Africa and Namibia and - it was South West  
12 Africa, of course then, Zimbabwe, greater interest in social issues. So let me say, I think  
13 not so much earnest, I mean people are lighthearted and fun and the Cubans are quite easy  
14 people from what little I knew then and know now, so it was less earnestness and over-  
15 seriousness than a sense of what's happening in the world, even if you speak about the  
16 cinema and about drinks and about women and about movies, there is a way you would  
17 speak about it if you're left wing, I would think. That was certainly lacking in this guy.  
18 That was another very like demoralising experience for me, it's a very trivial thing, I don't  
19 know how to explain it, but there this guy, I can remember I was shattered when I met this  
20 Cuban, I was shattered when I read about this too. And then I began to read, and I was  
21 quite bitter actually for several weeks. I can remember the Soviet Union that it sold us  
22 out so to speak, but of course I have a much more balanced view now. I think the Soviet  
23 Union we owe an enormous debt to as the ANC and as a liberation movement, that there  
24 were many, many wrongs, but there were also many, many rights so to speak and I had  
25 the privilege of going there in May 1990. The regime was about crumbling then and it  
26 was a fascinating experience for me. I spent ten days in Moscow, but I think that I have  
27 a much more balanced view now, and it's not relevant to our immediate exchange here,  
28 but ...
- 29 L: But Yunus, you see, in South Africa, we were so circumscribed, you were caught in this  
30 net, and what you had learnt was only what was allowed in, and Ellie, the Elephant was  
31 hidden from you.

1 C: Yes, yes. So I was in England for six years I think, it would be certainly. I left in  
2 September, a week later Steve Biko was killed tragically. I left in September 1977. I came  
3 back in June 1983. For the last two years that I was there - three years that I was there,  
4 my passport was not renewed because I slipped out of the country illegally. Immediately the  
5 news? - the local ethnic press, you know the extra edition of the Sunday Times had it quite  
6 prominently that I had fled the country. So the Security Police came round looking for  
7 me, looking for my mother to find out how and through which border I had left. But of  
8 course I hadn't - I'd gone with a passport. You see, when I got detained in '76, in  
9 August, I was living in Durban with my Aunt, so they went there to collect my passport.  
10 The Aunt said it was not there 'It's in Pietermaritzburg.' And in Pietermaritzburg, they  
11 came here and my mother was very willing to give them the passport, provided, not  
12 provided, but you know in the hope that they would release me quickly and so on. But  
13 she couldn't find my passport because I had just been to Swaziland, Lesotho, over the July  
14 holidays and the passport was in fact not in the cupboard where it is normally kept, but  
15 in my coat pocket, which - I was wearing my coat, you know and I had crossed the  
16 border. Oh in fact my passport was there, then I came back; I kept it and they had forgotten  
17 about it and so when they came back they had understood that my passport was  
18 withdrawn, but it wasn't, in fact I had it. So when I left, it was still valid for another three  
19 or four years I think, and when it got ... about three years at least...when it expired and  
20 I sought a renewal in London, through the Embassy there, it was turned down. And I was  
21 asked to leave immediately for South Africa, but of course I stayed on through the British  
22 Special Permit system and so I came back, I asked for a passport, they refused, but they  
23 gave me an emergency travel certificate. So I came back in 1970 - 1983, in June. And  
24 then I was very shortly after that caught up in the United Democratic Front. The anti-  
25 election campaign; I participated actively in that, but in fact I had reservations about the  
26 UDF..

27 L: Did you?

28 C: Yes, I felt it was too much of a popular front. Too amorphous, without enough  
29 of a centre. And we drew in a too wide cross-section of people. So I was initially an  
30 active participant in this campaigns, but not somebody who identified for myself anything  
31 more than a sort of very activist role.

- 1 L: Yes, Jerrel? Vencell, in her book, talks about the exhilaration of the marches of those  
2 times and that was it - people were coming in and enjoying it. but without any great depth  
3 of thought.
- 4 C: Yes, yes, the Marxist came a bit later, but it's the early period I'm talking about - 1983  
5 to 85, August at least was the campaign against the elections for the House of Delegates  
6 and the House of Representatives. Through the Natal Indian Congress, through the  
7 structures of the UDF, we all worked very hard to defeat the state's attempt to co-opt a  
8 significant section of Indian and Coloured people into this minority state. So we were  
9 quite successful, I think, less than twenty percent of the people eligible to vote, voted in  
10 the House of Delegates and slightly higher percentage for the House of Delegates  
11 (Representatives?). So, you know, that period was NIC, UDF period, but I was not - I  
12 was in the councils and committees, but I wasn't identified as somebody who is key,  
13 anyway to decision making, I was more the activist.
- 14 L: ...but you United Committee of Concern - that was your role?
- 15 C: That's right, I was there too, but again I wouldn't have classified myself as anybody sort  
16 of like, key to the decision making. I was there. I was also finding my feet having been  
17 away for six years. I was very interested in the Trade Union movement. COSATU in  
18 particular. so I did a fair amount of research-come-education work for COSATU in the  
19 period '83 'till '85 and I also got a job at the University doing research on the trade union  
20 movement and I was also a journalist. a freelance journalist and wrote a lot on the labour  
21 movement and ton politics generally, but particularly the labour movement for many of  
22 the Argus newspapers. particularly here in Natal; so I was involved in the trade union  
23 movement also at the level of campaign structures. Supporting struggles like the Simba-  
24 Quix boycott, the Sarmcol Workers Campaign .....
- 25 L: Well, indeed. you worked very hard there if I remember.
- 26 C: Yes, and then the campaign around Spar shops and then there was the W Brown  
27 Campaign and so on. so CAWUSA, SECAWU, there were many campaigns around that  
28 and I was quite involved in linking union structures with community structures because  
29 I was available, because I was involved in research and political education work with the  
30 unions. They were very guarded about drawing in individual activists but within the  
31 constraints of that I was able to do quite a bit and so played a role around that, but as it

1 unfolded, as the events unfolded within the UDF and the NIC, I became increasingly  
 2 involved in its leadership structures here in Pietermaritzburg, and so, I also realised that  
 3 if you want to reach the Indian community you also have to work through the structures  
 4 of the civics, besides the NIC. So I became much more involved in the leadership  
 5 structures of the civic organisations in Pietermaritzburg and became Secretary of the  
 6 Pietermaritzburg Central Ratepayers and Residents Association, and the Pietermaritzburg  
 7 Combined Ratepayers and Residents Association, in '87. And then the Natal Indian  
 8 Congress Executive for the Province as a whole, at its conference in November '87, I was  
 9 elected, at that conference to serve on its Provincial Executive, and of course I was always  
 10 on the Pietermaritzburg Branch Executive, from '87 onwards. So you begin to get  
 11 involved at the more leadership levels, locally and provincially, from the period '80 - say  
 12 '85, after the anti-election campaign, say early '85 onwards, '85, '86.

13 L: That's when you were detained, weren't you?

14 C: Oh yes, 1986, many of us, a large group of us here from Pietermaritzburg, we were  
 15 detained for two weeks during the emergency

16 L: In the New Prison.

17 C: That's right. But we were released very shortly. Other stayed on, Peter Kerchoff, AS  
 18 Chetty and others - Skumbuso, and yet I was really detained for spells?

19 L: I see, how long were you in????

20 C: Nearly two weeks. So we were released and we were back in circulation within two  
 21 weeks. So, the period '87, '88, sorry, '85, '86 to '90 was a period of engagement in  
 22 campaign structures that helped get the unions and community organisations specifically  
 23 around work-based demands. So we organised boycott campaigns around these issues,  
 24 specific products of companies and their dispute workers. That period also saw the  
 25 consolidation and centring of the civic movement. But also, increasing contact with  
 26 Indian and African, as the UDF structures grew in strength in the townships. It was also  
 27 increasing personal interaction between Indian and African and Coloured and White  
 28 activists over the issue of accommodating in our homes, refugees, comrades who had to  
 29 flee the townships. So for large chunks of the period '87/'88, we would have people in  
 30 our flat to stay for periods of say, from one to two nights to up to, well, six months,  
 31 intermittently, people would stay for two weeks and then go to another comrade and

1 come back to you a week later, stay for a week and a half, go away, so we. you know, we  
2 had a circulation of activists in and out of our homes and homes of other activists. who  
3 were forced to flee the townships. This was also a period where I began to travel a bit  
4 more, my passport would get renewed for short periods, so as an academic and an activist.  
5 I would often get invited. in my capacity as an academic, there was a lot of feel for what's  
6 happening in the political struggles. So I - as an academic activist, and an activist  
7 academic, I would tour around the country quite a lot more between that period '87/'90  
8 I also had the privilege and opportunity of touring ? Outside the country. '88...

9 L: '87, you went to Harare.

10 C: That's '88 I think it was , ja. '88, I went to Harare to meet with the ANC.

11 L: Was it your first meeting with them, wasn't it?

12 C: That's right, official meeting, yes, although of course in the period that I was in exile.  
13 there was a lot of contact - but again, formal contact would have occurred in my capacity  
14 as a member of the Association of Southern African Sociologists. We met with Comrade  
15 Paulo Jordan and the research department of the ANC. That would have been - say '88,  
16 in Harare. Then I also travelled to India, as part of an NIC, UDF, COSATU delegation.

17 L: Oh, that's interesting. Who did you meet there?

18 C: We - well we met a range of Indian Government Officials, including the President, Rajiv  
19 Gandhi. The issues around which we went were largely the need to isolate conservative  
20 Indian politicians who were in the House of Delegates, who, because they did not require  
21 visas to enter India, could go in and out of India, at will. We wanted them put on a list  
22 and to show them that the Indian Government rejects what they are doing in this country,  
23 they are participating in the Tricameral Parliament, and they would be denied access to  
24 India for holidays, or for visits. For whatever reason. We also wanted to discuss direct  
25 contact with the Indian Government and the UDF, COSATU, NIC, TIC inside the  
26 country, not just the ANC in exile. They were interested to discuss with us a range of  
27 issues as well. So for various reasons we went to India, we spent a very interesting ten  
28 days there. Then I also had the opportunity to travel to various parts of Europe, speaking  
29 largely about the unfolding struggle in South Africa.

30 L: And the forces of liberation that were gaining ?

31 C: Yes, that's right. And I would also have gone to Lusaka, I think it was October 1988,



1 with a large group of Indian South Africans who went to meet the ANC. Because, if you  
2 like one of the series of meetings that occurred around then, initially with the - like  
3 business delegation that went to Lusaka to meet the ANC, Anglo-American and so on.

4 L: And a lot of comrades had been in Lusaka.

5 C: That's right, so the contact was beginning to increase, and so I was part of that delegation  
6 from the NIC that went; it was a fascinating period we spent there of about five, six days.  
7 The larger group came for about two days over the weekend, but we went earlier, so we  
8 had a lot of discussions, largely about mobilising Indian people as part of the National  
9 Democratic Struggle. So, you know, those were exciting days, there was also the  
10 Conference for the Democratic Future, in late '89, around which we all worked and  
11 mobilised. So that was the period of mass democratic struggle, that was a period of a lot  
12 of activity and I think you are quite familiar with it. And I don't think I could say very  
13 much that you don't actually know. Are there any specific questions?

14 L: No, not at all.

15 C: Then we get the period 1990, with the unbanning of the ANC, of course we were all  
16 exhilarated and over-awed and astonished and bemused and confused about it all. But at  
17 that stage I was perhaps most active in the civics, you know, we were quite pre-occupied  
18 with civic struggles, you know, we had that major march against the Rates Campaign, in  
19 October 1989.

20 L: Yes, I remember that.

21 C: Where we drew between maybe five to eight thousand people out in the streets, and we  
22 linked that struggle for a more equal, less discriminatory rates system for the need for an  
23 open, non-racial Pietermaritzburg, as part of a non-racial, democratic South Africa. So  
24 that period represents a period of - you know '85, '90, of enormous engagement in legal  
25 activity, in open? But many of us of course also did link up with the ANC, particularly,  
26 I think, in my case, the period '87/'88 onwards, where we passed on information.

27 L: Well, you see, you didn't have raids? Alistair Sparks for instance, one realises how all  
28 these forces were at work but not being spoken of.

29 C: My links between the ANC between '84 and '87 were somewhat tenuous, partly because  
30 of a whole series of considerations that are irrelevant here. But from '87 onwards,  
31 particularly in information, a lot of - you know- of the work I did was basically doing

1 reports and passing it out and so on. The value of that I still cannot assess because I think  
 2 the ANC's internal groupings were, as we later discovered, very complex, and were not  
 3 always in touch with each other and so what the meaning of all that is I can't say. But  
 4 1990 comes the ANC's unbanning. So we all, of course, tried to revive the structures of  
 5 the ANC, with Harry Gwala leading us. I get appointed onto the Interim Committee of  
 6 the ANC - The Natal Midlands Committee. In October of that year, which is planned two  
 7 years previously, I go on sabbatical leave, for nine months I'm away. In England,  
 8 unavoidable, inevitable, for various academic and family reasons, I had to go. I come  
 9 back in April/May 1991 and then very shortly after that get drawn back into the structures  
 10 of the ANC, in my town branch and other related activities; I become Secretary of our  
 11 town branch. I think it was around July/August 1991. And I'm still active in the  
 12 structures of the civics, but far less so because I had now moved out of the  
 13 Indian/Coloured Group Area, what is formerly - into Scottsville and it is just not  
 14 appropriate. Plus I've got drawn into the Communist Party and there are questions about  
 15 where I must put my energy and what time availabilities I have. So I get elected onto the  
 16 Regional Executive Committee of the Communist Party and the ANC at the end of that  
 17 year. And remain there until the Provincial Structure is created of the ANC this year - the  
 18 last year, December, and I'm not on the Provincial Executive Committee, but I am 'ex-  
 19 officio' as a Member of Parliament on the Regional Executive Committee of the ANC  
 20 here and in the Klip River area and I am still on this Provincial Executive Committee, 'ex-  
 21 officio' again, as a Central Committee Member of the Communist Party, and I'm on the  
 22 REC of the Party. So, and now I am a Member of Parliament in the National Assembly,  
 23 so in short, to summarise the present situation, we could pursue some of these things in  
 24 greater detail, if you like, again, once you've listened to your cassette and come back.

25 L: I think you've given me a very good and, I mean, I would like to pursue some of the ...

26 C: Ja, if you're interested...but basically.....

27 L: You're not getting tired?

28 C: Ja, no, no, I've just got to wash ? as well, basically. I mean, at the moment I am a Member  
 29 of Parliament in the National Assembly who serves on the RDP Standing Committee,  
 30 Constitutional Affairs Standing Committee and Private Member of the Motions ? Standing  
 31 Committee. And I'm also involved in the Constitutional Assembly and Dean? Committee

1 Three - looking at relations between central government powers and provincial powers.  
2 The I'm also a Member of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party,  
3 the Provincial Executive Committee, the Regional Executive Committee and Branch  
4 Executive Committee. In the ANC, I am a Member of our Branch Executive Committee,  
5 'ex-officio', and of the Regional Executive Committee, 'ex-officio'. I am also, well  
6 linked, though not active with the civic structure in the city, town area. And I'm sort of  
7 drawn in every now and then on various campaigns

8 L: Yes, I'm sure you are.

9 C: But, essentially my primary role is as a National Member of Parliament at the moment and  
10 - you know - we ..

11 L: I could work it out - how old are you now?

12 C: I'm thirty-nine.

13 L: Well, there you are.

14 C: Yes.

15 L: What a good forty years you've spent.

16 C: And it's been very exciting.

17 L: Very interesting.

18 C: Very interesting, yes. And you know, I suppose, you know, when one looks back, you  
19 know, one has some regrets about certain courses of action one has taken, one would  
20 have liked to have been more knowledgeable, more experienced, more skilled at particular  
21 junctions of one's life when one felt if one had that experience one could have made better  
22 choices, but overall, I mean, I don't have any regrets, particularly.

23 L: Oh, and it's all growth years.

24 C: It's been very interesting, yes, very exciting, and I'm quite optimistic about the future. I  
25 think we have many, many difficulties to overcome, provided we have a sense of vision,  
26 provided we have a sober sense of where we are, I think it's hard to be disillusioned, or  
27 demoralised. You know I always said you can only become disillusioned if you've had  
28 illusions in the first place.

29 L: That's right. (Ruth speaks simultaneously and it is inaudible)

30 C: ..and I don't think I've had illusions, I think, you know, I don't expect socialism's going  
31 to take place around the corner. I don't think we're going to fundamentally South African

1 society in the next few years, but I certainly think we're going to make giant leaps forward  
2 and I think that we have a difficult two to three years ahead, but the foundations are being  
3 set for quite substantial change. Certainly more change than I think a lot of people are  
4 making out, but far less change than I think we would all like.

5 L: Well, quite.

6 C: But look at the balance of forces, look where we are at the moment. Look at the  
7 international conjuncture, look at the difficulties of the conflicts of South African society.  
8 You have to assess the nature of our conflicts to arrive at a sense of what degree of  
9 progress we have made. So I think it's quite complex. I think it's a very challenging  
10 period and I am certainly convinced that we will overcome the hurdles in the longer term  
11 and you know I'm certainly looking forward to the next period, really.

12 L: Well, that's lovely. Yunus, thank you so much.

13 C: Ja, let me disappear ....

14  
15 (End of second side).