

ANS The political prisoners I was with we all tended to come from the very similar kind of stratum - middle class type . . . basically. Most of us apart from Johnny Mathews, by the time I got there, although that was, were, had been to university and our conversions were sort of moral and intellectual conversions rather than, you know, to the struggle. Rather than as a result of wondering where the next uh, 5cents were going to come from to pay bus fare or something like that. My specific background anyway, . . . that kind of background I shared with the others but um, I grew up in a naval family. My father was a naval officer and although he died when I was fairly young, when I was 10 in fact. So I guess you could say they..came from a military caste. Hardly but anyway.

JF Whereabouts did you grow up?

ANS Well around the naval bases but Simonstown was the sort of last five years or so, of my father's life and um that kind of background reflected in some of my poems. There's a section in that collection called the 'Naval Base', which reflects that sort of childhood. Um, I remember in it must have been in the late '50's, ja, my father died in '60, so it was either in 1960 or late fifties I..there were troubles and I was very vague about what they were. I remember my father being called out uh, for special duties uh, in the townships - never being told what they were or anything. Just having this vague sense, our world is being threatened outside beyond sort of perimeters of the barbed wire fence, and so on that we lived..hind which we lived. Of course the barbed wire was less high than it is now. When I go back to Simonstown its interesting to see how much more lagerred the whole place has become.

JF When were you born?

ANS 1949.

JF Aha, and your mother, was she...ever an influence per se or what?

ANS I came from..quite typical English speaking middle strata. Even my father was not..he was not a political person. Was a career naval officer really and with some resentments coz he was English speaking and in the course of career the Nationalist Party had come to power and people from the Broederbond were being leap frogged into higher



ANS positions in the officer corps so there was a bit of disgruntlement there which I picked up even, which I remember picking up as a child, in regard to the Government. But it was a..I suppose what you call in Marxist terms you would say a non antagonistic contradiction. Um, bit of grumbling you know. Some of these chaps who were Afrikaans speaking and were put ( ? ) and were promoted rather fast than their natural talents were otherwise justified. Um, when my father died I was 10 years old <sup>I was</sup> we shift-up from Simonstown to this general area Rondebosch basically living in. And um, that kind of..my mother was..became very influential on me and she had been from the start in a particular, not in a political way in the least but her attitude was and still somewhat is you <sup>know,</sup> that leave politics alone-leave it to the sort of Afrikaans speakers and blacks. Let them you know..and she sort of encouraged me in my interests in poetry, arts, those kinds of things. And..started writing poetry quite early as a kid. I forget how early but you know, thirteen or whatever. On the one hand. On the other quite a well..now that was always a problem for a white South African kid, things like poetry and whatever are regarded as male..not really part of ..not one of the..national pastimes. I was also very into rugby and cricket and I was quite well integrated at that level, but I always had to do especially well in order to make space for myself psychologically as well as just generally to be able to pursue the other interests which were poetic at that point and not political. Um, we were also quite poor so although my father had been a naval officer <sup>we</sup> were not..I mean by S.A. standards but by white standards my mother was living on a pension and we'd sort of um,..we lived in Rondebosch which was a wealthy suburb but we were sort of on the periphery a bit and I think that looking back probably sort of also had its psychological and social level accounted for some of my later trajectory..um, in that I was interested in poetry and things like that which put me a bit on the sideline although at the same time I was anxious to integrate myself into the wider society and I think from a good, for the first 15 years of my life my greatest ambition was to wear the Springbok colours and to play rugby. Used to live right next to Newlands Rugby Ground and I used to practice running out from the tunnel on to the you know..from the change rooms onto the field. What I was sure was a greater future that awaited me. Ok, really I arrived at university..then I did a yea..nine months in the Navy as a citizen force you know draftee..conscriptee and then arrived at university in 1968, my first year. With all those kinds of contradictions really present in me: on the one hand sort of..by that stage now I was an aspiring poet and on the other hand still sort of quite anxious to..



ANS following rugby and cricket and all those things which plugged me very much into the white society and ah, was my link up with my peer group. And sort of the transformation came for me in '68, I think. It was possibly the spill over from...!68, was the year of students, internationally well, North America and Europe (Western) and um, later in the year, not quite May '68 it was... (?) Struggles in North America and Paris, Britain, whatever and W. Europe. I think it was probably about August here in C.T. there was a students march and sit in at Administrative buildings and for completely academic and um, sort of literary reasons I found myself involved in that thing. Because what happened was that the students occupied Admin buildings sort of copying Jerry Reuben and Danny Condindé or whoever and had a sort of alternative university down there and got progressive lecturers and or others from the community to come to give lectures, and I've heard that the..standard of lecturing was more interesting down there than on Campus (Main). So I was sort of seduced into this thing for intellectual reasons and that really maked the beginning of my sort of interest in..active interest in politics and involvement in it - at first via what was then called the Students Radical Movement at U.C.T. But then..some of the kind of different dynamics going on in my personality were there got to be problematic for me - I was writing poetry or trying to, it was very lyrical love poetry basically, a lot of it or poetry about natural landscapes and those kinds of things which I still feel..my bent is in that direction I would guess. But feeling increasingly self conscious about living in S.A.; horrific oppression occurring around me and haveng the sense this was almost self indulgent kind of activity to be pursuing; writing poetry about the landscape or lyrical feelings and really didn't resolve that problem and basically stopped writing poetry. Continued to do that - it's a fairly compulsive thing with me but not being really satisfied with it and really getting quite psychologically blocked I would guess. But more than that; also theoretically not understanding how that on a theoretical and asthetic level, I suppose, understanding how to link lyrical interests to political..to my growing political awareness of the situation. I suppose another factor in my develop,ent was that my political involvment was never like mainline at U.C.T. - the sort of mainline organisation was NUSAS



ANS and the S.R.C. structures and so forth. I wasn't particularly involved in those. I wasn't involved in them. Part of it was to do with the fact that I came from a poorish home background by now you see, and felt a bit estranged from the group of people who were at that stage - tended to monopolise that come from the better schools, quote unquote. And um, tended to be in the leadership positions and in places like in NUSAS and the S.R.C. And it was partly for those reasons rather than directly political reasons...became political reasons as well, that I was slightly outside of NUSAS and regarded myself as to the left a bit. Of course at that stage NUSAS was not what it is now - it was more liberal an organisation. Ah, there was quite a lot of allusions as well in regard to the leading role of white students and so on. Point one of students and two of white students because the period between about mid '60s through to early '70s was one characterised by the demolition of the black mass organisations - ah, sort of going underground and forced into exile and imprisonment or just death or of millions or thousands of people who'd been involved in mass ops..up-surge of the '50s and early '60s. And in a curious sort of way, its something I mentioned earlier in that speech at Wits that the sort of English liberal campuses they're called, Wits and U.C.T. specifically imagine themselves taking up the mantle of the struggle, which in a sense they were doing. The political events that hit the headlines locally as well as internationally, were often student demonstrations in Cape Town or Jo'berg - demonstrations at St. Georges Cathedral steps or whatever, and quite allot of police harassment and so on. But that situation produced two illusions: One, the leading role of students and two the leading role of white students and of a kind of liberal attitude, or social democratic attitude. Which um, also fed in to the whole ambience of the period, sort of late '60s early '70s internationally where students I mean there were a whole lot of theorists like Marcuse and Sarte and so on proclaiming students as being in the vanguard of the struggle of the <sup>3rd</sup> world and students..you see. So it was kind of fell in to that kind of situation as well. I think that...I was fairly critical of those things early on, from probably quite sectarian left position. And very hard not to be either of the one, kind of mainstream liberal thing or sectarian left because the alternatives weren't easy to find. I guess from the early '70s I was aware or trying to become aware more and it was very hard to get information about the ANC and SACP and so on. And was aware that those were probably the leading organisations that



ANS one needed to learn from but how in early 1970..In S.A...

JF Can you remember how you became aware first - was it something said in the home or something that you read or meet someone?

ANS Um, there were people I met on campus basically one or two um, in fact someone who finally got sentenced in..and ended up in Pretoria doing 6 years, Tony Holiday, had been an early influence. He was..he'd been quite a young person in the early '60s but he'd been ..... begun to be involved in underground politics basically when things were wiped out and I think because he was so young and peripheral they hadn't ...quite got to him, in the early '60s. So he was still around. I was in many ways, depending how you look at it, I mean, I look at it as being extremely fortunate, that was personal luck, more than anything that ah, via...sort of personal friendship I met him and that enabled me to get some information about traditions that had prevailed and so forth. Yes, I mean that was very important for me. But very hard in that if you...books were banned, books still are banned but tend to float around a little more freely. The cops are just a lot more stretched now than they were - at that stage you know one had a sense of them breathing down your back and that you were likely to get caught doing sort of the most minor things, like having a banned copy of this or that. And people were very frightened and scared and everything was very fragmented so it was extremely difficult to get information about what had happened in the 1950s and early '60s. And..occasionally someone would stumble across in a second hand bookshop a book written by Govan Mbeki ~~Golmore Beckies~~ 'the Peasant Revolt' or Eddy Roux's book Time Longer than Rope or something - its now not banned, it is around but at that stage they were... there were one or two copies around and people would copy them..you know they were worth their weight in gold. We had tiny little reading groups, basically trying to find out about that past, discuss it and understand the situation. Um, I had no black friends, I mean my whole political conversion, um...to become a participant in a national democratic struggle was ~~of~~ basically a broad black majority in S.A.- was full of a totally intellectual conversion. I met a couple of so called Coloured students at U.C.T. and was fairly friendly with them but they'd come out of that sort of Unity Movement tradition and had.. didn't, you know, know very much about...the '50s and early '60s and the ANC and so on. In so far as they did they had a very distorted picture. But I literally had no African friends, <sup>what so</sup> ever and no contacts



ANS into the townships. People were very scared of those contacts, I mean, it would have been..an understandably..probably any attempt on my part to.. or either a small group of friends had to kind of go out there and speak to people would have been met with considerable suspicion and so on. And we were very aware and didn't want to embarrass people but in any case we didn't really know who the people were and how one would go about doing that and all, in any case. So we were reading the sort of classics you know, ah, Marxism and ... Leninism and so on, when we could get hold of them and that wasn't easy and drips and drabs of things about the S.A. struggle. I actually tracked down a copy of Simons and Simons ah, and again that was something that was...so as a result of that now this is probably from the late '60s and '70s in those years the...it was quite an intellectual kind of political activity that I was involved in - we tried to be a bit of a ginger group on the campus, try and shift NUSAS left or in a left wing direction and we concentrated on running seminars and putting up publications and that sort of thing. So it was quite intellectual, theoretical and very educational and in so far as we were recovering some of the traditions of the '50s and '60s it was...more at the level of ideas and less at the level of the real essence of those periods in any ability to mobilise tens of thousands of people and conduct mass struggle. Obviously, I mean it was an abstraction for us in the period of late '60s early '70s. Ok, um that kind of work and reading etc - shall we stop I think that will.... (rise) (Come in...)

I think it was also quite significant the attitudes that prevailed at that stage amongst the small little group of people that I was involved with, um, inevitably I guess...ja, ok. Then...in the course of the early '70s..became...ja, ok sure...increasingly aware of the need to link up with um, the underground organisations and at this stage slowly slowly there were beginning to be pamphlets circulating/produced inside the country by the underground movement basically the ANC which made one aware of their existence underground but in a very tenuous way at that stage. no doubt. And I remember also at that stage still going through the pamphlets and always being hell of a relieved to find that down on the sort of third last sentence or whatever in the pamphlet the slogans come um, there would normally be a sentence or two saying that um, whites also have a role in the struggle. So ah, again the one..in a sense one did have a place in the struggle, one believed in it and it was something of an abstract belief. And of course now you must remember that one saw the beginnings of Black Consciousness and so on being formed as well



ANS I found myself being in quite a lot of sympathy with that kind of ideology because um, as I was saying that small group of people I was involved with were also...took a considerable..some distance..sort of set itself apart somewhat from NUSAS probably for sector.. I mean I think our duty would have been much, looking back, <sup>should have been</sup> to have worked much more within NUSAS and to have transformed it in that way rather than to sort have nibbled at it from outside. But at least some of what SASO was saying you know, <sup>we felt</sup> corresponded with what <sup>that</sup> NUSAS was often rather liberal, rather patronising, rather forgetful of the fact that the majority of people were black and so forth, in S.A. and that the struggle was going to have to be lead largely by black people - mobilise black people. So in a sense we obviously found...there were some themes in..that echoed our concern and worries as well. But the critiques were coming from very different places, from by and large, I guess, the <sup>SASO</sup> critique of NUSAS was if anything from the right rather than from the left. Whereas ours was from the sort of...dogmatic <sup>left position</sup>. But it certainly didn't help us, I mean in that it didn't <sup>create now a</sup> bridge now for us and ah, they were often conflating liberalism with socialism and communism and foreign ideologies or whatever the Black Consciousness leaders said that...that seemed to rule us out as well. Ok then, so I was involved in an undergraduate..I did a B.A from 1968 to 70 and then Honours in Philosophy in '71 and then decided that I wanted to go overseas: Partly to continue my studies and the aura of Paris was still in my head because I decided I wanted to go to the Sorbonne which is where I did go to do my M.A. in Philosophy. But a major part of my reason for wanting to go overseas was in fact to establish contact with the ANC and to offer my services to them with a view to coming back and working in whatever capacity they should ask...which I did do when I was out and um....I was asked to come back here and be involved in producing underground propaganda, leaflets and so forth on behalf of the ANC and SACP.

JF Can you just talk a bit about that - I mean my focus is whites and their role (Right) um, with all that searching for your place and getting just affirmations so infrequently. Did you feel when you made the contact - was there any issue about race? Was that an important vindication, er, the response? I mean did you feel even there..was it blacks you dealt with and tell me something about that?

ANS Ja...I think I'd be anxious not to..obviously part of them..the..of knock-around in my head would be that kind of motivation to put ~~my~~ myself on



ANS on side with the broad majority of South Africans and to throw myself in shoulder to shoulder with them in their struggle and I saw this as the way of doing that. I'd be anxious not to collapse it entirely into ... sort of personal salvation type motivation. I'm sure that in the case of any white making that kind of commitment you will find something of that present in...knocking around in the set of motivations that would lead to that sort of decision. But um, I think even at that stage now I was quite young then, but certainly now you know the decision was also a political decision and not just a personal one. I say that because I think that is actually quite a...its a bit of a syndrome for liberal through to left whites in S.A. that um political commitment ought to easily become a kind of personal trip where one is assuaging one's guilt and things like this and um I think that the first thing I picked up in making the approaches that I did when I was overseas to the organisation, was that they were very keen to sort out and be clear that my motivations weren't primarily of that kind - that there were political motivations and they were very insistent that my task was to go back and be effective, not go back and be caught. If you read Nadine Gordimer's novels, particularly 'Burger's Daughter' you could be left with the impression that - I raised <sup>with NE. having</sup> this and ~~I haven't~~ even spoken to her about it - that Rosa who's the Burger's Daughter finally resolved her personal conflict problems by coming back on a mission probably not really succeeding in actually..in committing anything, <sup>but</sup> basically...putting herself symbolically onside, going to jail and so forth and taking on herself a sort of suffering which is also redeeming kind of suffering. Now, I think that that is a motivation but one that one has to dispel or at least repress or make sure its not the dominant motivation for political engagement if one's a white person in S.A. You're very keen to be insistent on that thing...coz ah, it happened a bit in the '60s with some people, probably considerably with ARM people - there was a bit of a kind of martyr thing - throw ourselves into the jaws of the ~~apartheid~~ monster, get caught, never mind, it'll show white people are prepared to suffer and sacrifice. Now that symbolic dimension is important clearly in the struggle and figures like Bram Fischer and Dennis Goldberg when he was inside, had that kind of symbolic impact, on people that whites too were in jail and were prepared to die if necessary. But my major task was to be politically effective; to take the struggle forward in small ways, so far as I was able to do it and not to get caught and not to be a symbol and um ja; and that was impressed upon me, very strongly by ~~te~~ the people who were training me. And it was certainly some-



ANS something that rang many bells for me which I appreciated and you know, did want my motivation to be political and not psychological in the first instance. No doubt there are psychological factors knocking around in any sort of decision.

JF This is just really important because as I said a lot of people I talked with have skirted that central issue which is ultimately what I'm trying to deal with. (Right) Um, I don't know if I can ask the question... I will but I guess maybe if you'd say a bit more about going there as a white and I mean the way you were dealt with that made you really understand that; Was it blacks you dealt with and were you right away made to feel that you were being treated the way someone who'd come out of Soweto would be treated or..I mean I don't know....?

ANS Um...ja..I think so, ja, I say ~~that~~ would be the first thing. But I was firstly I wasn't you know, ~~fated~~ as some kind of someone who's made some great sacrifice for being white which I would hate to be the case,.. would've hated to be the case; I was treated as a sort of foot soldier in the struggle um, that's how I wanted to be treated and so ...there was <sup>firmness</sup> service but comradeship and you know, I think that was important and made..meant a lot to me. The other thing..I mean, the first thing that they did was they gave me a lot of horrific material to read about the interrogations, solitary confinement and so on that people have experienced one, in S.A. then two, around the world; um in Algeria, in..during the Nazi occupation of Central Europe and so forth. Accounts of interrogation. ~~But~~ <sup>ecoz</sup> they wanted to make quite sure that my commitments..that I wouldn't find myself in a ... torture chamber and being told by the cops and that is the first thing they tell you: oh your friends in London or whatever, have sent you out but they're sitting very happily there..Um so I would not feel that I had <sup>not</sup> been told what was awaiting me. Now I didn't really need to be told that; growing up in, politically in the '60s and early '70s I had a sense that virtually every second person seemed...who got pulled into detention seemed to end up you know, badly tortured and often dying. So I didn't need to be reminded of that but I was and again the message went home and that was that this is a serious business and um, I wasn't being lead up the garden path or...and the other thing that constantly was stressed to me was that it wasn't a romantic kind of thing that I was...going to be involved in. And also there is often the sort of romantic aura that attaches to underground work. A lot of



ANS my training came <sup>comising</sup> sort of in reminding me it was slog work; it was you're on your own a great deal, and that one could expect temptations, given one, the fact that earlier kind of syndrome.....