J.F. So if I can start by asking you where you were born and when?

F.E. Yes, I guess I just continue telling you the story until you decide to ask me something else?

J.F. Ja, but what I'd like you to say is what was your background....

F.E. Yes, yes, yes - I come from a broken family - my father left our family when I was three weeks old, and my father comes from Indian background and my mother comes from Malay background, and there was some kind of ethnic problems between these two communities as well, and so my mother was disowned by her family for getting married to my father - we lived in a two roomed house, two roomed meaning there were just two rooms in the house and a kitchen, on the wrong side of Wynberg in the Cape - I say the wrong side because when the whites wanted our side of the area there was this one road, South Road, which divided - which divided Wynberg from Plumstead, and the Malay community in South Africa, the families are still very extended, like my grandmother and my uncles and aunties and so on and so forth, and all of us would live in one place, right, before I was born, but all my uncles and aunties lived in Wynberg and - and my cousins and their children, and it is very much still the case.

We lived in the wrong side, and so when the Group Areas came we had to leave and it was - I mean it was a frightening experience - I was about four or five years old, but I remember it very clearly, and I couldn't quite understand why the whole family could stay back and - and we had to leave, but I couldn't understand this one side of the road idea - it was an ordinary small road - it wasn't a wide road, it wasn't a highway - you know, in South Africa you have the phenomena of highways dividing communities - a highway in a field and on the other side of the highway also a field, and there the two different communities - and so we left for a place called Bonteheuwel.

But my earliest political impressions were on Republic Day, when South Africa was declared a republic in 1961, and I was about five years old at that time....

J.F. You were born in 1957?

F.E. That's correct - I was five years old at that time and I remember clearly my brother brought home this medal that they got at school, these Republic Day medals, and I sported one - and then there was this elderly lady, Oma Arense, who lived next to us, and then she said that die kaffirs gaan jon vang als jy die medal draai - you know, the kaffirs are going to catch you and they going to beat you up if they see you wearing that medal - and there were also some black people living in that area with us.

Anyway I took the medal off, but I kept on wondering what is it that the blacks have against this - this particular kind of symbol - of course - and the whole thing also symbolises the - the separateness between the Malay commun - between the - the Coloured community and the African community, and the fact that it was quite I mean - my brother could come home with the medal and all the other children at school did have the medals - it's also an indication of where the Coloured community of those days were - I mean I remember in my very early school days the fact that we would sing the national anthem at school, the national an - the South African National Anthem, or the regime's national anthem - it's not being sung at all any more - and I mean I think those are significant indications of where our community was.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. We moved to Bonteheuwel and it was absolute wasteland - it was just wasteland - we moved into a small two roomed house - again it was five brothers, myself and one sister, without a father, and my mother - five of us, I think - four of us were still at school, and my mother and them (?) had to go and work, and I remember for the first three nights of living in Bonteheuwel my - my mother and my brothers got lost I mean from - because it's like you just see sand, and all these houses look exactly alike - you know, these little matchbok houses - anyway that is where we lived for a number of years until I finished my schooling in about '70 or something like that.

Bonteheuwel was - I loved going back to Bonteheuwel - I mean I enjoy Bonteheuwel, but it hasn't been like this all the time and I enjoy it from quite another angle - two important things happened in Bonteheuwel - now Bonteheuwel of course, like all the other displaced communities, people have been thrown from so many different areas and here they are thrown - my mother was raped in Bonteheuwel, and I remember - and the impact it had on us as little children, when the police came in and out and we - we didn't exactly know what was happening, and yet we knew that something sick sure had taken place - it was a terr - and none of us has spoke about it after that again - and my brother, my one brother wanted (?) to live in Durban, and he was a teacher in a religious community there, and then he came back to Bonteheuwel and again this whole thing of a displaced community and people being disorientated - he joined up with one of the local gangs, ended up serving about ten years for murder, and is presently still a - a warlord in Bonteheuwel - he's the only person in our family who has not moved out of Bonteheuwel - he seems to enjoy the pull of the ghetto - he - he's a Mandrax merchant - he's a Mandrax merchant and he's doing very well for himself.

He's paralysed, having been beaten up by the police at some point or the other, but that is his life at the moment....

J.F. He's paralysed in one limb?

F.E. Yes, yes, but the remarkable thing is that I mean Islam as a religion still exercises a - a very important hold over the morality of the Muslims, and our family is one of those old families where you've got priests running the family - I mean I'm the present priest in charge of the whole extended family, but with decent - very decent and upright and, you know, a morally fine kind of family with uncles and aunties and cousins and second cousins, and people who run the show at the mosque and people who run the show with religious rituals and that kind of thing, and the remarkable thing is that it fell to the lot of one of my brothers, who by accident lived on the other side of the road, and then we had to go to Bonteheuwel - I mean the other family is, in the very normal sense or the middle class sense of the word, very upright - I mean there are no criminals in our family - I mean he's like really a black sheep, and I don't think it's a coincidence, man, that - and the only woman in our family that was raped was my mother, in Bonteheuwel, and the only criminal that came from our family was in Bonteheuwel, and this gives you an idea of the - the impact that the Group Areas had as far as the disruption of the lives of people were concerned.

Those were some of my very early memories - yes, I come from a very, very poor family - there was never enough money for - for clothes - my - my earliest memories of school was the continuous stories that had to be told to the teachers about why you don't have money for your books - I forgot, miss - I forgot, miss - I forgot, sir - my mother forgot to give me the money - my mother says I must give it next week, sir - an endless -

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. I mean from - from those very early times you begin to - the system are the teachers, and you sort of say, have a handkerchief, and your nails are supposed to be clean, and the teachers had their own values and - and - and the poor had their own - the teachers always came from other areas, you see - those were some of my impressions, and of course running across a very large field every morning on my way to school, but running because the - the fields were frost-laden and it would - what you call - bite our feet - I mean I'd often go to school bare-feet - very, very often - very often there was nothing to eat in our - in our homes - in our house, and a favourite was sugar and bread, so you put the sugar on the bread and you - you let the water drip from the tap and you kind of - so that the - so that the sugar may stuck - may stick to the bread - that is the kind of family background that I come from....

J.F. Can I just ask you were those early memories at all permeated with a feeling that the whites were responsible for the kind of suffering or was there not that thought to make a link in that direction, or was there any sense that it was a class thing or - and was it overt, spoken by anyone of politics, or was it just a sense you got at some time?

F.E. Mmm - no, there was a very clear impression that the whites were responsible for it, and apartheid was a big word in the language of our people - the whites were responsible for it, the whites were in control of everything, but there was a sense of powerlessness towards these whites who were responsible for it, and this in one of the fundamental ways in which things are different now - I mean people do not have a sense of powerlessness - they may not have been able to do much with this renewed sense of confidence that they have, but I remember the whole community was - that was the one thing - the other thing was viz-a-viz the blacks - the community was completely suspended between - between the blacks and the - and the whites - my only memories of blacks were essentially of two kinds - the one was the bogey man, who was going to catch you at night - if you're not going to go to bed die boetie - die boetie kam jou vang kom slaap, you see - the boetie is the black man, but it's not a derogatory term for black person - boetie literally means small brother - boetie also means black man, but boetie is also - you would also call the black man boetie, can I have something, I mean unlike I mean people won't call say, kaffir, can I have something, but boetie's an affectionate term, which was quite unusual, I think.

J.F. But do Afrikaaners call each other boetie?

F.E. No, no, the Coloureds call the African men boetie - so die boetie kam jou vang - that was an image that I had, the bogey man, and the other image was of the milkman - these are the only two impressions that I had of black people until the age of 14 - I had no contact with black people, and what was amazing is that we lived on the other side of the road - it's again the road - you had this highway, the Vanguard Express-way, and then a field, then you had the Coloured community - we lived on the edge of that - and on the other side were the Langa hostels - you had the bush - you had the bush and then you had the Langa hostels, but imagine I mean until the age of 14 I had no contact with blacks, and my contact with blacks occurred when I had gone to attend a high school seminar at the University of Cape Town, but they lived across the road, and some - most people ask me what is apartheid all about - this is what apartheid is, to have people living on the other side of the road or the railway line or the hill, as in so many other parts of South Africa, and not to have any kind of human contact or recognise (?) the person on the other side as a human being and not as one mass of whites, or as blacks.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. But our people had a very clear idea that it was a racial thing - that it was the whites who were responsible for all of this, that the whites were the problem in South Africa - I must point out, though, that they never thought of the blacks as a part of the solution - at that stage they were in a limbo, a community - and this is, I think, one of - it's one of the most bizarre communities in the world, the Coloured community, I mean the - the idea of not being a coherent part of any structure of any kind, and you don't - where do you belong to - and until - in '62 the tengo, the king of Malasia, invited the Muslims to come home - invited the Malays to come home to Malasia, and he offered to pay for their expenses and so on in being repatriated to - to Malasia - so until then I mean - of course the - the wise thing on the part of the commun - I don't think it was (.........) or if it was just the fear of the unknown - they didn't take the offer up, but it wasn't because they - it wasn't because they - they didn't want to take the offer up - it was much more because they - they were afraid of the unknown, rather than a clear statement that we are a part of South Africa, we are a part of the oppressed - the concept of the oppressed - I don't think that that concept was a common concept amongst people - a concept was this enfranchised - that was a concept, but also not used by the ordinary people, by the - by the upper middle class people - and I remember that expression used by some teachers, and it is still an expression used by the Unity Movement crowd, but then I think you'll know that by the - from the Cape's political tradition, they have played a very crucial role in the ideological formations of the early days.

J.F. The expression the oppressed was....

F.E. No, no, the disenfranchised.

J.F. Did you grow up with a knowledge of the history of resistance in the Coloured community, the African People's Organisation, the Abdurahman, Gool, Unity Movement at all?

F.E. No, nothing, that's- that was an absolute blank space - that was an absolute blank space until the last four, five years - that's how I came to - to read up about these people and so on - you see, I may have had I remained in Wynberg with the rest of the Malay Coloured community, but not in Bonteheuwel - in Bonteheuwel I mean, you see, you grow up with that kind of knowledge when there is some kind of political sophistication, but a political sophistication which, especially in a ghetto that is new, is completely absent, and this is why I mean they can - they can go a long way in a place like Khayelitsha, because Crossroads may be a ghetto, but it has its own sense of community, it has its own traditions, its own history - that goes for District Six as well, but Khayelitsha won't have it - Khayelitsha's story is just a story of people fighting for survival - Crossroads is the story of people fighting for survival, but in a community sense I mean they - they've learned to live with each other, and this is why I mean in Bonteheuwel there was no sense of community, and so there's nobody to tell these stories - there's no favourite guy around the corner that you go and sit at the shop to go and listen to these stories, as was the case in Wynberg and in District Six.

J.F. And did your mother - what work did she do?

F.E. Oh, yes, that's another kind of very bad impression that I have of those years - my mother was a factory worker, and she would often leave very early in the morning, before we are awake, and she would return often I mean at about seven in the evening, and then also the sexism in the whole society - my brothers were adults,but they could not cook, they could not clean the house, they could not make the beds, and so my mother came home at night and she made the beds, and she had to do the cooking.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. Myself and my brother just elder than what I am - older than what I am - we did the cleaning of - we - we - we made the beds, but that was the limit of what our male commitment to the house would - would mean, cleaning the beds, you see - so here you had this woman who - who - who worked the whole day in a factory, and she was an ironer, and she had to....

J.F. She was a what?

F.E. An ironer, and she had to come home at night and to pay attention to all these things - she died of a heart attack in - in '71 at the age of 55, and she was clearly overworked - she came home from the factory, and it's a thing which I like find quite unforgiveable, both the sexism of society as well as the oppression on the factory floor - she forever complained about being tired and she - she quite often had to frequent hospitals and things like that, but yet I mean she never saw some kind of solution in the distribution of work inside the house - I mean like none of my brothers can cook, and of course this whole thing is being perpetuated in our own homes at the moment - and you've seen (........ ....) that I pay a lot of attention to the whole question of the social oppression of women - indeed I'm working on a play at the moment called Mother, to talk about the oppression of women in politically liberated families, because I think it's - I think it's very important to force the issue of the oppression of women onto the agenda - onto the political agenda.

I mean I think that people are just being bloody convenient and - and are using kind of all sorts of political jargon to - to run away from their own chauvinism, from their own inability to free themselves from their shackles, so it's all very convenient to talk about the political struggle comes first and there is that and then the social emancipation of women, this, that and the other, but other societies - I mean I've been to the Soviet Union recently - other societies have taught us that if the two things don't go hand in hand, then there is no automatic liberation of women after the political liberation of the country.

J.F. How do you think you got this awareness of male chauvinism and sexual oppression, given your home....

F.E. And given the place where I studied - I studied in Pakistan, theology in in an institution where our textbooks haven't changed for the last six - six centuries - none of the textbooks that I studied is newer than six centuries, and some of the grammar textbooks - I mean our other textbooks are as 12 centuries old or something like that(Laugh) - I still have all of them, I enjoy them - I think it was my mother - I think it was - first of all I mean I - there was a - a strange link between me and her that there wasn't between - between her and the others, because I was three weeks old when she was abandoned by my father, and so she had the sense of protection of this young child that she had to look after - I mean it - it's quite pathetic, three weeks, you know, and then the father left, and he's the youngest, and I was very frail, and so I think I had a very deep sensitivity towards all the sufferings that my mother endured, but I also think that it is also this that has politicised me - it is this precise awareness of seeing the oppression of people in the country culminating in her, and I think her plight as woman has forced us to focus on the - on the oppression of women - I think it came across a bit more vivid, man, than in many other families, because at least in other families you have the husband being the breadwinner in - in most other - the husband is the breadwinner, and the mother's job is just different in that it is a 24 hour job, but in her - in her case I mean it was a factory job, which was - which made her completely on par with all the other males in the family.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. Of course society has the myth, you know, that the guy's the bread-winner, so then you do the work at home, so I mean they can kind of (?) an oppressionist cushion in that way, because home work is supposed to be lighter work, it's supposed to be more casual - you don't work for a boss, you don't work to the clock, so it - it's like no big deal if you must work until 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock at night, when your husband has come and he's in bed already and you still tidying up the kitchen - but in our case it was different because she - she had a boss and she had hours, and she had to rush for - for a train, and that train thing was terrible - she had to run every morning, and she had to run every morning for a train, and run every night to catch the train again.

J.F. But how did you translate seeing it in the home - there're enough - there are people who grew up and saw the women in their families oppressed, but how have you - how is it for you become part of your political awareness, or was there anything that happened along the line as you got older?

F.E. No, there was nothing dramatic - it was just these memories - no, I don't quite know how I would be different from other people - perhaps I'm - I'm - one could also ask why - I mean I come from Bonteheuwel, and the townships of those days did not breed political activists - I was the first person to be detained, the first high school pupil to be detained, in about ten years and....

J.F. When was that?

F.E. When I was in school - that was in about '70 - in '70 - and it was a big thing, it - it hit the headlines of the papers - it was a big story- I mean of course if people get detained today it's not a big thing any more, it's - it also gives you an indication of how far we have come - but one could also ask I mean how did I grow in this - in this barrenness - in fact living in Bonteheuwel I was the national chairperson of an organisation called National Youth Action, a non-racial organisation seeking to politicise high school students - I mean it was - it was truly non-racial in that there were lots of Africans and Coloureds and whites in the organisation.

Of course BC was THE philosophy of those days, and my entire national exec was white, which of course gives a lot of credibility to the whole BC idea of how - of how whites had actually dominated the political scene in the late '60s and early '70s, and I think it was completely true, but of course the Coloured community and the black community have acquired a political sophistication today which really invalidates that argument - I mean there is no ways that you'll find - that you find say, I mean at a conference like this, you know - you may find academically whites still dominating the scenes, but not in terms of confidence to present your point of view or confidence for you to stand up and speak for yourself - you don't have that kind of shying away any more.

Anyway so there was this organisation, National Youth Action, which I think was a very important organisation - it was completely non-racial, which of course links up to the other question that you asked - I mean if racial memories were so bad then - then how come this wealth of goodwill that there still - that there still existed towards whites - I must point out that in that particular era it wasn't goodwill that made you reach out towards whites - it was much more your own sense of inferiority, your wanting to be in acceptable company, your wanting to be human, and whiteness representing that which is human - it was that in the late '60s and early '70s that caused so many Coloureds to gravitate, and so many blacks to gravitate towards white dominated organisations, such as NUSAS and an organisation like NYA.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. I mean I remember the sense of pride that I could walk around with my white friends in the Coloured community and people looking at us, and this guy has white friends, but it was a very negative thing of course, so it was that that first - that first permeated this whole, quite, unquote, non-racialism - then of course BC came, and I think BC was tremendously important, and I don't like the way in which the value of BC's being underplayed today - I think that it had a context - I mean given this kind of context which I've just told you about of this tremendous feeling of social inferiority, BC came and then - and said no, we need to discover for our own selves what we are all about - we need that breathing space, that space for ourselves - and it did that - it did that to a whole - to just thousands of people.

I mean BC expanded so rapidly amongst people and it caught on, and it caught - there was a tremendous wave of pride in being who you are - from that of course I mean people have now moved on to another understanding of non-racialism, I think a much more authentic understanding of what non-racialism is all about - are there any more personal questions before I go onto this non-racial thing?

J.F. Why don't you go on and I'll get back - I'd rather you go with your feelings (?) relevant.

F.E. And so then SASO came, infiltrated a conference of ours, opened our eyes, I think....

J.F. An NYA conference?

F.E. Yes, an NYA conference - some of the NYA people that are still around is Graeme Bloch and Cheryl Carolus - the three of us are still NYA buddies.

J.F. I'm just wondering - maybe I could just take it back from - was that your real first political involvement?

F.E. Yes, yes.

J.F. When did you get involved?

F.E. I was in Standard Eight - I was in Standard Eight and I was about 13 or 14 at that time - I was about 14 - my brother - my brother's boss - my brother's boss's son - I don't know what's his name now - they had some meeting at the university and my brother asked if I didn't want to go along, so the company car came to fetch me and took me to the university - my brother had by this time worked himself up - quote, unquote, worked himself up - and then I went....

J.F. Worked himself up in what way?

F.E. In the company - in the company, and he was now production manager or something like that - and then I went and I saw all these white people in these - and - and I fitted in well....

J.F. You thought that was pretty cool?

E.F. Yes, it was and - but again it was a sense of inferiority - the sense of wanting to be accepted - wanting to be accepted by other people - it was that and I - I joined in, and I cut a pretty impressive figure for them, and after ten days of national conferencing I became the Western Cape chairperson - they thought that very - it was a good game (?) - and the next day became the national chairperson.

J.F. Were there many Coloureds and blacks?

E

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. Yes, yes.

J.F. Africans as well?

F.E. There were lots of Africans - lots and lots of Africans.

J.F. And is it - it's not religious in any way, it's....

F.E. No.

J.F. .... national (......) but who's behind it?

F.E. NUSAS was behind it.

J.F. Was it the NUSAS youth....

F.E. No, no, it was a combination of NUSAS and the young progs.

J.F. So it was liberal?

F.E. It was liberal, yes - of course NUSAS itself was liberal in those days - NUSAS as a whole - I mean not the leadership of NUSAS - and as NUSAS became radicalised between NUSAS and SASO, the same thing happened to NYA - NYA broke up into three groups - SASO, which became much more famous because of its - the political profile of BC and the '76 uprisings, SASM, and a group called Contact, who insisted on non-racialism, and a white interest group - they of course all faded out....

J.F. What do you mean a white interest group?

F.E. No, BC had this idea that white people should work in their own communities, so people who accepted the BC idea for the white community.

J.F. And Contact was..............

END OF SIDE ONE.

F.E. There was hardly any kind of intellectual content to any of these discussions that we had - the Unity Movement did not feature at all in our debates, neither did the ANC feature in our discussions - I mean it was just what these young people thought ought to be done, and in all fairness to the NUSAS people, them in their liberalism felt that these youngsters must sort out things for themselves - anyway so now it was this whole BC crowd - I remained chairperson of NYA for that year, until I joined the BC crowd myself.

J.F. What year was that?

F.E. That was I think in - in '71.

J.F. What made you join the crowd?

F.E. Oh, I - I supported the BC crowd from the beginning, but I just felt that I had a duty to stay on in NYA to finish my term of office....

J.F. What was the motivation for supporting the BC crowd - discuss (?) the white liberal point of view or criticism or had you - you felt from the beginning....

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. No, it was just the uneasiness - I mean the superficiality of - of - of white/black relations in these non-racial organisations, and the fact that there was no acknowledgement of - of the realities (?) as they existed, and all these whites, for example, were people who lived in the upper class areas, unlike the non-racialism of today, where most of the whites who are involved actually move away from their - from their areas and they go to the poorer white areas - that's why we talk about the Obs area committee or the Gardens area committee and - and this was, I think, deliberate (?) liberalism and what we experience today is that the white activists move away from their double storey mansions - now I think there is some bizarre element in that, because Indian activists who live in double storey homes aren't required to do that to establish their credibility - now why do whites have to go that extra - it's a penance kind of thing - it's trying to compensate for - for your historical role in things, but I think it's one of the anomalies that I'm not too pleased with in the struggle at the moment - the fact that it is required of whites to go that extra bit - it's not required of other people to go that extra bit.

I mean there are senior activists in the national democratic movement who live in double storey homes, even triple storey homes, but they not white, you see - I don't see how our people would have tolerated a white person who lived in a triple storey home, so there is still those kind of undertones of racialism even in the non-racial movement - I think we've come a long way since then, but those undertones do exist and they are real.

Anyway then I went to Pakistan and I studied theology there....

J.F. That's a big jump - let me just - if I can clarify - you were in NYA - when you first were fetched in the company car and they elected you in that - there was a period when you were pretty pleased about it....

F.E. Yes, I was very pleased about it - I had a position, I was a somebody.

J.F. Was it because these whites liked you and that was....

F.E. The whites liked me and I was acceptable to them and - and they thought I was a good guy, I was a very good guy and....

J.F. That made you feel (.......)

F.E. It made me feel very, very pleased.

J.F. So how then did you move towards the BC - I'm just wondering if there were any incidents where something happened which showed white domination or whether you just went - one day stood back and said : Look, this is useless - how did you move to BC, I'm just so interested to know

F.E. Actually there was this conference organised, I'm not sure by who any more - it was an NYA conference, but we had a speaker, Ben Khoape - he came to speak, and he made quite an impression on all of us, and there was fireworks - it was a very bitter - it was a very emotional thing - for the first time I mean the whole non-racial cocoon was shattered and people were told that this is not what reality's all about - that converted a lot of us to BC on that particular day, and there were lots of tears and people were crying and they were very upset - it was a very traumatic thing, because we were living in our own world, you see, of non-racialism, which had nothing to do with South African reality, and again not non-racialism as it is understood today - a very flimsy kind of avoidance of - of problems, avoidance of different realities.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. But it was much more for tactical reasons that I stayed on, and people also felt that there is scope for co-operation between these different factions, and I was like the senior figure that could possibly hold all three factions together in some kind of federation, and it's that why (? I remained on as the national chairperson of NYA - for a long time NYA had a black caucus that represented the interests of the BC people, the black caucus of NYA - that black caucus came to form the South African Students Movement in the Transvaal, and the South African Black Scholars Association, SABSA, in the Cape - and it was only after a year when I saw the futility of all this non-racial kind of pussyfooting, and what was more is that the most competent black guys had now broken away and formed SABSA, so I also had efficiency problems with the running of the organisation, and here I was sitting now with a national exec who were entirely white, and this I found untenable because our realities differed from each other so much - it was then that I moved over to SABSA as well.

J.F. Did you ever discuss it with any of the whites or did you just one day leave and?

F.E. No, we discussed it at length, and we remained kind of very good friends and so on.

J.F. Did they understand?

F.E. Yes, they did, there was - I was - I was quite surprised I mean - there was a lot of understanding amongst whites for the position of black, but there's also another kind of understanding, and I don't think it's an authentic understanding- it's - it's - it's an understanding born in the sense of guilt, so yes, yes, Faried, I mean we understand and - but it's not an intellectual understanding - it's not even an emotional understanding - it's if you are black then you must be correct, man - it's this whole liberal guilt, you see, like if you like another black guy then you must be correct, so O.K., here's a ten rand (?) - it's that kind of thing - I think you know what I'm trying to say - anyway...

J.F. So then you moved to SABSA?

F.E. I moved to SABSA and I stayed there for a year, and (?) I finished my schooling.

J.F. How did you find SABSA - did you grow politically, were they discussing intellect....

F.E. SABSA was an extension of BC and just an extension of SASO, and unlike the white liberalism that allowed for these youngsters to find their own feet, they didn't - all our seminars were dominated by SASO people - SASO came and they spoke - Barney Pityana, Henry Isaacs, Johnny Issel, Terror Lakota - these people came and they dominated our seminars - they spoke and they ran our everything for us, our workshops, and so we were just an extension - we were just the young black guys as far as they were concerned.

J.F. And did you grapple with issues - at the time and as you look back on it, was it a growing period, were you pleased about BC, were there any feelings of it?

F.E. I think it was very important I mean - BC stepped in at a time when there was an absolute vacuum in the community - a sense of loss, a sense of - I mean I explained to you earlier on about the sense of being in the middle of nowhere that the Coloured community seemed to have experienced in those early years.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. And it was at such a stage that BC came in and BC said that no, you are a part of that crowd, we belong there - it was - it gave us a sense of dignity, it gave us a sense of power - for the first time we realised that - I think it was - I know (?) this is a very simplistic - and there was a tremendous amount of condescension towards the black people in BC - I remember discussing I mean the new exec - who would be on the new exec of SABSA, and then the SABSA chairperson said that look, look, look, all these fellows are Coloured, we must get a black one here - any black, but we must get a black on the exec.

And then I looked at this whole thing and I thought oh, my God, this is paternalism, and then I told him : Look, this is paternalism and I'm going to expose it - I'm going to tell people what you said - but I was threatened with expulsion, and then I backtracked, but this was original (?) idea that even the BC - you see, BC worked from the premise that our realities are different and that is why we don't have a common cause - now they had to work from that premise because any other premise would have been a blatently racist premise, and they denied that they were racists - they still deny that they are racists, but they say that our realities are different and therefore we work with our own communities.

But the myth in that was that the reality of the Indians are also different from the reality of the blacks and of the Coloureds are different from the Indians, so why - why should the Coloureds and the blacks - why should the Coloureds and Indians be a part of the black community - I mean either you recognise authentic cultural differences between people, fine, and then work from that premise, but once you start saying that all of us are black and - and all of us have this much in common, which wasn't true - I mean my social experience does not give any kind of credibility to the idea that the Coloureds regarded themselves as a part of the black community - never were we a part of the black community, and so the - O.K., I don't want to talk about congress now, but the line that congress seems to have struck, that people have differences and that these differences are authentic, and they just talk about one black mass because it's a myth, and don't talk about one white mass because that's also a myth, you see - I think it is that I mean which caused my conversion much later on I mean to the - to the congress line.

J.F. But in that year that you were in SASO there were seeds sown, you're saying - you kind of began to see cracks....

F.E. Yes, yes, and the interesting thing was it was also the - I also remember clearly BC being questioned between '71, '72 - BC being really questioned like between - it was in '73 when other elements started attacking BC like never before, and I'm not quite sure how this commensurated with other political developments in the Western Cape, but much of these arguments were Unity Movement based, or Unity Movement types of arguments against BC, and they launched a - a counter-attack onto BC in '72, '73, and lots - lots of people began to question BC in '72, '73, but I don't think that this questioning was intensive enough to have actually lasted until the '76 period, and the one thing which I find bad about the '76 period is that claims are being made that it was actually a congress uprising, and that's not true.

I mean I'm very much a part of congress and I support the congress movement completely, but I don't think that that - that that period can be attributed to congress in honesty.

J.F. Were you influenced by the Unity Movement making that critique.

F.E. No, never.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J.F. ....about - you're saying Unity Movement gave critique of BC - you were also making critique of BC?

E.F. Yes.

J.F. Were you....

F.E. It was essentially empirical - it was as I experienced it in the organisation - there was also this contempt for intellectualisation in the BC circles - I mean BC had some very primitive and very - it had some very bare ideas, man, ideas that were - that were really half-baked, quite simplistic, about this black mass being mobilised and then they going to meet a white mass, and for example, if you ask : O.K., what happens to the good whites - then they talk about a mountain, you know, and all the bad people on the other side of the mountain, the bad whites on one si(de) - so you go and you go around from the one side, the black mass, and all the good whites go around from the other side and they will meet on the - all sorts of simplistic kind of analyses existed in those days - if for - I mean - about say, the - the differences in the levels of oppression of black and white - no, Coloureds aren't different from blacks that are oppressed - you either pregnant or you're not pregnant - whether you're three months pregnant or whether you're nine months pregnant is not the point.

So whether you're oppressed to this degree or whether you're oppressed to that degree, it's not the point - it was kind of very simplistic analogies were used as a substitute for political debate in the BC circles.

J.F. BC were saying Coloureds were oppressed like blacks?

F.E. Yes.

J.F. And you're saying what?

F.E. It's not true - then they come with a story like the pregnant story, so it doesn't matter if the Coloureds are nine - three months oppressed and the blacks are nine months oppressed, pregnancy is pregnancy.

J.F. That's what they'd say?

F.E. Yes.

J.F. And how did you respond to that - what did you say about that?

F.E. Now it's difficult to actually tackle analogies like this, but inside yourself is selfism (?) - inside yourself you just know that there's something wrong with the story, man - you can't define it, you can't explain it, but it doesn't make any sense to you.

J.F. Because you can see that Coloureds are a different situation (?)

F.E. Yes, yes, but what I'm trying to say is that they managed to - I don't want to use the word hoodwink, it's a very negative term, but they managed to keep a lot of us going on constructions like those, and I - I don't think that there's too much documented about that period, but I mean the whole BC ideology was riddled with this kind of selfism (?)

J.F. But some Coloureds who are Indians would be pleased with that analogy because of like say, guilt and feelings of a Indian who lives in the three storey house to say : Hey, I'm oppressed, I'm black, so I'm also oppressed - and then that just there's a big sigh of relief and they can join the movement.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J.F. They don't want to say : Oh, well, gosh, my father's got a big car and you don't even - you've never taken anything but a bus - they're not going to want to bring that up, but I'm interested that you would bring that up and would it - in a sense would point out that Bonteheuwel is a marginally better existence than Langa in the hostels.

F.E. I think it's an essentially personal thing - I've always had this commitment to criticism, and we had a big argument about it last night, the (.......) of Islam people - it was three against two - we are writing a paper at the moment on why the call (?) of Islam from an Islamic theological position, has opted for working with congress, from a theological position - I've done the paper and the paper is now being read by the call of Islam people before publication - it's been (being) criticised by call of Islam people, but as is my style, and even in the call of Islam information brochure which I've given you, I always end with the grey areas - I say that these are areas that our arguments - wherein our arguments fall flat - these are questions that we haven't resolved yet - I mean these are some of the problems in an alliance with congress - these are contradictions in the call of Islam's position, and I'm the leader of the call of Islam.

But it is something which I've always done in every single paper that I've - even a polemic paper - I'm mean when (?) I've defended a certain position - at the end of that I will come with my questions about my own position, and it's a thing I think which has permeated all - I mean the sum total of my political involvement to - to do things I think in a very committed way - it is quite possible for me to give my whole life to something and yet see all the holes in it, and to expose the holes in it.

J.F. But tell me when they were making a simplistic analogy and you were seeing differences because of the Coloured situation, where was your head - where was your point of view at in terms of the Coloured identity - had you by then said so-called Coloured and reject it or did you just - where were you?

F.E. It was so-called Coloured.

J.F. When did that come about and how?

F.E. That came out right from the beginning when you started using BC terminology, you are so-called Coloured, but your being a part of the Coloured community you - you remained a part of the Coloured community - BC never made us become a part of the black community, BC never encouraged us to meet blacks - the amazing thing is that it is congress with its non-racialism but with its recognition of cultural differences, that has done far more to bring people of different races together - I mean I now know far more black people and have been to black areas far more often than in the BC days - I mean BC has done nothing to bring communities together because it - it fails to acknowledge that there were cultural differences in communities - they just presumed that we were one, and so we never developed friends across the colour lines - the only times you saw them was at seminars, unlike now where I know a lot of black guys and I go to the townships fairly often, and yet now there's a recognition of the fact that you are a bit different, that we not exactly the same.

We have a common cause, a common goal, but I work from my community and you work from yours, but there's lots of space for us to get together, and we must increase that space for togetherness - but there was this reference to so-called Coloured, and it was a contradiction because you never thought of yourself as a so-called Coloured - you thought of yourself as a Coloured in your own - in - in your own social awareness you were a Coloured, but you would talk of yourself as so-called Coloured.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J.F. So you would thank BC for breaking down the colour (...........) - when you were in NYA did you say so-called Coloured or were you....

F.E. No, I said - yes, we said so-called Coloured.

J.F. But was that from the BC or from the NYA or?

F.E. Oh, oh, oh, no, I was talking about the intermediate period - no, in NYA it was the Coloured people - BC taught us about so-called Coloureds, and of course now it's back to Coloureds.

J.F. It is?

F.E. No, but people don't have any qualms about using the term Coloured - people aren't proud of it - I mean it's not a - but it's not a big thing and nobody says so-called Coloureds any more.

J.F. In the future South Africa will that (........) ever die out or is it a necessary term?

F.E. I think that the last four years has really brought the Coloured community a very, very long way in - in not ensuring (?) that that kind of thing dies out, but in making sure that a larger South Africanist precedes whatever other cultural background you could be having - I mean the Muslim community is distinct from the Coloured community, although also a part of the community at the same time, but yet for them I mean the last four, five years have been an essentially a move towards a South Africanist, towards a recognition that we are a part of South Africa, that our destiny is tied up with the rest of the people of South Africa, and the same to a far greater degree goes for the Coloured community, because the Coloured community is far less homogenous, far less distinct in terms of I mean having a tradition and a history and so on and so forth, that the Muslims could be - that the Muslims do have, so there is this move towards a South Africanist.

In fact the irony is that the slogan of one nation is not the slogan of congress but the slogan of others, and yet because of the mobilisation effected by congress it is - it is essentially congress that has moved people towards the idea of one nation - you know, the one nation idea is essentially the Unity Movement types, the CAL types - Cape Action League types, the Africanist types - it's essentially their idea, and yet it is congress that has moved people towards that position of a unitary South Africa and all of us being a part of that.

J.F. Since you're so into the critiquing, can I just ask you that kind of critique of non-racialism, which I say is the devil's advocate because I think it can be answered, but I'm interested how you would answer it, is that it's all fine for you as a leader to talk about the great friends you've had and all the contact you've had and all that, but that its leaders and that the community, the base, doesn't get together - that if you're a Coloured living in Athlone, you go to your area committee meeting in your UDF, but you never get to Guguletu, whereas you as a leader, or somebody who's on the national exec - Andrew Boraine can meet with Mountain Qumbela, but that's because they've got their positions, but yet you're saying actually that you - I'm just wondering how you'd respond to that?

F.E. It's an interesting one - yes, I think it is true - I think a commun - on a community - on (?) community with another community, I think there's lots of scope for inter-racial contact, and I don't think that nearly enough is being done by congress, but the whole idea of fighting together, or fighting a struggle at the same time.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. For example, the youngsters of Athlone did not go to fight in Langa and the youngsters of Langa did not come to Athlone to come and riot there, but the idea that people are rioting in Athlone on the same day that others are rioting in Langa, it is this idea which is giving birth to the one South Africa - it is not so much the social interaction of - of black communities with say, Coloured communities - it's not so much that, but much more a unity that comes from struggle, so at the meeting then in the evening when the activist from Langa talks about what happened in the township today and the activist from Bonteheuwel talks about what's happened in the township today, it is then when people feel, you know, the similarity in their lives, but it's not a social convergence, man, but - it's not a social convergence, which again I mean gives this thing to congress's position that there are separate communities - no big deal about that - but one struggle - and in that way we're not moving closer to each other in the social sense, but certainly in the political sense, and it is that, I think, that will count more than anything else in a future South Africa.

J.F. What's your position and what's your understanding about this whole debate of area committees - the fact that in Transvaal you've got the anti-PC, which is a Coloured group, you've got this UCC in Durban, you've got the white even more, you've got the JODAC in the Transvaal, you've got something in the Durban area possibly, but in Cape Town never, never could you have a UDF white area committee....

F.E. There was some debate about it recently and it came off very badly - I mean the people who supported the idea were shoof.

J.F. The idea of what?

F.E. The idea of separate - of - of - of a white thingie (?) - look, in some ways it is a part of our Unity Movement tradition, it's a part of our - I mean the Unity Movement tradition in the Cape goes very, very strong - I don't know how aware you are of that - ideologically the Cape is until today very, very much a combin - today it is a combination of Unity Movement and congress - even the congress elements, we in the Western Cape are on the left of congress, because our Unity Movement - because of the Unity Movement tradition in the Western Cape.

Now the curious thing about my own position is that I commute between the Transvaal and the Cape on an ongoing basis - I spend three, four days in the Cape and three or four days in the Transvaal, and the politics of the two regions are completely different from each other, and the religious life of the two communities are different from each other, and the cultural lives (Laugh) - and I mean I've been doing this for the last two years - I don't support the TIC position because I think in many ways in these areas it is not an ideological position that has caused them to have say, JODAC and the TIC and the RMC, the Release Mandela Committee, but it is much more the fight for political hegemony in different caucuses in the UDF that causes people to insist on these kinds of divisions - that is the one reality, as far as I see.

The other reality is that the communities are more separate in these areas than in the Western Cape - you see, geographically the Western Cape is actually very small, unlike the Transvaal where Lenasia is 20 kilometers out and you can forget about them there - you can't forget about the Coloureds in the Western Cape, you can't forget about the whites in the Western - you can't forget about the blacks - I mean Langa is in the middle of - of Athlone and Bonteheuwel, two (to) Coloured townships, and Gugs is next to Mannenberg - is between Mannenberg and Philipi (?) - so geographically then the one community cannot really ignore the other community.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. And the Transvaal is a vast hinterland - the same goes for Natal - of course in Natal they're much more closer to each other, but culturally the - the roots of people it's much more - then (?) it's much more deeper - in the Cape the black community is a culturally displaced community - I mean their homeland is the Transkei and the Ciskei, so there isn't those cultural roots - the Coloured community has its own kind of eclectic concoction of this, that and the other, and it's (?) the white community.

In Natal you've got the Indian community, who only came from India 100 years ago - parents of the present Indian generation still speak of India as home, you go home - I mean it is lots and lots of Indian peo - every Indian person has spent two, three years in India in his school days, until today - you find a guy who's about 20 years old and he's in matric - why are you in matric at the age of 20 - oh, he spent three years in Indian when he was small - so India is still home, so the Indian identity isn't still very strong, you see, and the Zulu ethnic thing is still quite strong in - in - in Natal, and so the separateness of communities is geographically and otherwise, and sociologically far - a far greater reality than what it is in the Western Cape, so I think it's a combination of these two factors that causes the Western Cape to be so radically different.

It's first of all the Unity Movement tradition, secondly the - the fight for hegemony in the - in the Transvaal and in Natal, and thirdly the - the authentic cultural differences.

J.F. What do you mean by fight for hegemony in Transvaal and in Natal that doesn't exist in Cape Town?

F.E. No, it does exist, except that I think they have reached a far more mature way of resolving those things - I mean factions exist in the UDF.

J.F. In the Cape?

F.E. Yes - factions exist openly, factions caucus openly, factions fight openly in GC meetings, but they have this togetherness, unlike in the Transvaal where the TIC represents a faction of the UDF - not only a group that works with its own culture with its own cultural community - I mean in the Cape they would be called the Isselites, the people who have TIC kind of ideology.

J.F. Johnny Issel?

F.E. Yes.

J.F. Why, he advocates what, four nations?

F.E. Yes, that kind of thing - not exactly in the raw (.............)

J.F. Because that doesn't really exist, people - there's that kind of critique, and then when I interviewed ANC people they said : Show me the four nations thesis................

END OF SIDE TWO.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. .... really a fringe idea - look, I mean there are two ways of looking at the four nation - the - the four nation theory - the one is as the recognition of cultural differences as the base from which to mobilise people, and the one is to also see this as an intrinsic part of a new South Africa, and the holding on to your ethnic identities, you see - now congress has no problem with the recognition of separate communities, but it is much more cultural differences that congress acknowledges and recognises, rather than ethnic or racial differences, but I really suspect, man, that the congress or - I mean I'm talking about the TIC and the NIC, that they doing nothing to move out to other communities, and that they not only using the Indianness of people as a means of harnessing their own communities, but the fact that they not taking their communities beyond that Indianness is an indication that they are stuck where they are, because you supposed to use your cultural differences as a means of mobilisation - you're not supposed to use your cultural differences as a means of glorifying the past and holding onto it and - and I get the impression, but again I mean I have my Western Cape way of looking at this whole thing.

J.F. But just to challenge your point of view, what about the fact that you've said the Coloured community is different materially, culturally etc. - how do you mobilise the Coloured in the Western Cape - why don't you have the Coloured UDF area committee, or in fact don't you really have that - isn't Grassroots a paper that represents the Coloured - I'm saying if indeed you're accepting the idea that one uses the community to mobilise just like you deal with people, Muslim people - isn't that a contradiction, or is it actually coming down to the presentation that because of Unity Movement background you actually don't - you just chafe at the idea of mentioning the Coloured People's Congress....

F.E. No - yes....

J.F. .... or the CP and SACPO or something?

F.E. No, I think the one is - I mean like take the Muslim thing by way of analogy, Islam is a different community, the Muslims are a community on their own - we've worked from that premise - and yet at the same time we have worked miracles in terms of bringing our community closer to Christians and to Hindus and to Jews - I mean I chatted to you this morning about the Jewish thing - that's our latest thing, you see - but we've used our Islam to take us closer to other people and we have - we - from in the beginning when the call of Islam had Muslim only meetings, we moved beyond that and had public meetings in halls - first our meetings were in mosques, then our meetings moved onto halls, where the general activist could also pitch up, then our meetings move onto churches, where we speak in churches, and we bring the Muslims into the church - now this is how you take your community from one position and you lead them further on - I don't get the impression that the Indian congresses are doing this kind of thing, do you know what - and - and they are able to do it - the TIC never has a meeting in Soweto, and the RMC would never think of having a meeting in Lens, so those kind of divisions are being kept together - I mean kept intact, and this is my problem with their position.

J.F. And you said that comes out of our Unity Movement position, but when I asked you earlier you said to me oh, no, you hadn't been influenced by Unity Movement.

F.E. I was talking about the - the Western Cape as a whole - I - I spoke about myself personally and I spoke to you about the whole Western Cape - when I talk about our I talk about the Western Cape.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J.F. I'm just so interested in and reading about the Cape historically because I've been reading about - have you read this Gavin Lewis book Between the Wire and the Wall and the Coloureds - have you heard of it?

F.E. No.

J.F. It's a new book by Raven and it's from - the title comes from a poem by (..........) Between the Wire and the Wall - it's some academic from Australia writing his thesis on the history of the Coloured people, but there's a lot of facts in it that I learned, and then reading Abdurahman and....

F.E. Cissy Gool....

J.F. .... and Gools, and I interviewed Tabata Gool and that kind of thing, and reading it I am struck with it - the rich tradition of resistance - they weren't sitting around, but then that kind of absolute going nowhere on the boycott position and that kind of thing, so I'm interested - it seems that in a sense what you're saying is whether or not you're personally affected by it, whether or not you support it, it's there - there is this idea, is that what you're saying?

F.E. Yes, yes, yes, I never supported it, but it is there and it affects the way in which you look at things - you feel it all the time.

J.F. But what is there - when you said - what is there that's there - I'd just like you to spell it out - is it an idea that you reject the word Coloured or is it an idea that you don't want to institutionalise the word Coloured with the Coloured People's Congress or what is it?

F.E. The Coloured People's Congress is never mentioned - it's never mentioned - now that's very significant - we have a sense of embarrassment at it, and unlike in the - in the Transvaal and Nata - I don't know if you - when you speak to Cape activists you never hear about the Coloured People's Congress - we never speak about it - we really (?) feel uncomfortable about the fact that there was actually a time when the Coloured people call themselves Coloured and were (?) ashamed of it - there's actually that kind of - but it's an ambivalence, you see - it's an ambivalence between our political position and in our social precepts - it's that kind of thing - I mean like politically, ideologically, we ought to be supporting that idea for that time, but no, we gloss over it and shoo, shoo, quickly, quickly, pass over the idea that our people did actually organise as a separate community, and Johnny Issel wanted to revive the Coloured People's Congress at the beginning when this whole congress movement was being relaunched in the Western Cape, and it met with a lot of opposition from people - I don't know if you know about it.

J.F. Did he want to call it the (...............)

F.E. Yes.

J.F. Because obviously the name is the problem.

F.E. No, but the other thing is also unlike the Indian congresses - the Indian congresses is legitimately a part of the tradition of people - the Coloured People's Congress is not a part of the tradition of the Coloured people - you don't have a Gandhiji, you see, that stands up, or a (.... ....) Sita or (............)

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J.F. Do you have - do people ever talk about Coloured leaders - could you name me - who would you name - who would the average person you deal with name if they say : Look, name me a figure of resistance in South Africa who was a hero who happened to be Coloured?

F.E. No name would come to the mind.

J.F. What about Alex La Guma?

F.E. No, no name would come to mind - now again no other community - I mean I - I referred to this early on - in the more established communities, District Six (..................) quarters, Wynberg, the Malay quarters, there name - a name like Alex La Guma would come to the front, Abe Sachs-no, not Abe Sachs but he would be a known figure - Cissy Gool, Dr. Abdurahman - names would come to the front, but not in the townships - the townships are communities without histories, without any kind of roots.

J.F. Isn't that what it comes down to is the lack of culture - because the Indians have that tradition and it's a culturally rooted thing, even whites....

F.E. Like until now, until you raised it, I've never thought of Alex La Guma as a Coloured - not once have I thought of Alex La Guma as a Coloured.

J.F. Didn't you see that debate in the African Communist when he wrote in and said : I'm sick of being called a so-called Coloured - there was quite a lovely exchange before he died about three or four years ago, because I interviewed Reg September about it, and he was one of the first people I think at the beginning of the kind of O.K., we've had enough of so-called already, but he actually wrote in and said : Look, I grew up in Cape Town, I'm a Coloured from Cape Town and I'm not going to call it so-called - I should - I want to use it in the book, that quotation - I think he wrote to Sichaba as a letter to the editor and then he wrote something and somebody responded, but I interviewed James Stuart - you know who he is - and he's on the NEC of ANC.

F.E. Mmm, the only Coloured, the only so-called Coloured.

J.F. There're two - Reg September's also.

F.E. Oh, I've never met Reg - is he around?

J.F. I think he might be around - I'll ask if he's around - I don't know, maybe they were meaning another Reg - I think he hasn't been that well, but anyway there are those two and I wanted to talk to them about - interestingly, James Stuart didn't mention it very much because he was in the Transvaal - Reg September mentioned it a lot and it was - he was saying yes, we should talk to Alex La Guma - so you're saying that there just isn't any....

F.E. No, but it's again I think if - I mean if there was any kind of possibility of a history developing or a culture developing and a culture of - of - of resistance, then it would have been during the Group Areas period, but that was also the period of social upheaval, the period of - of disorientation, and so in - in a purely cultural sense I mean I think it's a - it's a - it's a tragedy that you actually have a whole community without any roots, without any traditions, without any folk heroes, not even Donna Brand (?) not even James Matthews, without any poets.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. Like you don't have a thing such as a Coloured expression, you know, like a Zulu expression, or as Zulu people say, or as is the tradition of say, the Indian people and....

J.F. (......................................) of Afrikaans is Coloured, isn't it?

F.E. Yes, but it's - it's - it's a marginalised thingie.

J.F. Why, because Afrikaans isn't respectable in the struggle?

F.E. Oh, you're talking about the tsotsi (.......) - that's not....

J.F. But just the way people speak Afrikaans in the Cape as opposed to the way Botha speaks it.

F.E. Yes, but people are not proud of the way - no, it is you're not supposed to speak like that.

J.F. What is it (.........)

F.E. Yes, but - yes, it - it's not - people have this feeling that you're not supposed to speak like this - we uneducated, that's why we speak like this.

J.F. Did you grow up speaking Afrikaans?

F.E. Yes, but I feel uncomfortable now because I - I speak sophisticated Afrikaans - I don't speak the tsotsi (.......) or the ordinary people's language, and so I don't speak Afrikaans because I can't - I've lost that Afrikaans.

J.F. Your mother spoke Afrikaans mainly?

F.E. Yes, yes, only Afrikaans - I did my schooling in Afrikaans.

J.F. I thought there was a kind of sense that people had a certain pride in Afrikaans in the - that people spoke it and joked around and refer to each other with those kinds of terms - even in Harare you get people - South Africans will speak in Afrikaans just (..........) expressions.

F.E. No, that's a different one - when you meet South Africans outside the country it is a means of identifying and their sense of togetherness - it's that that comes out - there was just a thing or two that I wanted to say about the non-racial thing before we conclude - you know, I think that - I don't want to be too philosophical about the whole thing, but I think the one thing that could have ensured that our struggle be an extremely messy one is a black/white confrontation, and I think that that would have dehumanised blacks as much as what it dehumanises whites, and to see a whole nation or a whole race as a part of the problem that must be eliminated, I think that is dehumanising, and I think the SACP - although from what I would regard as a reactionary position initially, the SACP had done a tremendous amount to non-racialise the struggle of our people, if not in practice then in theory, the idea that there are whites, the Congress of Democrats - the idea that there are whites who are prepared to suffer for a cause - I think that had gone a long way in keeping the non-racial ideal alive, even throughout the BC period - BC could never ignore the fact that Bram Fischer was on jail - was on Robben Island, and that there was a guy called Joe Slovo who was working day and night outside the country - they could never deny the existences of these people and the existence of the Congress and Democrats and the existence of the SACP of the Bram Fischers and the Slovos and the Neil Aggetts.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. It is their existence that has done the most, I think, for ensuring that our struggle remained a human one, and that is why I mean when I speak in public and call for the unbanning of the ANC I always add the SACP, because I think they've done a lot to keep our struggle a humane one.

J.F. Why do you say initially from a reactionary position?

F.E. This whole white workers thing.

J.F. You mean 1922?

F.E. Yes, yes, very, very initially.

J.F. So there's no anti-communism in the community you work with?

F.E. Yes, there's a lot of anti-communism in the community - a lot of anti-communism in the community, but it's a personal position that I have and I speak about it, I speak about it openly - the community's quite ambivalent towards communism, especially the Muslim community, because communism in their - in their collective psyche (?) represents atheism, and there's nothing else abominable to a Muslim as non-belief in God.

J.F. Can you just give me five minutes to ask about Islam because (........ .....) - why (Tape off) - if you can just tell me a bit of your history of awareness and growing up in that community - you were raised a Muslim?

F.E. Yes, yes - yes, of course I was born in a Muslim family - I told you yesterday about how intensely attached to a religion this comm - this community was, or this family was, of mine, and how our being removed to a ghetto also assisted in the de-religionisation of our family, to the extent that my mother and her clan, which was often - we were often contemptuously referred to as those - that's by my grandmother and by the rest of the family, as those who know nothing about Godsegebod, which is a strange kind of Afrikaans - Godsegebod, God's - God's prayer, but I think it meant to mean you know nothing about the precepts of your religion.

Anyway I was fairly religious from a very young age, and this was unrelated to any kind of family influences, because my family gradually moved away from religion - now there are two kinds of phenomena in the townships - the one is that people actually become more fundamentalist and they hold onto their evangelical types of religion - they go to church more regularly, and it's a means of holding onto sanity - the other trend is also to - to just - it's just you're losing touch with your religion is just a part of this whole disintegration that takes place in these communities, especially the newly uprooted ones, or the newly placed ones or misplaced ones - displaced ones.

Anyway my own religious development is essentially a personal thing - it wasn't connected to any kind of family pressure, and in fact I taught - you have this whole Madressa system whereby you have somebody in - in every neighbourhood teaching all the children of that neighbourhood - I was one of those - I was a teacher in those structures from a very young age - I think I was about eleven years old when I was teaching already in one of those structures - I was 13 years old when I became a formal teacher at the mosque and got paid for it - I mean a monthly salary - so my commitment to religion has been a fairly early one - when I completed my matric I went to Pakistan, where I spent eight years of studying Islamic theology.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J.F. Why did you go to Pakistan - did you expect it to be eight years or - why - not that many South African Muslims do it, do they?

F.E. Yes, the - no, the surprising thing is not that it's - I mean South African Muslims do go to Pakistan in large numbers, but the people of Indopak origin, meaning the clergy from Natal and the Transvaal, they normally trained in - in Pakistan, and not the ones from the Cape - the Cape will normally train in the Middle East - the Cape ones - however, there is an evangelical group that operates within the Malay community also, and it has its bases in India and Pakistan, the (................) - and I spent many years roaming around with them - I don't know if you've seen them around here also - they just about all over the world - they wear those short kind of tunics, and you could see them sometimes with their blankets and so on - it's a roving band of people, and they've been to - well, you just about find them all over the world - so I was attached to them and because of that connection I went to Pakistan.

J.F. I'm just confused - you were in NYA and everything you told me yesterday I might not have even known if you hadn't....

F.E. Oh, all of this happened at the same time.

J.F. So while you were in NYA you were also a?

F.E. Yes, yes - I was a deeply religious person even in NYA, but there was no connection - I mean it was a schizophrenic existence - there was no connection between my religious involvement and my political involvement - I mean it was two completely separate things - the religious people frowned on my political thingies and my political friends, no, they did not frown on my - on my religious commitment at all - they were very respectful towards it - but it was a kind of game that you played with God, that I will help you and then you help us - I help you in your religious thingies and you help us in our political things - that was the kind of very naive high school rationalisation that I had at that stage, and it was a Christian group in Pakistan that forced me to see the relationship between the two.

I belonged to a Christian group in Pakistan, the Students Christian Movement, fairly early in my theological studies in Pakistan - now I mean the other amazing thing was that I went to study at a very conservative place - at a place where if you read newspapers I mean, then you are lost, if that's the daily newspapers - because you came here for (.......) for religion, you did not come here for dunya, for the world....

J.F. What are those two words?

F.E. Din - D i n, and a stroke on the i, and dunya - d u n y a, and a stroke on the a - so you were reminded all the time that you came here for din and not for dunya I mean, and so you not supposed to read newspapers, and indeed I was expelled from that place after four and a half years because as - to quote my principal - Tumhari khariji ta aluqat bahut hai - you've got lots of outside connections - but I was shrewd - I did not take my expulsion - I didn't protest against it, but I asked for forgiveness and I promised never to do it again, but it was just a - I was just being shrewd, that's all - you see, I realised that if I'm being expelled from there, then I knew that I'm going to be different from all the other theologians back home, and I also knew that an expulsion behind your name, I mean people don't understand that for this and that - people don't understand that whole social environment, that whole - the theological narrowness of people I mean, and they will just say (.................) Faried - he was expelled, what's he talking about.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. So I stayed on for six months after that at that place after I was rein - reinstated, and then I quietly left for another place - but the amazing thing was that I lived in this environment where you could not read outside newspapers, and in this environment, coming from South Africa - coming from all that political kind of vibrancy and so on and so forth - I actually not only survived but I grew - I was a psychological wreck in the beginning - I mean can you imagine that very active kind of life of social commitment, of involvement, and here you are now stuck to - to your books - you are now stuck to your books and as if there is no world beyond your books, beyond your books and beyond your spiritual masters - we found - I was sitting in the cafe at the bottom of our institution one night, myself and - and two other frie - and one other friend from South Africa - we were four who were involved politically, including the president of SABSA, the South African Black Scholars Association - four of us had gone to Pakistan, and they dropped out of religious studies.

Anyway we were sitting in this cafe one night when a guy started chatting to us, and then - I remember we were discussing Ivan Illych and his stuff (?) and his works, so a guy walks up to us and he asked us - he wanted to join the conversation - we really ignored him because not unlike many other parts of the two thirds world, people have a fascination with English and they want to interrupt your conversation as soon as they know that you speak English - they want to become friendly with you, they want to learn English, they want to use you in this way, you see, so we were tired of this whole Pakis - of this Pakistani nonsense for two or three months already.

Anyway the guy persisted and he turned out to be a Catholic priest, Father Jimmy de Souza, and he told us that he knows of another group that meets on a weekly basis in fact to discuss the works of Ivan Illych - I - we went to our room and two of us decided that this guy can't be trusted and they're not going to take up the meeting with him - I went to meet Jimmy, and that was the beginning of a wonderful relationship between myself and - and the Christian community - did I give you a copy of the Desmond Tutu peace (?) lecture - in there you'll see I make reference to the Christian community and to their suffering in Pakistan, the social oppression that they experience - anyway - and so I joined the Students Christian Movement....

J.F. In Pakistan?

F.E. Yes, in Pakistan, and we met once a week to discuss Ivan Illych and to work on educational projects - later on of course my involvement with them increased so much that I became vice-principal of a high school being run by them, the St. Patricks Technical High School, being run by the La Salle brothers, and we had lots of different kinds of projects going in the sweeper community, in the prisons, in the Hindu villages, literacy programmes, a whole variety of things, but they forced me away from my narrow perception of religion and they forced me also from my very chauvinistic Muslim perspective that I had grown up with in this other fundamentalist grouping, you see - anyway they are essentially responsible for the fact that I could see the marriage between Islam and my - and my social commitment, and not my theology - I mean today I have successfully integrated my theology with my - with my social commitment - I don't know - I don't want to take a boast (?) but I do think that as far as the emergence of a liberation theology is concerned, I don't think that our group, the Call of Islam, and myself personally - I do think that we are doing a pioneering work in many conferences that I've attended overseas - the kind of theology that we expound, people have never come across it.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. People have never come across it, and the kind of excitement with which they - they meet - the stuff that we have written, the stuff that is being produced at the moment in South Africa, it all gives us a sense of being the pioneers in - in Islamic liberation theology - but that group, ironic as it may be - I don't think it's ironic really, because liberation theology, it wouldn't be ironic in a concept such as liberation theology for one group to have actually moved the other - that group has done a lot for me.

There's one particular person, a Brother Norman, who has done - I mean Brother Norman's whole life was very deeply inspiring one and it was - I think he forced me to realise I mean the essential goodness of people that transcends religious barriers - I was of course in touch I mean - NYA, National Youth Action, and South African Black Scholars Association had their offices at the Christian Institute, so even there we were in touch with good people....

J.F. Where, Christian Institute?

F.E. In Cape Town - such as Theo Kotze and Beyers Naude.

J.F. What years is this now?

F.E. This was the early years of BC.

J.F. Early '70s before (?) you left?

F.E. Mmm, '70 to '73.

J.F. So before you left you had begun these movements towards the Christian community?

F.E. No, no, we were in touch with them, we saw them - I mean Theo - you know Theo Kotze - Theo would come home to come and console my family after I was detained, and I delivered a peace lecture in the borough of Lewisham in London in March and I dedicated it to Theo because Theo is the first - I mean I remember very clearly the - the solace that Theo was to our families when there weren't any Muslim priests that one could go to for this kind of support - anyway and then I also became involved I mean with the - the Muslim brotherhood types in - in Pakistan, but there is also an evolution, you see, from seeing Islam and my political involvement as two separate things - I moved towards the brotherhood, towards the Muslim brotherhood, who believes in the combination of Islam and politics, O.K., but I don't know if you know anything about them, but you must have heard about them - it's their types that I mean like killed Sadat, it's their types that are essentially responsible for what is known as Muslim fundamentalism.

Anyway I was involved with them in Pakistan, so this was some kind of moving from my separation of faith and religion and doctrine to a combination of the two, but it was still a very reactionary religion, a social workish religion, and all my involvement, even with the Students Christian Movement, was social workish - it was geared towards reform, you see, so again there was two separate kinds of involvement, with the Christian Students Movement on the one hand, and with the Muslim brotherhood on the other hand, but the one hardly knew about the other one and the one wasn't a part of the other one - when I came to South Africa....

J.F. When you came back?

F.E. Yes, when I qualified I came back, it was after about eight years....

J.F. You qualified as?

F.E. As a (..........) - well, it's written in that little book...........

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

END OF SIDE ONE.

F.E. .... combination of theology and politics - so I became principal of this seminary on the south coast of Natal, and there were a number of people at the seminary who were born Muslims, but the seminary was - was initially intended to be the training ground of converted Muslims, of blacks, you see....

J.F. Of Africans?

F.E. Of African Muslims, yes, but there I was - I was confronted with the whole concept of a missionary Islam, of an I'm chosen, you are frozen, and it is my task to come and defrost you - I mean that was the whole story there, you see, and I lived quite uncomfortably with it - I mean there were times when we raised this in committee meetings and when we had seminars around the issue, but - and (?) I clearly realised that we were on different tangents - here all these blacks were coming, and I was quite a hard-liner on many things - for example, until then the blacks were - were given free clothes and people would come and bring all their rummage there and it would be distributed to the students there, so when I came there I found two rooms filled, boxes of clothes, and I refused to distribute the clothes - people came with new shoes also - I mean boxes of new shoes and new tackies and things like that, and I refused to distribute them - the students got ten rand a week pocket money - I refused to distribute the pocket money - we're going to do gardening, and if you do so much gardening you will get so much money - that was my line and - and I, unlike the committee, who were all Indian upper middle class business people, I had no conscience problems with blacks - I had never harmed blacks - I'd always been a part of the liberation struggle, and I've got no reason to be soft towards blacks - if I'm going to be soft towards anybody it's because the person is human- if I'm going to be harsh towards somebody it's (?) because the person blundered or the person needs his principal to be harsh towards him, and it was going to be nothing of this pally-pallying around.

I did think that I was a very friendly person, I did think that I was a very competent principal, and all my ideas I mean like say, around Ivan Illych's works and so on and - and my whole - and all my years of teaching experience and so on, fine (?) that was there, but don't come and think that because you going to be black you going to get any special favours from me - now for people who had grown up in a whole spirit of dependence this is very difficult to swallow, and needless to say, I wasn't a very popular principal - I wasn't popular with the committee because of all my funny ideas about why should we go and convert people and this, that and the other, and my political ideas - the students found me politically very, very good, but they couldn't stand the fact that they were not getting shoes any more, they're not getting free pocket money any more, and so after a year I was out.

Now there is a dispute until today about whether I was sacked or whether I resigned - I think it's just a technicality - I mean in technicality I resigned, but I'm sure I would have been forced out even if I did not resign - so that was that one year....

J.F. That was '81, '82?

F.E. Yes, yes, and - but at that same period I was a member of the MYM, the Muslim Youth Movement, and the Muslim Youth Movement ran this seminary - the Muslim Youth Movement is an extension of the Muslim brotherhood, and the Muslim brotherhood movement, there are two - O.K., where do I start - in Islamic fundamentalism, or what is interpreted as fundamentalism, there are two trends - the one is the Irani trend, and the other one is a more moderate trend - that is the Egyptian/Pakistani model - Egyptian, Sudan, Pakistani model - they are represented by the brotherhood types.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. So in Pakistan you have the Jamata Islami, in Syria, in all the Arab countries you've got the Muslim brotherhood - the Muslim brotherhood is - regards itself as the Islamic movement all over the world - in England they would be represented in an organisation like FOSAS, Federation of - of Students - some Islamic students or something like that - in America there would be the MSA, the Muslim Students Association - in South Africa they are the MYM, but they are all interlinked with each other, and discipline is like an international kind of discipline - this movement is the strongest Muslim movement in South Africa - I was a member of that movement, the MYM.

Yes, I was a movement (?) - I was just thinking - I have an essay I've just written an essay for Third World Quarterly on how international Islamic movements influenced Islam in South Africa and how the - that Islam was in turn influenced by the liberation movement inside South Africa, with the external PAC, ANC kind of connections, and it's that essay that I wanted you to read.

J.F. I'll look for it (....................) so I should be able to get it.

F.E. No, it's only coming up in the next April issue.

J.F. (............) last year - I can get a copy easily.

F.E. I see - no, it's coming up in April - anyway so I was in the MYM, but the MYM is also religiously fundamentalist - fundamentalist Islam is the only religion acceptable to Allah - all other paths I mean lead to hell - that it is our task to convert people, and our objective is to establish an Islamic state in South Africa - I found it a little bit uncomfortable being in that crowd, but it was very - it was - it was pleasant being in that crowd, but there was one contradiction - there was one thing that bothered me all the time, that if my friends from Pakistan were to come to South Africa, would I be able to introduce them to my MYM friends - I'm talking about all my Christian Students Movement friends - and I could not, and that made me feel that there were contradictions in my life - I mean the fact that I wouldn't be able to show off my Christian friends to my Muslim friends here.

J.F. Why not?

F.E. Because my Muslim friends they were fundamentalists.

J.F. They were anti-Christian?

F.E. Yes, so I lived in this kind of - in these two worlds, you see - of course I mean, as I pointed out earlier on, the world had narrowed from the fundamentalism of the (................) to the national youth action - the world has now narrowed to an Islam which saw the need to get involved in life around you, but it was still a very arrogant Islam - then came the launch of the UDF - not the launch, the year before the UDF when the CDF, the Cape Democratic Front, was being launched, a year before the UDF.

J.F. Wasn't it that that (?) was launched before?

F.E. No, the CDF?

J.F. Yes.

F.E. Yes, the CDF was a regional structure.

J.F. Before UDF (..........)

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. Yes.

J.F. When was it launched then?

F.E. CDF was launched in June, UDF was launched in August, yes, so that was the year that I was at this seminary - then I was appointed by the MYM - I was a very senior person in the MYM, and I was appointed by the MYM to head the - to head its commission into political developments in South Africa and to work out a blueprint for the movement's - to work out a blueprint for the movement's political involvement - this mandate, so to say, took me to - this mandate, so to say, took me to meet people like Don Mattera, Neville Alexander, people like Johnny Issel, I mean all the bigwigs of the Build a national forum as well as of the United - of the impending United Democratic Front.

I opted for the UDF, and this caused a split between us and the movement - between us and the MYM - by us I talk about the founders of the Call of Islam, myself, Imman Hassan, Adli, who is also here, and two other guys in the MYM - we left the MYM not to form the Call of Islam but we just left the MYM.

J.F. Because?

F.E. Because we - we didn't like their line towards non-Muslims, we didn't like their line towards the UDF, and we were also being elbowed out because we were very, very powerful people in the MYM and they felt that they couldn't have us - and this is one of my reasons for leaving ASA-DA (?) that - that seminary, because I was told I mean I - I could no longer be trusted with the future of our children - my ideological position was too bad - a few months after that we formed the Call of Islam, and I think now I have reached the line where my political commitment is in an incredible manner linked to my theological commitment, and the fact that we can actually put our theological and political line on paper and have it being challenged by others is an indication that those kinds of contradictions are now being ironed out - it's being - it's being narrowed - I don't think that we actually live without contradict - that we live absolutely without contradictions, but I do think that I mean - that we have now reached the point of credibility, wherein we - we not kind of doing any egg dancing or moving - oscillating between this, that and the other.

Of course when you are involved in a front, as we are in the UDF, then you are also involved with elements that are different from you, but these are honest acknowledgements of difference - I mean the SACP is the SACP and they are not Muslims, and Muslims are Muslims, they are not Marxists, so there are differences, but your commitment now is based on an acknowledgement of those difference, not of those difference existing within a few individuals and tearing them apart - one day they political, the next day they spiritual, the one moment they like this, the next moment they are like that.

And so we have now then succeeded in carrying the realities of our struggle into our faith, meaning in the way in which we interpret our faith - the way in which we interpret our doctrine is now being determined by the struggle, and at the same time our struggle is also being fed by our doctrine, by our theology - our theology also inspires our political involvement - so this then we have in common with what is called liberation theology, and we pleased about it.

J.F. Let me just see if I can ask some more concise questions and then - because if you give answers more specifically that'd be easier for me to use in fact - were you influenced by Latin American liberation theology?

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. Not at all.

J.F. I think the real thing I'd like to develop is is this idea of inter-faith involvement - is there - is it in a sense parallel or analogous to non-racialism?

F.E. Lots of such arguments are being used - for example - I mean you talking about non-racialism as a creed in the UDF.

J.F. Ja, it seems like a lot of the things you said earlier on at a (?) strictly political level, like not pretending there aren't differences between the different communities working within the communities, but having that reaching out and working together in a front is what you're saying about religions - you're not going to not be Muslim, but you're not going to reject Christians, is that - can you talk a bit about that?

F.E. Yes, yes - no, like if you look at our attitude towards say, the Jewish community, then this political line and how it's influenced our theology clearly comes out - for example, we don't - I mean I think I told you yesterday that it is not our task - it's not our task to - to bring the Jewish community into the struggle, but at the same time in the same way, that it's not our task to bring the white community into the struggle, but in the same way, if van Zyl Slabbert and his IDASA wants to do it, we should try to facilitate things for him - we should not try to make things more difficult for van Zyl Slabbert, and that is why I mean the same thing goes for the Jewish community as a religious community - the Call of Islam is bitterly opposed to Zionism, especially political Zionism - we make allowances for spiritual Zionism, but we bitterly opposed to political Zionism, and South Africans are Zionists, but in the same way that most white liberals are capitalists, and capitalism is a part of the problem, and yet you make leeway for those, you - you draw the line - O.K., fine, if you capitalist it's big deal for us, but at this stage, no big deal - so we're saying O.K., fine, if you are a Zionist, it's a big problem for us, but at this stage in your political development we're going to kind of ignore that part of the problem for a while.

Later on, as your own political development increases, and as your own analysis of the sit - of course you will begin to see the relationship between apartheid and Zionism, and as so many I mean not only whites, even blacks, enter the struggle from a liberal position, that things are bad around, that's when we would like to change things, we would like to reform things, let's start a soup kitchen, and as you are engaged in analysis you begin to see that there are fundamental causes to those problems, of those problems - now the same thing we saying in our inter-faith work with the Jewish community, that Zionism is a problem for us, but if the Jews become involved in this whole inter-faith venture, then it is inevitable that the narrowness of, you know, Jewish arrogance, man, the chosen people - that even that will be diminished in the process of inter-faith involvement, so very similar principles are applied by us both ways, but you've only pointed them out - I mean I was never aware of them, but it doesn't mean that there is what I call this credibility in - in analysis, meaning the absence of contradictions in analysis.

J.F. Just to go back to something you could have applied back in your NYA days - is it a step for Coloured - people who happen to be Coloured and are political, or people who are Coloured who are becoming political, to see Nelson Mandela as their leader because he's not Coloured, because he's African - if there is this history of the bogey man, if there is this history of the divisions, how can these kids then scream at rallies for Slovo and Mandela, and how can you say to me I can't name a Coloured political leader - I'm just interested in that.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J,F. Other people have said to me that it does mean something to them to see James Stuart on the NEC because he's Coloured, that they would have to admit that that gives them this little - this little young guy, Peter Williams, I interviewed, from Cape Town - you know him?

F.E. Mmm.

J.F. He said no, it does mean something to him, it makes him feel like ja, he's got a place - I'm just wondering what that process is about?

F.E. That's interesting - I've never thought of James Stuart as Coloured - thought of him consciously in the way that Peter would have done, that Peter did - the Coloured community also has different communities - Peter comes from the pure Coloured community, I think - that's the one thing - the other thing is that in my - I mean I - I personally have become far too universalist - I've travelled far too much - I mean I've grown up in far too different communiti - far too many different communities for me to think of myself as a part of the Coloured community.

J.F. What about reaching out to people, trying to move (...................) - trying to move a pure Muslim community into (...............) into a political point of view - doesn't it mean something for them to see the Imam raising his fist next to Boesak and an African leader at the UDF rally - doesn't it help them move politically to see....

F.E. Yes, but that is as Muslims, not as Coloureds - it won't move the Muslims to see a Coloured - Muslims - I don't think Muslims really think of themselves as Coloured - they don't think of themselves as anything but South Africans as a Muslim and Muslims - until recently only as Muslims who live in South Africa.

J.F. But do they accept African Muslims as no problem or don't they see them as....

F.E. As different?

J.F. Ja.

F.E. Not any more - I mean this is one of the achievements of the struggle in the last four, five years - I mean you asked about seeing Nelson Mandela as a leader - I think it's incredible, I mean a kaffir - a kaffir is being vivad like this, and the people all go along with it and they proud and they all want him free - can you believe it - I mean it's - it's un - this would have been unbelievable ten years ago.

J.F. For the Coloured community?

F.E. Yes, and certainly for the Muslim community as well, and I think that Muslims are religiously not only - you see Muslims' racialism or sense of race has been tainted by a religious arrogance also, which is also the, I think, characteristic of a minority ethos - minorities tend to see themselves as superior to the majority - yes, it's quite a simple phenomena - we different - we fewer, you see - we're not a part of the mass, so there's - and also I mean Islam is very much of an arrogant religion - so from all those angles I mean it's amazing that Muslims have actually come to regard Mandela as their leader.

J.F. What does that word kaffir mean to a Muslim?

F.E. Kaffir means kaffir.

J.F. Doesn't it - the origin mean infidel and....

F.E. No.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

J.F. I just thought maybe you meant a non-Muslim.

F.E. No, this is - I think this is some - I mean I don't know where this distortion in the languages come in, but a kaffir is a kaffir in the derogatory sense of the word - I mean Muslims do not - I mean there is another word, kaafer (?) but kaafer in the Muslim mind is never connected to kaffir - Joe Slovo is a kaafer for the Muslims.

J.F. Maybe you could kind of sum up by telling me how - what's the make-up of the Call of Islam, how many people is that?

F.E. Now that's a very embarrassing question, because the Call of Islam is a closed organisation - the Call of Islam is not open to members of the public - we work in cells, we recruit our people carefully - if I become impressed with you and if I think of you as a potential Call of Islam people, then I will interview (...........) to another Call of Islam people just by the way for a casual meeting - I'll set up a very casual kind of thingie, and there's a sense of casual things wherein (?) you are checked out, and then after a few months you could be taken up into one of our structures, a parallel structure - you still not a Call of Islam member - and then if you kind of make things and ideologically you fit in well with us, then you become a Call of Islam member - and so we have 120 members in the Western Cape and about 43 in the Transvaal and a handful in Natal, but I think this - the membership belies how strong we really are, because the truth is that these are committed and core activists - I mean people that are quite clear ideologically about where we are going and people that have shown a commitment to that - it's unlike just I mean a - an organisation.

We are finding ways of getting around a question like yours, because it comes up very often, and it forever has to be prefaced with a long introduction, an apologetic introduction nearly - we beginning to look at associate membership that could run into the thousands, because we have no doubt that we are the most popular Muslim body in South Africa, not the strongest - the MYM is - but the most popular Muslim body in South Africa is the Call of Islam, and so we looking into that problem.

You see, the problem with organising a minority community is that in the same way say (?) you organise the Greek community - you can't organise people on the basis of being Greeks, and people do this - you have the Hellenic Club of Johannesburg, but are they progressive Greeks, are they reactionary Greeks, are they nice Greeks, are they horrible Greeks - so what happens is all the years Muslims have organised people purely, and have drawn people into their organisations just because they Muslim, but the history of Muslims in South Africa is littered with organisations that were born and then disintegrated, and there are two reasons for this - the one is that people that were drawn into it were not ideologically homogenous - I mean you have - you have Muslims who are committed to the non-racialist creed, you have apolitical Muslims, you have reactionary Muslims - how can you get all of them into one organisation - but because we are a minority, you see, you think that all of us must be one and (?) it's - it's - it's a myth to think of all Christians being one in South Africa - in the same way all Muslims are not one, so what the Call of Islam has done is it had set for itself a - I can't get the word now - the - a bottom line, that these are our bottom lines - if you are this type of person, and that's also important for us, a type of person we're looking for - we look for people that can laugh - we looking for people that can - that can sing - we looking for people that are fun to be with, for people that - for people that can take criticism, that can criticise themselves - we looking for people that are open, open to new ideas at the same time, but we looking for people who believe in the ideas that we have.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. The - our ideas on ecology, our ideas on health, our ideas on women especially, our ideas on - on inter-faith work, our ideas on the legitimacy of other faiths - I mean there's no ways that you can - that you going to be a member of the Call of Islam and not accept the legitimacy of other faiths - so these are our bottom lines - now the fact that our bottom lines are pretty clearly drawn also makes the Call of Islam a much more effective organisation, because if an issue I mean - we running a campaign now against the sexual abuse of women at schools - now there's no issue about whether to take the issue up or not, there's no debate - the issue must be taken up, how are we going to take it up.

So whilst our members are then fewer, there is far greater room for an - an active and an immediate response to problems in the community, and this accounts for our effectiveness as an organisation, our very smallness.

J.F. What year was Call of Islam founded?

F.E. In the year the UDF was launched, in '84.

J.F. '83.

F.E. In '83, yes.

J.F. And what is the kind of national leaning of the more fundamentalist Muslims - would it be towards ANC, would it be towards PAC, would it be towards BC, would it be for no politics?

F.E. The one is (?) if you employ the word fundamentalist in the ordinary sense of the word....

J.F. Let me say the conventional....

F.E. The conventional Muslims....

J.F. .... (.........) probably say : Ja, I'm Coloured, I'm from the Cape, I'm Muslim, or I'm from Jo'burg and I'm Muslim, nothing more.

F.E. That depends on the geographical area - if it's the Cape then they would be supporting the ANC, but that is because they regard they're a part of the community, and the community supports the ANC, and I'm not saying this I mean as a person that supports the ANC myself - I think any kind of objective observer would notice this - in the Transvaal and in Natal it's slightly different - they would be completely apolitical - if they are forced to support (?) a political party they will support the TIC, but not the ANC necessarily.

J.F. Finally just to come back to the theme, is non-racialism important - when you heard that I said I wanted to ask you questions about politics and an emphasis on non-racialism did you - what was your reaction - how- do you think it's worth spending a lot of time on?

F.E. I don't think so, because it is so much an acceptable thing in our struggle - now I don't know, I have kind of ambivalent feelings about the whole thing - on the one hand it seemed to be such a natural, such an acceptable thing in our struggle - I mean look at the way people respond to Beyers - I mean can you imagine a white Afrikaaner being carried soldier-high - shoulder-high at the funeral of an ANC guerilla, an Afrikaaner that was a member of the Broderabond, and again I mean all of this is witness to the tremendous capacity that the black people of South Africa have for - for whatever is human.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE

F.E. So at a level - at a visible level, there is hardly any need to go into the whole debate of non-racialism and so on and so forth, but I don't think that one should also under-estimate the ability of demagogues in the community to appeal to the very base thing in people, that we have been oppressed by the whites because we are black - I mean if Hitler could use this so effectively in such a sophisticated society, this appeal to race, in such a sophisticated society, how much more potential is there not for the abuse of the concept of race in an essentially tribal society, which large parts of South Africa still is, so I think that potential is there, you see, but because it is only potential it is not evident, it is not empirical, one tends to ignore it, but I don't think it's a question that one can ignore, and I do think that it is one of the inadequacies in the way congress looks at things - I think congress ignores the potential that there is - I think congress is far too taken up in what is evident at the moment, and does not take enough cognisance of - of how people could be swayed.

I mean I really think that in an election, in an election in which say, if the PAC has the funding that the ANC gets, I think that level PAC rhetoric would be far more attractive to many black people than the rhetoric of the ANC - the land is ours, give us our land back and - and along comes the ANC and says that the land belongs to all - fortunately of course, the PAC doesn't have that kind of infrastructure, it doesn't have that kind of organisational skills, but it is much more on political sophistication or organisational pragmatism and skills that we would win the struggle, rather than in a simple argument between two people - I think we have won the strug - we have won the hearts of people because of our ability to organise rather than - than our rhetoric.

Of course the other guys I mean when they engage in rhetoric they deliver long papers, you know, this whole tradition of the PAC and Unity Movement - I don't know if you know anything about the way they conduct their public meetings - so they deliver long, long essays and dissertations, masters theses they deliver, you see, which all - which is very, very boring for people, but if they must learn communication skills, media skills and so on and so forth, I think they have much of a chance.

END OF INTERVIEW.

SAHA ARCHIVE FOR JUSTICE