**UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE**

**DOCUMENTATION CENTRE**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**"VOICES OF RESISTANCE"**

INTERVIEWEE: MAGGIE GOVENDER

INTERVIEWER: D SHONGWE

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DS: Good afternoon and welcome. My name is Dimakatso Shongwe from the University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre. Today, we are interviewing Maggie Govender. Welcome and thank you for your time, Maggie.

MG: Thanks.

DS: Should I call you Maggie, is it fine ?

MG: It is fine.

DS: Okay, Maggie, would you please tell us a little bit about yourself, where and when you were born?

MG: Okay, I was born at McCord's Hospital Durban, quite a while ago. I grew up in Durban Central, until we had to move to Chatsworth because of the Group Areas Act, and did my high-school schooling at Chatsworth, became a student at the University of Durban-Westville, qualified as a teacher, worked for a while as a teacher, then resigned from teaching as a result of political victimisation. Worked for the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union as an education officer for three years. I spent a year at the Community Research Unit, and then after the James Commission, I was asked to go back to teaching, and since it suited it my circumstances, at the time, went back, and I'm there, to date.

DS: Okay, just to go back a little, could you just tell us about the community you grew up in. What was it like?

MG: Alright, my growing up in Durban Central was quite different from Chatsworth because (1) we were all very close; everybody knew everybody else, and we basically went to the same schools. I went to, what was then called the Hindu Tamil Institute. I think later became Pambili, and I went to Methodist Girls', which was an interesting experience. And then, when we moved to Chatsworth, we moved into a place where we didn't really know the others who were living there, because everybody had been displaced.

DS: If I may ask, how old were you when you moved to Chatsworth?

MG: About 11-years old.

DS: Do you still remember the year?

MG: No I can't work it out.

DS: But it was during?

MG: It was during my primary school.

DS: Okay and Group Areas Act?

MG: Yes.

DS: Okay so you went to Chatsworth?

MG: Yes. And then completed my, well one year of primary school and then went into high school, initially, at Apollo Secondary. We were relocated to the Woodhurst area, which was fairly new. Well, it was a totally new area when we moved in. I think we amongst the first people to move into that area. It was quite strange, because we had lived as an extended family in Durban, and the family was broken up. Other people, members of the family had

moved to other parts of Chatsworth. My father chose the Woodhurst area because it was convenient for work. He worked in the hotel industry. And we got to know our neighbours eventually, when they did move in. Found it quite different. The one thing I recall, wasn't all bad, was that it was the first time we had a garden, a proper garden. In town we just had a little strip of land, so that was quite nice.

DS: Okay, one other thing, could you tell us about your grandparents? Were they born here in South Africa?

MG: Yes, my father's family are of Telegu origin, lived in Overport, West Road, and my mother's family were also from Overport. My mother is a bit of a mix, in that her mother, I think, was from Mauritius or her family there, part of them were from Mauritius. And my grandfather was a wrestler, and it seemed like he was a wrestling champion. They called him Pakkari Pillay, he was obviously quite famous, so.

DS: Okay, you said earlier on you lived as an extended family before you moved into Chatsworth. So, were you not able to live together anymore when you moved into Chatsworth or was it because of the?

MG: No when I moved to Chatsworth there were two factors which made us split up. One was economic, some of the houses were more expensive, you had to pay a larger deposit or something like that, on them. And the second one was the closeness to Durban. My father was working in Durban, and he worked nightshift because he was a waiter and later a barman. And he looked at which area was closest in

terms of travel, so we then chose the Woodhurst area because that was closest.

DS: Okay, so where did your mother work?

MG: My mother was a schoolteacher, and she, when we moved to Chatsworth, had to apply for a transfer to a local school.

DS: Siblings, do you have any siblings?

MG: Yes two brothers. My younger brother lived with us and my elder brother remained with my granny.

DS: So you went to the same school?

MG: No, well, I completed my year, and then moved to a school in Chatsworth. So the year that we moved involved a lot of travelling for all of us. We would have to leave home at about five or so to get to school by eight because the bus the transport system was poor. And we had to - the transport was never reliable. So if the bus broke down you had to be early enough to be able to get another bus and things like that. And then we arrived home late as well. At that time, you didn't really have very easy access that you have now with Higginson Highway, so the transport that we used came through Cavendish, which wasn't a very - the roads were not very good then.

DS: Were there Africans living with you?

MG: No. Not at all, it was purely Indian.

DS: Okay, so you completed your matric where?

MG: At Chatsworth Secondary.

DS: Chatsworth, how was the teachers there, if you remember any event?

MG: Yes, we had good teachers they were quite dedicated, very strict. What I do remember, in my matric year I was the head prefect of the school, was

that I had access - one of my teachers had given me a copy of a Black Consciousness booklet, which featured women in the struggle. And I remember clearly the pictures of Winnie Mandela and various other women activists and during a particular boring biology lesson I had this in my notebook. And the teacher stood behind me and he looked at that and the next thing I knew I was called to the office and accused of being involved in politics. And at that time, to be quite frank, I wasn't at all politically involved. Had a very limited consciousness and I think that incident made me more curious about what is was they were so scared of?

DS: Okay and thereafter? Did they punish you or?

MG: Well, they did say that it's not something a head prefect should do. But what that did, was I think it frightened my parents a bit because I wanted to do law, study law, and my mother then got worried that I would get involved in politics. And tried to steer me onto some other path of study. And then I came to UDW and that was quite different.

DS: Okay, the subjects you were doing did you like them?

MG: At school?

DS: Yes.

MG: Yes, at that time, if you did reasonably well at school, the expectation of the community was you were supposed to become a doctor, and if you didn't do that, you were to become a teacher, possibly a lawyer. And for women, I think it was good enough to get your matric. So I did the science course, not because I really wanted to do it,

although I was quite a good student, but it was more of a kind of pressure to say that you had to get into something that was considered good. It was also a bit difficult, at that time, because I think it wouldn't have been such a bad idea if I started working. Study for a female wasn't such a great thing. Fortunately, my mother was somebody who was quite advanced, I think, in her thinking, for the time. And she sacrificed quite a bit to ensure that I was able to get to university.

DS: Okay, so you finally went to - you studied here at Durban-Westville so tell us about your experiences?

MG: The political one or the studies?

DS: The studies and political one.

MG: Okay, as far as studies went, I initially registered, I basically followed the trend and registered for what was called the Big Four. And that was more because there was the expectation that I should become a doctor and all of that.

DS: Okay, what is the Big Four? Why the Big Four?

MG: The Big Four was the four science subjects, which qualified you to enter into medical school. And I didn't actually have the money to study and fortunately, I got a bursary from Shell. And although I passed in the first year, I think, very early in the year, I realised that this wasn't my field. So I switched in the second year and went into an arts course, basically all languages, because I was interested in that, and I had this ambition to become an interpreter. Of course, that eventually got ruined because it meant going to Rhodes University and applying for a permit to study there. And I wasn't prepared to do that because people of

colour were not, you know, freely admitted into white institutions. While I was on campus, from my second year onwards, in 1980 there were the school boycotts, education boycotts in the country. And we got involved here on, at university - a group of us, where we found that, in 1976, basically the education protests had passed us by as a community. I'm talking about the Indian community. I was in my matric year and I sort of felt a sense of guilt as to why. I couldn't understand how it is something so significant had occurred, and we at school didn't even appear to have been affected by it. But you know, at university, I think, interaction with people does open your mind. And while we were on campus here, we interacted with a range of people. There was Preggs and Jay, Bobby, Abier, Alf, all these people, and there was a lot of talking and debate and we did feel that we needed to do something and it was twofold. One, was on campus, we felt the students were apathetic and we needed to show register our protest as an institution here, and then the second thing was there was also this feeling that this protest needed to be reflected in the community. So we did try to also establish links with high school students and in the course of that, it was like work in community then and work on campus. We also linked up people like Kumi Naidoo, Kovin, who were students, and at that point, I think my first encounter with Kumi was when he was on the verge on being expelled from school. And we set up classes.

DS: Why was he?

MG: Because he was involved in the student protest at school, he was in high school at the time. And what we did, a group of us that's myself, Shoots Naidoo, Charm Govender, and there were other people as well. We set up classes for these students because we felt that they should - basically it was to show the system a point, that you may have expelled them, but they could pass and do better than the other students. And they actually did do that because they passed fairly well in their matric year when they were eventually taken back to school. On campus, we engaged in the usual round, I mean there were the activists like Yunis Shaik, Moe Shaik, Bobby Subrayan, Alf Kariem, Abier Maharaj, and a range of others as well. We engaged in the usual round campus was quite safe so we could march and chant and feel very revolutionary. And we did that, but I think it was significant because firstly, in the Indian community, this kind of thing had gone into a lull, right, and in a way we were doing that. And I think our activity, actions also, in some way, made our parents more aware. They didn't quite understand what we were doing. But they became a bit more aware.

DS: Did your parents support you when you were involved in this activism?

MG: I think my mother far more than my father, he was more silent. But I think he, whatever disapproval, as I later found out, he basically vented to my mother not to me. I was fairly headstrong, so I think they knew that, you know, if I wanted I would go ahead. But certainly my mother, didn't encourage it, but didn't stop it. Basically she

respected what I did. The term went for us as well was when we were baton-charged here on the campus. It was after one of our rounds of marching and protesting we had gone to the administration building and there had been riot police on the campus. But they hadn't you know done anything to students. And on that particular day there was an incident where there was a stone thrown at the rector's window while he was looking out at the time.

DS: Who was the rector then?

MG: Professor Olivier.

DS: Okay.

MG: And on the heels of that, I'm not sure of the sequence of it but students without warning were actually baton-charged. And it was quite a horrific thing because although I mean we were protesting and all of that we hadn't actually felt that kind of brutality. And students were beaten up and we were tear-gassed and I remember Alison Lazarus, I think she was pregnant at the time and she was hit on her stomach and it was quite shocking. And the irony of it was that the some of the university administration non-white members were also beaten up.

DS: Were they also involved in the strike or?

MG: No they were not involved in the strike but I think they came out to flee the tear-gas and all of that. And in the whole you know what was carrying on they also, some of them were also beaten up, tear-gassed. I remember Harold Reddy who was the registrar at the time he was tear-gassed and he was trying to tell them that he was employed here but

nobody would listen to him. Anyway, when that happened on that day, the university was then shut down, closed. And what we decided to do as students was get into our area groups, whatever area we lived, in form ourselves into groups. And we said that the idea was that we should go into the community and inform them about what was happening and then see whether we could get involved in any community activities, as well. It was a bit selfish, I think, on one hand because we wanted to get support for our cause, but there was also that kind of motivation to do something, but we didn't quite know what. So we did that, we broke up into different areas and I went into the Chatsworth group and we discovered that there was an organisation called the Chatsworth Housing Action committee. Which suited us because it sounded suitably you know protest kind and all of that, and it was doing the right thing. So we linked up with them and at that time we had Roy Padayachee who was involved in it the Natal Indian Congress were also involved in that organisation. And it was progressive it espoused the principles of the Freedom Charter publicly, and it also had a system of mass action where residents were encouraged to not just to be passively protesting but to become a bit more active in what they were doing. So we became involved in that and I think that is where people like Shoots, myself, all of us, we actually cut our teeth. Between the NIC and the Chatsworth Housing Action Committee we received you know a fairly good training in politics, we developed an understanding of community issues.

And I think one of the things we benefited from, as students, is we actually went and did work at grass roots level. You know, students, you can work on campus. It is good but interaction with ordinary people that's something that generally we don't have. So we were fortunate. A similar thing had occurred in Phoenix, where you had the Phoenix Rent Action Committee and then later the Phoenix Working Committee. So that's how we became involved.

DS: Okay so if I may ask is the book that you read on Black Women impacted on you?

MG: Well for the first time in my life I understood that there was a struggle where - I mean I had a vague consciousness. To be absolutely honest with you, my understanding of, you know, the political struggle in our country at that point was extremely limited. The kind of history that we were taught at school et cetera didn't tell us or didn't teach us to be critical. So that was the first time and I was curious I had to find out more. And certainly after that I did start, you know, reading and campus, of course, was the catalyst because you are exposed to a range of things here. Not just people but literature, ideas, I actually found myself aligned with the Congress Movement. I found that I subscribed to those principles yes, but certainly I mean that was like one of the first, one of the first things that I read which was you know alternative, if you want to call it that. My elder brother was involved in the sports movement so he used to provide some literature to me as well. But of course our access to all of this was very limited. I

think we got the greatest access when we came onto campus.

DS: What book can you remember that has impacted on you?

MG: Strangely enough I mean there were quite a few books, right? But there was one, and its got nothing to do with South Africa this must just be something personal. But I remember this book called "Black like Me." It was about this American white who I think adopted the guise of a black person and went through this, and that was something that well at least made me sensitive about other issues. You see the community I come from was quite comfortable, and it would have been very easy just to have studied, got a degree, got a job, got married, settled down, and nobody would have complained, including myself I suppose.

DS: So you finished your degree without having any problems maybe being expelled at a university because of your involvement in mobilising students?

MG: Well the first SRC that was elected there and I served on it and the subsequent one.

DS: What year what that you still remember?

MG: Well I think 1981 and then the next election as well I served on the SRC. There wasn't open victimisation from the campus authorities but obviously they knew who we were, because we were visited by Security Branch at home. And those addresses and the information that they would have had would obviously have been provided via the campus. But you know this held true for many of us we came from I am thinking in

particular people like Shoots Naidoo and all of that. He is actually dead now. We came from very poor homes, our parents struggled to actually pay our university fees, and bursaries were not easily available to us. And I think what drove some of us anyway, was that we wanted to prove a point within the community there was this kind of negative attitude to participation in politics you know. Politics wasn't supposed to be good and all of this was seen as politics, not just improvement of life and all of that. And certainly for myself the driving force to pass and I passed every year. The driving force was to prove to people that I could pass I could be involved in politics and pass and that included my family. Not my mother but you know members of the family who were quite influential. And the group of us who actually went through and passed in that period we did it while we were involved in firstly, the anti-LAC, Local Affairs Communities Campaigns. The anti-Tricameral Parliament Campaigns, the million signature campaign and the UDF. So we, the activities continued but there was this kind of thing as well that one you couldn't afford to waste money so you had to also work at your academic work. I don't know it's a bit hard to explain but it meant you worked extra time.

DS: Okay so would you like to tell us about the million signatures? What was it all about? Why a million signatures?

MG: Okay this was a UDF campaign and this was around the formation of the Tricameral Parliament which was a follow on, from the, in terms of the Indian

Community, it would have been a follow on from the South African Indian Council right. This one was an attempt to introduce colour into government but it wasn't really. The people who would serve and the structures were not really decision-making structures, they were more a token structures. And at that point what we were trying to do was build non-racialism. So we wanted to show mass rejection of this Tricameral Parliament and the million-signature campaign was exactly that. The idea was, you would collect a million signatures showing people's opposition to the apartheid structure at that point the Tricameral parliament. But the second part of it was, it would provide a tool to educate people because in getting people to sign you would have to explain to them what this thing was about and why they should reject it and all of that.

DS: Okay would you like to tell us what the Tricameral system was all about?

MG: Well it was exactly that. Tricamerals we were three chambers and there was going to be like a white chamber, an Indian chamber, and a Coloured chamber. No representation of African people and the white chamber was the actually the decision- making one. The Indian chamber, which would have had Indian people in it and the Coloured one, they were there very similar to the local affairs committees. They would have been advisory if decisions were taken they were not in a position to change those decisions they could only talk. So we felt that those were, you know, well one, it was a very crude attempt to say that the

government was no longer white but we also felt that, that was not going to serve any purpose. You excluded African people, who were the majority in the country. That was completely out of order. But even had they been included and it was a four-chamber parliament it would have still been ineffective because the people of colour didn't have decision-making power. So they would have just been there as tokens.

DS: Okay so the campaign was a success?

MG: Very successful. I'm never sure whether we actually collected a million signatures because a lot of the petitions were confiscated by the police and all of that, but it certainly did raise awareness. The other big plus in that campaign was that non-racialism was built. For example what we would do is like on a Saturday we would get a group of people together across so it would be Indian, African, Coloured, White people going to Durban Central. Which was generally the area where we you know wanted to create an impact and we would set up tables which would soon get you know turned over by the police and all of that. But we would do that and we would at least engage people you know in town. We did it in our areas as well. And then meetings were called as part of this campaign and again they were non-racial meetings. Now you know you are talking about the period where everything was, you were kept in compartments, so this was quite a useful tool. The government didn't respond well to this. People I remember there were a whole of attempts made to link the UDF with the African National Congress, which was banned. And I remember there

was one case where according to the reports on the SABC which was, you know, very biased. A car of terrorists had been stopped, or I don't know whether they killed or what happened there. But they also found million signature petition forms in the car. And that was supposed to be like you know proof that there was a link between them. And there was a lot of attempt made to discredit the campaign. But I do think it served a purpose. It certainly raised awareness and it did build non-racialism at least at the level of activists and things like that.

DS: So far did people vote?

MG: In the Tricameral, no.

DS: They didn't.

MG: In fact that was, for us, one our greatest victories because we had asked people to stay at home. Not on the election day, not to go and cast a vote but to remain at home. And there was this massive stay away from the poles. So although the Tricameral parliament was established it had no credibility and no legitimacy because it didn't, it was patently a failure.

DS: It didn't function?

MG: No, no they functioned I mean they collected their salaries they met. But they couldn't claim any credibility.

DS: It was legitimate like people wanted it and okay so you are still at the university by this time?

MG: No now I'm teaching.

DS: You are teaching.

MG: I didn't spend long at the university, unlike people who came in later years or became permanent

students. We couldn't afford it that was part of the problem we didn't have bursaries.

DS: Did you finish the degree?

MG: I finished the degree.

DS: You finished your agree.

MG: I finished the degree. I was also fortunate in that my majors were English and French and I got a scholarship from the French Government, which was very beneficial to me. Because I spent three months in France, had the opportunity of interacting with part of the Anti-apartheid Movement and other organisations. Was also able to briefly go to the UK. So you know my personal experiences widened, and you know I also realised that there was support out there. When you are in the country, at that time you didn't really know because there was such a black-out on the media you know everything was so restricted the press and all of it. You didn't know what was happening out there really, and that was very heartening so when I came back it was, it was like even more positive for me. I did a teaching diploma at UDW and I was fortunate in that my first year, at that time, teaching you had, you had to basically go and take up a post wherever you were appointed. You didn't have a choice and I was appointed close to home which I didn't expect because I said that is when you would have seen victimisation. If you were politically involved they were supposed to send you off to some remote place. But fortunately I was appointed at the school where they did practice teaching, and what had happened there was the school principal when I went to teach there'd been a teacher absent.

So he had asked me if I would come in on a voluntary basis to assist and I said yes. And then he casually asked me would you like to teach in this school? And I said yes because at that point I didn't know where I was going to be posted to. And I think this, I think he never ever told me this but I think that he did pull strings so I was appointed there. I didn't complain. I didn't even ask about the process I was just grateful to be close to home I taught that was in 1984. In 1985 we were involved in these campaigns now right and the UDF launch and all of that was in process of taking place. I had my first son, and then in 1986 my son was a year and one month, I was arrested or detained under the State of Emergency and at that point there were three women from Chatsworth who were detained. That was myself, Patsy Pillay and Thunai Reddy.

DS: Where were you arrested?

MG: From school.

DS: From school you were involved in any activity that?

MG: Well political activity.

DS: Okay.

MG: Right the arrest was quite an interesting thing. I think that was a major eye-opener in the community as well. Because the police came with a whole lot of, well very heavily armed. They surrounded the school they brought these military vehicles and then they came into the school. And then with the Security Police and what had happened was this was June 17th. I had, every year since I started teaching stayed away from school on June 16th as a point of principle. Right, and they didn't pick it up and of

course what I used to fill in my leave form was that I was ill. And I had stayed away on the June 16th and went back on the 17th but we knew because arrests were taking place. We had suspected that there were going to be arrests and when I went to school I didn't expect the police to come there to arrest me but there was that other people were being arrested. And when they did pitch up at school. I mean they said, I remember it was Harry, Harry Singh right, we used to call him Smiling Harry.

DS: Were you teaching by that time or?

MG: I was teaching, I was teaching. He jumped up and said "you are arrested under the State of Emergency" or something like that.

DS: Just in front of the students?

MG: They called me to the office and my principal at the time was quite a scared person. So when this police told him not to say anything they were going to take me away. He didn't say anything and fortunately I had an HOD a Head of Department who was progressive, Rex Ayer, and he was the one who went to the staff to say this is what happened. And I had a good relation with my students so as I was being taken out, now this thing created quite a stir because my school was in a very settled community, houses all around, everybody saw what was happening. And some of my students had gone on a school excursion and the bus was coming back. So they saw me, and two of these children ran didn't get to school, they ran to a relative's home to go and tell these people that is what's happened. Had those children not done that my family probably wouldn't have immediately

known what had happened. Now why this is important is while this was happening the police were sending people to my home. So even though I wasn't there they were doing what was called a raid. And this, the children alerting my mother-in-law, helped because what my mother-in-law did then did, and we were quite cross with her afterwards was she burnt everything that she could see that looked political. She engaged in this massive burning thing that was the value of an extended family they all got into it. They were all just burning things and my husband had come home they told him to go, to leave so when I got there I saw the car. The police took me eventually home I saw the car and was a bit worried thinking he was there but he had obviously gone they had warned him. My son was one year and one month and he was breastfed at the time he was very traumatised because Major Benjamin who was a known Security Policeman was part of this raiding team. And when they came to the house they knocked my son over you know a little boy he's wandering around not knowing what's going on. They knocked him over, something that he never forgot and he well there were various other incidents after that when they went home and harassed people at home. But my son certainly developed a phobia about police, which I think he has only just come out of in the last few years. Those are like the side-effects that we don't think about, with children. In any event, they didn't allow me access to my son I was kept in solitary confinement, his breast-feeding had to

stop obviously because I wasn't there I was the provider of the milk. And they harassed my family a lot. My son was particularly unfortunate because when they came to arrest me they also wanted to arrest my husband so he effectively lost two parents in one go. And it was quite a disrupted time for him and I think it was even worse for him because after three months and a few weeks I was released without charge and all of that. And at the end of that year my husband was detained, again under the Section 29 at that point. And he was held in prison for six months in excess of six months.

DS: Section 29 what was it all about?

MG: Okay that was a modification on the State of Emergency that one was the Section 29 of the Internal Security Act which provided for unlimited detention, and which denied you access to lawyers all of that. It was a harsher version, right, the State of Emergency regulations actually said specified the time within which a person you know could be detained and then the police had to apply for an extension, which is what they did for me. But the Internal Security Act Section 29 of that meant just unlimited detention there was no and my husband was in fact assaulted, quite severely when he was in detention. And I laid a charge, which was eventually dismissed by Tim McNally you know the Attorney-General because he said there was no evidence. But my husband had been examined by the district surgeon who had found the bruising, found the marks, he had a fracture for three months that was unattended, all of that, but

that was the way in which you know they operated.

DS: So how long were you detained?

MG: It was three months and three weeks.

DS: Would you like to tell us about detention?

MG: You know that is a very interesting thing. I was in solitary confinement at the Durban Westville Prison, and in that section there were other people as well. Umi Jetham, who was from the medical school, and she was on the medical MSRC the students representative council there. Mrs. Jean Manning she was also part of it and there were other activists there as well. Janet Applegreen I think was with us as well. And other people that we didn't know. We were not allowed access to each other but what we would do, was at night when the warders and all of that went away we would shout to try and find out who was there. And one of the ways of getting to find out who was actually being held was to volunteer to like wash you know the floors. So I remember one incident were Thunai Reddy and myself we volunteered this very long passage. The advantage of it was the cell doors were open so we got a quick glimpse of some of the people who were there. I think we were quite fortunate compared to other detainees because we were held at Durban Westville Prison and the prison authorities were not quite sure how to deal with us as political prisoners. If we were held in the cells at a police station or at John Vorster, CR Swart, I think it would have been much worse because then it would have been extremely stringent about the application of rules, et cetera. But at Durban-Westville we were able to in some way deceive the

warders because they didn't quite know and they were afraid of us. Because they didn't know. I think they thought we were highly dangerous. So they didn't quite know what to do with us so we could insist on certain things. And for example we could insist on being allowed to wash clothes because when we were arrested we were not allowed to take we just had to take like one set of clothing and obviously in that time you.

DS: Okay so now your mother used to...?

MG: We actually challenged and I think it was like we pushed and pushed and we won concessions. I mean they didn't give them to us we won. And we did go on hunger strike there because one of the prisoners the detainees I don't know her name had actually been assaulted. And we went on a hunger strike and they were terrified because unlike the police services the prison authorities had signed the Geneva Convention. So they had to subscribe to a set of human rights and they were frightened when we went on it.

DS: Would you like to tell us about the Geneva Convention?

MG: Okay that one says well the South African Prison Services they signed it and I think it says that you have to have, it specifies the kind of diet you have in terms of the balance of nutritional stuff and all that. It also talks of the treatment of prisoner's basic human rights for prisoners. And the prison authorities didn't know where we fitted so we sort of tried to push that Geneva thing. So we got a bit more. So I think we were slightly luckier but look

the food was miserable. And it was the one time in my life when I was really slim, so it was nice.

DS: So what did you eat basically what was it like?

MG: Oh goodness the food they gave us, the diet was terrible. In the morning they would give us pap, right, but no salt or anything like that, with a drop of I think syrup or something in it and they would give us rooibos tea. And at that time we all on principle refused the rooibos tea because there was salmonella scare about rooibos that was exported so we thought they were dumping this on us and it was some indirect way of poisoning us or something. So we didn't drink that. The food was really terrible. I think they used to just re-boil whatever they had there. So we did try to put up some kind of fight about the food but we didn't win that one. We did get one visit from a magistrate and we complained bitterly about the treatment. We had children with us. Now they were not supposed to arrest children, and these were African kids, girls, I think they must have been between twelve and thirteen and they used to cry terribly in the night. They were terrified and I don't think they were politically active we got the feeling these children were just picked off the street because they happened to be on the street at the time. And the police had dumped them there and that was what we protested about. But then after we did that we protested to the magistrate we all separated. So initially we were in one section they took all of us and separated us. I think they realised that we were communicating. And that was their attempt to stop it.

DS: What exactly did they want would they interrogate you?

MG: Well my interrogation they said that I was member of the African National Congress. I was a terrorist they had a record and this is where I saw the collusion between the education department which was headed by Rajbansi at that time and the Security Forces. They had my entire personnel file, which is not something you could just get it had to be handed over by someone. And they were quite furious about the fact that I had stayed away on every June 16th since I started teaching, they had a record of meetings that I was at. They had pictures of me in meetings. Some people who had left the country were my associates and they you know wanted to draw the link to say that you are the member of the African National Congress. You are here in the country, you want, to you know, make this country ungovernable, you're a terrorist, and all of that. The fact that I had gone to France was a problem because their perception of it was that I had gone for training overseas and that I was now like you know this I don't know ticking time bomb or something in the country. I was going to wreak havoc somewhere. So there was all of that. And then there was the personal pressure because what they would do is they would take pictures of my son, this was horrifying, you don't realise how invasive these people are. So they had pictures of my family, they had my wedding pictures, I don't when they got all these things. And then you know when you are feeling really down they just pull this thing out and show this to you and say "but you can

see them, we'll let you see them if you just tell us what we want to know." And they made us write you had to write I think of the people who were there my interrogations were the longest. And the police one of the problems they had, right, it was a mixture of police so there were white policemen, Indian policemen, African policemen, Security Police didn't actually interrogate but they were present. What they found very difficult to understand is they used to tell me: "your mother is a teacher, you are a qualified teacher, you have this degree, you are earning well why are you involved in all this? Why can't you just and go and live a normal life what, what is it?" And that is what made them very suspicious, and I really think that they were trying convince me that I was doing the wrong thing.

DS: So were you able to talk to them also to answer their questions?

MG: Yes. Not answer their questions, because I mean we were old school, so we operations that you say nothing. So basically you know pretend total ignorance and all of that. But what we did I mean this is like comes from people like Pravin Gordhan and all of that, because they had this idea that even the police could be turned. So you should, wherever you were attempt to you know convince people of the rightness of what you are doing and let them understand also that they are victims. And with these Security Policemen, the non-white Security Policemen they were very sensitive about the fact that they were treated differently in terms of wages they couldn't even use the same toilets as their

white counterparts. So when I raised this on one or two occasions they became quite aggressive and very defensive about it. Denying you know trying to say that no, no they were treated equally but you could see that, that was an area of unhappiness for them. And I think in later times when some of these police actually provided information to the African National Congress. It would have been things like that, that drove them because they also were discriminated against. And it didn't matter that they were doing this dirty work, they were not treated equally.

DS: So do you still remember some of the names of your interrogators?

MG: Yes one was Harry Singh, Major Benjamin who, I think, has now joined the ANC or something, but I am not sure, and Victor Rajah who is dead. His home was blown up and they never found the people who did it.

DS: So they eventually - [interruption]

MG: There was another guy called Vishnu Singh a younger person.

DS: Okay so you still remember the year, which you were arrested 1986?

MG: 1986.

DS: 1986 when, June?

MG: In June, June 17th.

DS: Okay June 17th and then after three months they released you.

MG: The release was also difficult because they had this proviso and we all us had this. We knew the history of what Ahmed Bawa had gone through. About the many times he was released and then re- arrested at

the gates of the prison. So that was something, like you know almost like when we were schooled in politics those were the things we were told expect these kinds of things. So when I told I mean somebody just opened my cell door and they came in and said: "right get your things you are going." I was extremely suspicious about it. They had some regulation that you had to be taken home by the Security Police when you were released from detention. And in my case when I was taken out and I was held at the bottom the holding area at Westville Prison it took hours and no Security Policeman came. And I got more and more agitated because I believed that they were getting an order to prolong my detention. And eventually I fought with the warders who were there and insisted I was allowed to phone home. And I made a telephone call and said I wanted someone from home to come and fetch me. And by that time I think they were a bit sympathetic the warders and they when my brother eventually came to pick me up they did they let me go and as we were leaving we saw the Security Police coming in. So I think they did have an order of course I never went home. That was the start of a quite a long time on the run.

DS: Can we pause for a minute?

TAPE SWITCHED OFF

RESUMPTION ON SIDE B

DS: We are back you were still telling us about your release.

MG: Yes, so I never went home. We spent I think the best of that year living in the homes of many relatives and that's when you had the advantage of a

supportive family. Conservative people actually were prepared to say "come and stay here in our home", and I didn't go to school for a quite a while. When I eventually went back to school I was visited by the police and I couldn't live with my husband so I had my child with me he was traumatised. Initially didn't want to be with me because I think he felt I'd let him down by going away all of that. And at school, and this was the kind of you know this kind of collusion between your House of Delegates and the police. At school I was told that there was going to be an inquiry into my alleged misconduct. And I said what misconduct? I didn't do anything wrong? And they said "no you were, you were arrested." And there were two of my students who had also been arrested. And I had had something to do with that and they were going to - [interruption]

DS: Were they arrested while you were detained?

MG: The same period, they were distributing pamphlets. Well we had also given them pamphlets. But it wasn't a coercion they were politically aware, so they had chosen to do that. In any event I refused to participate in this inquiry and I had not been paid for the period of my detention. And I think it was like some kind of pig-headedness, I said no I had to be paid because they knew where I was. I prepared to work I was in one state department they could check I wasn't on holiday. And they were quite vindictive about it and then what we found was that at my school there were three of us who had the surname Govender. So the first lady was transferred without explanation to some school she had never

applied for. She made a big row they brought her back. Then the second lady got transferred, she made a big row they brought her back. And eventually at the end of the year, no and with the second one she made this row, she went and saw Rajbansi apparently, or so she said, and when she spoke to him he said that there is a Govender in that school who's causing a lot of trouble. She is involved in this NIC and she is a communist and terrorist and all that, and that's the one they want to get out. But you see the stupidness of this people was that they couldn't even get my initial right to effect a transfer. In any event at the end of that year 1986 I was not, at my request. I was on the day that my husband was arrested, I was served with a transfer notice saying that I had to leave the school that was ten minutes from my home to go to school in Umzinto. That was at least about half an hour to forty-five minutes on the south coast. And it was a ridiculous transfer because I hadn't asked for it. I was a matric teacher, so you are supposed to remain with your students you know all of that. And as we later found out the signature on that form, my transfer form wasn't even the signature of the person in charge of transfers. It was politically some Panday who signed. So that was straight political intervention you know and it was clearly victimisation.

DS: So you moved to this new school?

MG: I had to. At that time TASA wasn't as strong.

DS: TASA?

MG: The Teachers Association of South Africa. Although they tried to take the matter up, they

couldn't I'm not I think there were constraints. They couldn't actually you know push this matter. And when I got to that school I found that my being appointed at that school resulted in another innocent person being displaced. He was living in the area, he was moved to Margate it was a whole chain of things. So that was the that was my return. Then my husband was locked up so it was.

DS: What year?

MG: At the end of December. So it was a bit exciting because now we had to go through a whole round of police visits about him. And it was the same thing he nearly escaped, they fired at him he fractured his knee trying to flee from them.

DS: Was he a teacher also?

MG: No he was working on an NGO.

DS: NGO and you?

MG: And they arrested him from work.

DS: Okay what was the NGO all about?

MG: It was an early childhood development project. He worked there as a librarian.

DS: Okay so by this time were you allied to any political organisation or civic society?

MG: Well the Natal Indian Congress which was a legal organisation. I was a member. I eventually became secretary of the branch in our area there. I was a member, executive member of the Chatsworth Housing Action committee, which took up a whole range of community issues, ranging from the sale of houses, rent struggles, rates were involved in you know opposition to discriminatory rates. And the Chatsworth Housing Action committee also had a political element to it, in that all our demands, were

we would quote I mean our slogan was: "Houses, Security and Comfort." It was straight out of the Freedom Charter. So our involvement in that was a political thing. We got in there we wanted to do work with people, but we also wanted to transmit a political message. So that here it was an organisation that served well to do that also, within the community.

DS: You mentioned that you were also involved in rent struggles, would you like to tell us a little bit about that?

MG: Yes, you see in the Chatsworth area in the sub-economic areas Woodhurst, Westcliffe, Bayview people there didn't own their homes. And you are talking about quite a while. A lot of people in Chatsworth were homeowners. But in those areas people could not purchase those homes and the rents that they were paying were out of proportion. (1) to their income; (2) the kind of services that they were given; and (3) the calculation of those rates, it was based on some apartheid formula. So we then took on the what was then the Durban City Council, and again we had non-racial protests. But mainly Indian and Coloured people because the African areas fell under the KwaZulu-Natal province. So it was a bit of a different authority to deal with. And it was a very, very interesting period in the, particular like say in the Indian and Coloured communities because we had ordinary residents, women, et cetera, who marched who were engaged in active protests. Something that wasn't a common feature in those communities and at the same time there was I think a bit of an

increase in their political understanding of what was going on. We also had you know women leadership being thrown out. People like Mrs. Naicker, Mrs. Reddy in Chatsworth, you had Mrs. Maharaj in Phoenix. Ordinary women who were at home, who would get onto a public platform and talk and commanded tremendous support. So it was also a good period to build grass-roots leadership, and lots of people were actually grownup you know in that time and understood what was going on. We also enjoyed very wide support from organisations in the communities. So you had religious organizations, all of that, lent their support to campaigns that they perceived to be just campaigns. Because they were dealing with issues that affected people on a daily basis.

DS: Okay so if I may ask you, you eventually transferred to this new school and how did the teachers accept, you did they have any idea who you were why you were transferred?

MG: No, they knew. They knew, because I displaced a teacher so there was a whole lot of questioning how is it that so and so who has not applied for a transfer he is suddenly moved out of the school to make way for this person? But I must say that I was transferred to Rosewell Secondary in Umzinto, and I have nothing but praise for the staff, the principal and staff of that school. I was you know particularly vulnerable at that time because my husband was locked up in prison. I had no access to him; I didn't know whether he was you know injured and all of that. And I was travelling this distance and from the principal

through to the teachers and that community, they supported me. And in a way it was very, very good because it, it made me stronger. I mean I would drive, and the teachers from the school community members would actually telephone when I was leaving school they would telephone home to say "she's leaving now" and then phone to say "has she arrived?" And sometimes they would even escort me because I had a very troublesome car. And the principal never stopped attempting to apply for a transfer for me close to home. And the community was a conservative community. They knew, they were not, you know, politically very active and things like that but they were supportive. So that was really very good for me at that time.

DS: You taught there up until when?

MG: 1988.

DS: 1988 why did you?

MG: You see eventually it became, became too much for me to travel because I had a second child a baby. And the travelling consumed a lot of time and then there was the police harassment.

DS: Okay can we pause for just a minute?

TAPE SWITCHED OFF

ON RESUMPTION

DS: We are back.

MG: Well the principal at Rosewell Secondary was Mr. SN Naidoo and he did try whatever was possible within, you know, the influence that he had to get a transfer back for me. And also, I think, the staff members there the ladies and I remember there were a whole range of them I can't remember all the

names. But they would go out of their way to be supportive and everybody knew the story, nobody actually came and asked. But they gave their support and if I chose to speak about it then we would talk.

DS: Okay so while your husband was detained how was life actually, besides being you were a mother a teacher and - ?

MG: Well the one thing is that nobody makes concessions so you learn to like take whatever time you have because I was politically active as well. And even though he was in prison, my political involvement didn't stop and we were forever campaigning I mean we were a whole range of things. My son learnt I mean my son's idea of a bedroom was the back seat of the car. I had my husband's family was extremely supportive I lived with them so I had that help. My own mother and father were supportive so I think that gives a lot of strength when people are around. And then there were a lot of activists. For example I remember when I on the day I was the night before I was due to report at this new school and my car was troubling and we were trying to sort this thing out. And I saw somebody coming up the driveway and I immediately thought it was the police because there was this person walking very quietly. And then as the person came closer he said something and then I looked and it was Billy Nair. And he was at that point in hiding but he had gone out of his way to come and see me to tell me "I understand that you are going to school the next day, this new school hang in there, and don't give up." And that was the kind of calibre of people that

we had at that time. George Sewpersadh of the Natal Indian Congress used to come every Sunday. And George is not a very articulate person and he would sit there and he would say "are you okay?" And then he would struggle around to say something else, didn't always find the words but the very fact that he came there you know that was comforting. And people like Pravin Gordhan, and Vish Sewpersadh, all of these people were incredibly supportive. The activists in Chatsworth took it upon themselves to all become surrogate parent's to my son. So he had a whole range of people, they even worked out times and they were a lot of younger people who had come in as activists, Anesh Sanker, and Suren Chetty, and people like that, who would actually, amongst themselves, agree that they are going to visit and they are going to take this boy and do something with him all of that. So my son didn't actually want for company, companionship, and all of that because people really went out of their way. The same applied to Patsy Pillay, when she had been in detention as well the activists also rallied to her support. And there were people like Derrick Naidoo and all of that who would take our families to detainee support committee meetings. I mean when I came out prison it was the biggest shock of my life to see my mother, Charm, my husband's mother, Patsy's mother, all our mothers attending, like you know veterans, attending these detainees support committee meetings chatting with all these people. They had all obviously undergone some major shift, and they shifted because they became you know more articulate and all of that as

well it was very interesting. And then people like Derrick and Des Moodley would fetch them take them to these meetings and would always be around so it was very good. I think we were fortunate we had a very good support system.

DS: Okay so you worked there for how long?

MG: In Umzinto?

DS: Yes.

MG: I was there for three years.

DS: For three years and then why did you?

MG: Well as I said the pressures were becoming a bit much. Although I knew that this was what the system actually wanted, for me to leave. But on a personal level it was difficult travelling, juggling my time around, sorting my kids out, all of that. And we had met as political activists and one of the things one of the key issues at that time was the organisation of Indian Women Workers. And there was a vacancy in what was then the Garment Workers Union. And I applied for that, having discussed this with people who felt it was a good idea. And I got a post there, in The Garment Workers Union as an education officer. At that time the Garment Workers Union was not in COSATU. And it was crucial for that union to actually go into COSATU, for non-racialism; for the strengthening of the federation; for building workers solidarity; all of that, and non-racialism. So that was the kind of idea behind my applying for that job. There were already people working there, from you know the kind of congress tradition. Yunis Shaik was there as secretary; AJ Moodley was there as well, he is now dead. And Preggs Govender,

when I went in she was unwell. But basically it was you know - [interruption]

DS: What year was that?

MG: That was in 1988, about mid-year. And we actually, that group here in Durban, working together with people like Billy Nair, and as people from COSATU. We actually, in a way, contributed towards taking that union and those workers into accepting to become part of COSATU. It was a very big move for the union and it changed its name. The Garment Workers Union was, you know, the Bolton Families legacy it changed its name to the Garment & Allied Workers Union. And we went into COSATU and the workers accepted you know. Before you became a member of COSATU, we had to engage in political education with the workers. You had to change the kind of conservatism of the union. People had to see things differently it wasn't easy, and I wouldn't say we were totally successful but we were able to have an impact.

MS: If I were to ask what conditions did the people work in the garment factories?

MG: Terrible. It was the majority women worker union. A very large number of Indian women in KwaZulu-Natal, that was the tradition. Coloured workers and not too many African workers at that time, right. The wages were pathetic, I mean I think when I went in there they must have been earning roundabout R12 a week, right. That was the, you know, really a very, very low wage I think it was about twelve. I maybe wrong, but extremely low. And that was one of the reasons that people actually supported the movement of COSATU because we said living wage,

that's what the strength and support of other unions all of that. And it wasn't just a matter of doing political education you had to also deliver. So we had for the first time in the history of the garment industry here, we had major strikes in that period, where workers went out on strike for higher wages. And there were very large jumps they were not obviously living wages according to us as we would say but certainly very large jumps in the salary increases in that period. And so workers saw a tangible, a benefit of belonging to some larger movement, because there you know their benefits their wages were drastically increased. We also put in the element of rights for workers. So for example there was thing about depot Provera injections beings used. I remember in Verulam, in the factories you know the clinics were actually giving women these as contraception, and we put that in saying that it is not acceptable. These have terrible side-effects on women. We issued introduced this issue of women's empowerment, because it was a majority women worker union.

DS: Did like the these people from clinic they like people who were taking this injections like willingly or?

MG: They didn't know.

DS: They didn't know.

MG: They didn't know the ignorance of workers was exploited all they knew was that a contraceptive injection. They didn't understand so what they didn't know obviously nobody was prepared to actually go and tell them until as part of the unions intervention those were issues that we raised. We

had fought for improved conditions in terms of maternity benefits, permanence of workers. Because at that time women who fell pregnant had to leave their jobs, right.

DS: They were not even allowed to come back after the birth?

MG: No, if they came back it was they would be lucky right. Registration of workers, all of those things there was lots of abuses of workers. As women, and as workers and those were also the issues. It was actually a very good period, because there was so much wrong that whatever you did was an improvement. And that you know ensured the credibility as well. And from that we went into preparing workers because COSATU had the policy of one union, one industry, one union. So there was the Textile Workers Union, and the Leather workers who were allied, and basically part of the same industry. So we had to engage in talks with APTUSA which was already a COSATU affiliate. And it was only when the Garment & Allied Workers Union agreed to merge with ABTUSA that we could go in as members of COSATU. And that merger took place, it was interesting merger because you had a fairly male dominated union and a fairly female dominated union coming together the leadership tussle was interesting.

DS: So how long did you stay there?

MG: Three years.

DS: Three years about three years. By this time the police they were not harassing you anymore?

MG: It wasn't as bad.

DS: Okay but they came there?

MG: Yes you see, what was happening then was that I think there were talks carrying on outside the country. There was a realisation that this regime had to change. So it wasn't like an official easing up, but certainly the open harassment was reduced. It was also a time, like in that period while I was with the union there was for example a delegation that had left to represent the Indian community that went to meet the ANC in exile. So those things were they were not the regime wasn't enthusiastic about it but realised that those were also necessary because there were a whole lot of talks, you know, negotiations carrying on at that time behind closed doors and behind the scenes, as well.

DS: So after you worked there what did you do?

MG: I went to, now you know I spoke about this merger there were political differences. We came from the congress tradition and had the Garment Workers Union like that and ABTUSA well there were differences, let's put it like that. And I felt that it was better at that point to leave the union. I didn't see myself moving too much further in the new union, right. And I went to work for the community research unit. I became coordinator of their research-training programmed and we trained civic activists from townships around Durban to conduct research in their communities to establish needs and all of that.

DS: What kind of research basically?

MG: We worked with the residents associations and civic associations, in those communities. For example we

worked with the Lamontville Residents Association and discussed with them what they wanted and then we conducted, we changed their activists to conduct research on those areas. So Lamontville was doing a wanted research done into the housing needs of people, you know kinds of housing, et cetera. Because Lamontville was opening up in terms of housing projects and we did a complete study there and that actually has been registered as a piece of research. And the activists themselves, you know, they learnt those skills.

DS: You said earlier on there were differences between the two unions, what kind of differences?

MG: Okay, nothing really voiced, okay, but within the union movement, as you know, there were like different political tendencies, and things like that. And there was you know potential for conflict as well. So I mean that I actually chose to go into the community research unit at that time.

DS: Okay how long did you stay in the community research unit?

MG: For just a year. In that year the James Commission was held and you know it was into political interference and education and all of that it was headed by Mr. Justice James.

DS: Would you like to tell us about this James Commission?

MG: So this one investigated the doings of the House of Delegates in particular in the field of education. And people were called to testify about their experiences, and these were investigated. And then the James Commission actually ruled on it. It was the James Commission which, as part of its

findings, stated that Rajbansi, Mr. Rajas, it recommended that he should never hold public office he was unfit to hold public office because of the corruption and the mal-administration and all of that that occurred. I testified on my matter and in terms of evidence that was brought there this is when it came out that people had signed, politically aligned people, had signed my transfer notice. There was a whole range of documentation that came out about correspondence trying to, you know, arrange this - so it was just one of the matters. And it was at the end of that hearing that the late Mr. AK Singh approached me and said he was, actually apologized for what had happened, and said, would I like to come back to teaching, I would be welcome. And at that time I had had my second child so the teaching hours all of that were far more attractive to me and I actually then went back to teaching.

DS: Okay so up until today?

MG: Yes.

DS: Okay.

MG: But unfortunately teaching has been a bit of a rough ride. There is a thing in the education department that you have to have continuous service for them to consider you for promotion all of that. And my service was broken although it wasn't really out of my choice so for a very long time I wasn't promoted, you know all this business. And well that's like one of the not so nice things.

DS: So if I, if I may ask the unbanning of political organizations what did it mean to you?

MG: Well it meant that I could openly say that I was a member of the ANC. I had joined the ANC, while it

was a banned organisation. And I had actually been part of Operation VULA which was headed by Mac Maharaj, Oliver Tambo and Ronny Kasrils and Joe Slovo. So it basically meant that I could publicly acknowledge a membership that I had actually taken a long time ago.

DS: Okay if I may ask would you like to tell us about the Operation VULA what was it all about basically, or is it classified information?

MG: No it's not classified. Well Operation VULA was a kind of secret project of the ANC. It was known to the President, the then President Oliver Tambo and it enjoyed his sanction. And the idea was you know there was like different pillars of the struggle and one of them was to have a kind of mass uprising, if you want, it or to prepare for that. And well one of the things Operation VULA did was bring a lot of arms into the country, right? In the eventuality of such a thing occurring but that wasn't the only thing. There was also the whole issue of political awareness, getting people to understand what the ANC was about, what it stood for, all of that. If there was political work as well. So we had or there were people throughout the country who were part of this and within the Chatsworth area there were a group of us who were involved in Operation VULA. You had earlier asked about police harassment. Well, some people had been arrested around the time that Siphiwe Nyanda and others were arrested Mvuso Cavalla, who was actually executed by the Security Police. Around that time the police harassment of us actually increased, but not harassment basically what they did was you would

have a car stationed outside your house and they would observe. And the idea was they were trying to draw links because although there were talks occurring, Operation VULA wasn't something that the government would condone or sanction. So they would you know and I mean the rest of the people like Pravin Gordhan and Mac Maharaj as well actually showed that. It was something that I must say I, it was an honour to actually be part of that, because we felt that we were doing something important.

DS: By then would I be right if I say you were part of the armed struggle?

MG: Yes.

DS: Okay. Actually, you joined?

MG: Yes.

DS: Okay can I pause for just a minute?

TAPE SWITCHED OFF

RESUMPTION OF INTERVIEW

DS: We are back.

MG: In the case of Mvuso Cavalla, who was arrested as part of that Operation VULA, there were a whole round of arrests. He vanished, never knew what happened to him, we suspected that they had killed him. There was nothing no confirmation that came from anywhere, and I remember we had the first ANC conference and the issue was raised what has happened to Mvuso Cavalla? Nobody had any idea. And eventually his wife had to struggle very hard because there was no income, although he had taken an insurance policy for his family. She couldn't claim that because there was no body and no proof of death.

DS: Okay I believe that Portia Ndwandwe was also part of the Operation VULA, would you like to tell us about the incident or even a brief history of her if you met maybe at the university?

MG: Okay, no we didn't meet at the university this and we didn't know each other by our correct names. It was only later when you saw the face you realised that this was the person whom you knew by another name you know. And again it was a disappearance, and then the next thing you knew was that it was a death. But you know that was a feature and I think particularly of Operation VULA because it was a secret project which was different from like many of the other ANC projects. I think a lot of the people there actually suffered quite severe brutality, you know. Even like Pravin Gordhan, when he was locked up in Bethlehem he was just transferred they didn't know where he was. Siphiwe Nyanda same story. Mac Maharaj I mean he was the member of the NEC, National Executive Committee of the ANC, and they locked him up. Even while engaging in talks with the ANC. And it also, I think, convinced us that you have to be very careful about placing your faith and confidence in the talks, or not the talks, but maybe the bona fides of that government and its representatives. We actually were very wary and that is why with Operation VULA you said "top secret", it wasn't actually that. But there was always this feeling that you couldn't secure, you were not sure that even your freedom was totally secure, and it wasn't a good thing to place all your eggs in the basket or disclose everything you know. If it wasn't a threat from the

existing regime it could have been a threat from your right-wing elements. And like even you assassination of Chris Hani, most recently, the discovery of a right-wing plot tells you that even so many years down the line you cannot say your democracy is totally secure.

DS: Okay so if I believe there were rumours that Portia Ndwandwe apparently had spoken up maybe, there was that did you believe that rumour?

MG: No.

DS: She didn't.

MG: No.

DS: Okay but there was a rumor?

MG: There were rumours but there is also this thing that when the person is not here issues get clouded. And then there are lots of suggestions that do come out. The police themselves also are quite good at putting out you know many of these. I'm not in a position to actually comment on that.

DS: Okay so when you found out that Portia Ndwandwe was killed, how did you feel?

MG: Actually helpless because really, it's a fait Accompli, what could you do? And you know you feel an anger but you can't go beyond that and then the only thing do is to say find out are the families sorted out, those kinds of things. You can't bring the person back. And one of the things that was also was, I mean many of these people who committed it said they did these things. I think initially there was this kind of anger that these people could say this and nothing was happening to them. Those are things you have to work through.

DS: So why do you think the National Party has agreed to negotiate a settlement?

MG: I think they had no choice. The mass campaigns combined with the international pressure, because there was tremendous international pressure, put them in a situation where, they were forced I will not say that they went willingly to actually negotiate. I think they realised that if they didn't start they would eventually be forced to a table. But it was advantageous to actually start earlier, where you could negotiate. Because at that time in the country there was tremendous mass activity. That whole idea of like you know popular mass action was all over the place. You had your defiance campaigns, people were occupying the beaches, hospitals and it wasn't just restricted to small groupings of people, it was activity across non-racial lines. People were actually acting from a strong moral sense, as well. They may not have agreed to all the politics but there was heightened activity in the country. There was also this pressure in terms of the armed struggle I think government was concerned about that. And there was international pressure, tremendous international pressure. So I think all of those factors the National Party I think did the right thing, the sensible thing.

DS: Okay would you like to tell us about this international pressure?

MG: Well you had a whole range of things. You had like simple things like cultural boycotts, which you know you had the UN declarations were apartheid had been declared a crime against humanity. You

had countries that were refusing to trade with South Africa. South Africa was classed together with Israel, so I mean we were like pariahs of the world. It was difficult to even students, to go and you know study, white students. I think also within the white community there was an amount of pressure as well that was coming out, morally anyway. So I really do believe that it wasn't choice, there wasn't a choice really. The National Party I think was sensible, I won't say right, I won't say it was good. I don't think they really wanted to do it, but in assessing the situation, they obviously adapted to what was best for them.

DS: If there were no negotiations do you think we would have won?

MG: Yes.

DS: How?

MG: It was a right struggle. So eventually they could have been longer certainly, and perhaps, we are fortunate we had a bloodless transition. Right it would have been I think ugly, you would have had lots more suffering, violence and all of that. But eventually I mean history you can't go against what history teaches you. When your struggle is right and the cause is just.

DS: Okay what were your hopes for the country when the negotiations started?

MG: I was a delegate to CODESA and there was a lot of concern about the genuineness of those people who were part of those talks. But in terms of hopes yes, you wanted peaceful the peaceful transition was the best, because it meant your country would be intact, you would have something to start from. Your

economy could grow all of that. Also we had used the charter as a beacon and those principles what we wanted to come through in whatever negotiated agreements had been there. And then obviously the majority of people in our country right the African working class, their interests had to be best served.

DS: Okay have these hopes been realised especially when you spoke of the Charter some of their principles of the charter were included have they been realised?

MG: No I think we are heading in the right direction we are nowhere near it. I mean you have massive inequality in our country at this point that hasn't changed. But at least what you have is a good Constitution. Hopefully the political will is still there to actually move with that. And we have had some improvements, but certainly it's not, I mean not a drastic change. The very fact that we have such a high rate of unemployment; there is a shortage of housing; all of that says that's there's lots more to be done. But I do think that the fact that you have got his Constitution, you do have the political will means that at least you are working towards that.

DS: If I may ask why do you think are the major challenges or issues facing the South African government?

MG: The whole question of poverty, unemployment. I think those are the two crucial things. The economic imbalances in our country, I mean I know we are not a socialist government, but certainly we have to address that because you can't have a

society that is prospering and flourishing if you have the majority of people who are still, you know, poverty-stricken. I think we also have, racism is here. Change of government hasn't taken that away. And it's across the board; so it's between black and white, within the black community itself I mean recently we have had this whole debacle about you know about Mogen Ngema's song. That tells us that we have a long way to go. This is a very new democracy and I think we are not yet mature or we haven't matured into it. You know even amongst activists you do get this kind of thing. And I am not apportioning blame because I don't think we can do that, it's a legacy we come out of. We were you know grown in this apartheid tradition, it is going to be very hard to get rid of it. And you know, your government changing, a new constitution doesn't change attitudes and all of that as well.

DS: Okay so do you think there is anything that the government can do, I mean the government has adopted this GEAR policy you know, is it possible like it shows all over the country that the GEAR policy is not working. It works for some people.

MG: I don't have the answer on that one, right, but I think there are some positive things in the economy. For example you know our inflation rate, you know it dropped. We are putting some things right. I also think that I am not defending the GEAR policy, but I think that the government actually didn't have a choice. It would have had to follow that kind of policy or something on those lines. We are not a socialist country and it's not your communist countries that actually dominate your international

arena. I mean when you got rid of apartheid you also opened the doors to things like globalisation, all of that. Which means then that you have to as a country, we are going to have to keep up you know if we are to survive, or we are going to be at the mercy of all these forces. It's quite frightening with globalisation what can happen to your country without even your intention. So I think in the light of that, this policy is the one that is being followed, but certainly it's not the ideal policy and other things have to be put into place to address the inequities that we have.

DS: You are talking of racism and all that, recently we had the World Summit on Sustainable Development Conference. We heard Mugabe saying that Tony Blair should have his London and leave Zimbabwe to the Zimbabweans.

MG: Well Zimbabwe, I think Mugabe actually doesn't have a choice in what's happening there because the land redistribution I mean that's crucial to that economy and we could very well end up in a similar situation if we don't address our own issue of land redistribution, right. Because the majority of people don't have access to the land, they don't own the land. Which is the situation in Zimbabwe I mean I'm not defending the way in which Mugabe is going about it but I do think that land does need to be redistributed in Zimbabwe. You can't have the minority still I mean so many years down the line after Zimbabwe have reached independence you can't have the minority possessing the bulk of the land. Because then it tells you that you haven't redistributed to the benefit of the people. So okay

he might be going about it in the wrong way and I think perhaps very often he lets things happen because in terms of the law you know it might be a bit more difficult. But I think of the lesson we learn here in this country that if we don't want to degenerate in that kind of anarchy if you want, then we need to at the top and whatever other organisations there are, we need to actually start getting our act together and speed up the process.

DS: Do you think the government is prepared to learn from Zimbabwe or should we - let me just put it like this - do you think it's only the government that has to you know learn from Zimbabwe or even the people themselves who own this land and the economy - [interruption]

MG: No I think it's both. You see it's easy and it's a convenient scapegoat to always say government right. But I think everything you know involves like we always talk about stakeholders. There are many stakeholders here. Also I think like say on the part of people, say ordinary people you we have to also have a system were we say this is not good for our country if you are just going and have land invasions. Because what's the point of destroying say fertile land where you have got crops growing its not going to serve you or anyone well. So it's got to be both, but okay that's easy to say, but if people are hungry and they don't have, then you know things can become quite difficult and that is why whatever powers our government has you know in terms of legislation or that it needs to implement those things quickly.

DS: Okay you are a member of SADTU?

MG: I'm a member of SADTU.

DS: Okay yesterday you had this march what is this all about would you like to tell us?

MG: Okay it's SADTU in KwaZulu-Natal, we are having a problem with the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department around the staffing and provision of education. In terms of staffing, there is a thing called PPN, Post Provisioning Norm, it tells you how many pupils you have learners you have per teacher. And the National Education Department the National Policy has been that you will reduce the number of learners per educator over the next so many years. And we started at 39, no we started at 40, went down to 39, we came down last year to 36, nationally right. However, in KZ-N this year, due to a range of factors, including the abuse of money and whatever else that was done, the KZ-N Education Department decided to change that ratio. So instead of reducing it they increased it so we went from 36 to 36.5 which sounds like a pretty small figure. But I will give you a concrete example in my school that .5 means we have to get rid of two teachers, qualified teachers, and that's the kind of scenario that you will be getting in schools. So obviously teachers are up in arms because (1) you are right in the middle of your school year; you have a policy, which says national policy, which says you are supposed to be reducing this right. And then you have a provincial education department that seems to be reversing the process right. And it's clearly not to the benefit of pupils because, if they are short of teachers it's a problem. (2) one of the

other reasons for starting to reduce that pupil/teacher ratio was to employ qualified people who are out there, who don't have jobs. Now you can't do that because in addition to reducing the number, or increasing the number, the CEO of Education has also said that they will not advertise posts in what they call an open vacancy list, which means anyone, can apply. They will only advertise this thing called a closed vacancy list, which are ordinary teachers in the system who are in excess in their schools so they are saying that will reduce financial costs.

DS: So I believe there are teachers, temporary teachers?

MG: Yes they are supposed to be dismissed.

DS: They are supposed to be dismissed?

MG: They are qualified people they have not been onto the permanent staff. But they are now according to if this new set of decisions is implemented they will have to be dismissed immediately.

DS: So what's going to happen about them?

MG: Well that's the thing that is why the union I mean SADTU I don't know about the other unions they appear to be fairly silent on this but certainly that's why SADTU is fighting the matter. But there is also another reason that SADTU went on strike. There has been a decision nationally, that you admit pupils at the age of six into schools so in KwaZulu-Natal we have conservatively 40 000 new pupils. But the department has stated that it will not provide teachers. So if a school, your school is obliged to accept these children. But you have to manage with the staff that you have, which is ridiculous because you then could be going into

classroom sizes in excess of 40 or 50 well in excess of 50.

DS: Okay also in this thing its like its confusing, its just that I have somebody I know who is a temporary teacher and who didn't get paid last month and the thing was just been implemented if I may or it was long?

MG: We have a similar situation our school two teachers. We have been told about this but it seems like the action has been taken already. We have a teacher, two teachers in our school who didn't get paid as well. And when we went and checked this out what we were told is that they are off the computer. So they have effectively been fired without them knowing about it because if you're off that computer there is no record of you as a teacher on the departments payroll. So I think that's well that's one of the things the union is, is now struggling to reverse.

DS: Okay. So are they continuing to work or?

MG: No they are there because the poor people were can they go? And they haven't been told they are fired and we are not really recognising this thing. And what we have to do now is negotiate, because at this point they are unpaid. And they are people who are breadwinners and all of that so it's a really a very, very bad situation.

DS: Okay coming to this point it always troubled me this OBE thing. I believe that next year it's - okay can we pause?

TAPE SWITCHED OFF

RESUMPTION ON TAPE 2

DS: We are back. I was still asking you about the this situation in teaching in KwaZulu-Natal Education Department. So in your negotiations do you think you are going to manage to resolve this?

MG: Look I'm not sure.

DS: You are not sure.

MG: We would like to have it resolved first. But it will also depend on I think all the unions acting together. At this point SADTU is the one and they are doing something on the matter. You have got NACTOSA, and you have got the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwys Unie, so that creates a kind of weakness because the department then can talk to them and you know force it through because we have got two parties that might be agreeable. I do think that there needs to be this kind of working together with the unions. Because this is something that affects everybody's membership it's not an insurance policy.

WITH THE CHANGE OF TAPE THE RECORDING IS AFFECTED -

VERY POOR SOUND QUALITY

[unclear] your membership where people are going to lose their jobs. All unions have to actually come together to try and solve this thing. But it's not just about jobs. Yesterday on that SADTU march we had a representative from the association of governing bodies of KwaZulu-Natal and he was pointing out as a parent that he wants his child to get a good education. And he wants his child to be you know to have a future and not have a huge class. And you know just talk give a parent's viewpoint as well. This is not something that you want. You want a

better point of public education and we had that. There is no explanation as to why suddenly you actually go back we are moving on the right track and then it seems like.

DS: So if I may ask why was the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department has taken that step or is it nationwide?

MG: No, no it's just KZ-N.

DS: Why?

MG: I think I'm not sure you know, I have not been privy to the discussions. But I think part of it is economic, economics where this province receives the largest slice of education budget in the country. But it is not handled properly and you had many instances were money is unaccounted for we've even had cases were money had been returned to the national coffers. And for example around HIV/Aids education that you know money that was given to the department and also like you've got just cases like where people are suspended, but they receive massive salaries and you know all of that. So and up to now our Education Department cannot say how many teachers it has in its employ. Even though they've employed you know consultants and companies and whatever else to do those counts. We still can't ,I mean if you had to go and they have done it in the provincial parliament go and say how many teachers are employed by KwaZulu-Natal's Education Department they cannot give you a figure. Now I mean how do you budget if you don't know the number of people you are supposed be paying? It's ridiculous. So I think there is a lot of bad administration and obviously money has been

wasted and clearly there are economic constraints. So I think they are responding to that and this appears to be a quick way of saving some money.

DS: Okay earlier on in our discussion you pointed out that the history that they taught you basically, was limited...

MG: Absolutely.

DS: ... so is there any change from that we hear from now?

MG: Definitely. My one grouse is that history is not a compulsory subject in school. And you know I teach in a high school and I know that many young people don't know our history, right. And because they are not they do a bit of history in primary school but that's very basic stuff. And then in high school we study novels, we study literature, all of that which requires an understanding of your country's history, current affairs, all of that and our students really don't know. I mean we say June 16th they understand what it means, you can say June 16th to a your average student now and the all the person thinks is public holiday, Youth Day, but they don't know what. They don't know the history of it. So as far as history goes I for one think it should be compulsory as part of the school curriculum. But the history where children have opted to study history up to matric level it's absolutely wonderful. They study, my son does history and in his matric year he is doing the Middle East crisis; he has done a whole bit on South African history it's really good. And obviously they are better informed and you know they appreciate things more. I think also it's part of our

development as a nation. We need to know what has happened. And if you don't have this where you know it's compulsory that all these areas and international politics as well we are actually are not going to develop the all-rounded individuals that we need in society. So the history curriculum is very good. Problem is that there aren't that many students doing it because it's a choice.

DS: It's a choice so therefore that is why you suggested that it should be made compulsory?

MG: Compulsory.

DS: Okay I think I agree with you. Okay I just want to change my questions and focus on TRC. Did you offer any statement to TRC?

MG: No, no I didn't.

DS: How do you view TRC?

MG: There's mixed feelings, right. I think it was a very good thing to do, the rationale that you wouldn't have discovered the truth otherwise, I think it's actually quite valid. So as far as that goes I mean we obviously learnt a lot that we wouldn't have learnt. Equally, I don't think that everybody was totally upfront. So there is also a lot that hasn't actually been revealed. I mean that's I supposed that's how it goes. Personally I mean I wasn't very happy about you know people you committed atrocities being granted those amnesties but that's a personal thing. I understand the need for it I know it had to be done but just like my personal thing I wasn't too happy about that. But certainly in terms of revealing things that needed to you know be brought out I think that was a good thing. The victims and all of that and the you,

know the reparations I don't think that has really worked out. One, I don't think they can really be compensated for what happened. But in terms of the financial thing as well from what I understand there hasn't been enough money. So even that compensation I don't think it's really been adequate for all those people whose families were affected and things like that.

DS: Okay so they do you understand the TRC mandate?

MG: I think basically they were to get people to speak about what had occurred, it was also be a kind of healing I mean you know its like the idea of opening the wound let it bleed and then it will heal, and to build national reconciliation unity. I think in some ways it has done that. Perhaps more so for white people because I think they didn't know many of the things that happened or maybe were never you know it didn't come into their faces. That this is what is going on they may have suspected so as a nation we can see you know where things went wrong as well.

DS: Okay I just want to ask you a question like you know for you what did apartheid mean?

MG: For me I think it was a more of a moral thing. That is just wasn't right. And I think I also carried a sense of guilt because as person of Indian origin, South African of Indian origin, I was actually more privileged than African people and I found that abhorrent. It wasn't a situation of my making or choosing but that was the situation I found myself in. So for example even though I mean I was a victim of apartheid as well, as much as an African person, within that context, we were still better

treated right. For example we had education access to education those kinds of things. And you know that, I don't know it's maybe a kind of guilt thing although as I said its not a situation of my making and that was like a part of the thing that drove as well that you wanted the equality. Certainly it wasn't like a thing about financial gain there was nothing to gain in any event. I haven't really benefited from that in terms of finances. But I certainly have grown. The other thing that I must say, and we always said that we would say this is you see the Natal Indian Congress when we were part we joined it used to conduct political education classes. To train activists, to brief us about things like our history of our country which we didn't get in school. And the negative effect of that has really I mean I see this, people who were activists in that period went through that training. And you had people like Pravin Gordhan, Yunus Mohammed, Billy Nair, Paul David, all of them. We actually have come out more critical so those are like life skills that we learnt which we applied even in our ordinary lives. In terms of like being able to look at situations critically. Secondly, confidence all of us were forced we were thrown in the deep end, you had to learn to talk. I mean if you had to go and do house visits which was the modus operandi in your community work you had to find the courage to go and knock on a door and talk to a total stranger about politics. And let me say that's not an easy thing to do. So it gives certainly all of us we developed that confidence. So I mean you know at the level of developing people's personal skills, we

have certainly benefited. Also like tools of analyses and all of that. Then the opportunity we were able to work with people across racial lines in a period when we were all in racial group you know categories. That was wonderful because I have never had to like because it was my growing period. And because I interacted with African activists as well, Mpo Scott, Jabu Sithole, a whole range of people there was never a problem about interacting with African people. I mean even today you find that even if a person is really progressive you still carry that apartheid thing because you never had the opportunity of interacting freely. I suppose our kids will be different my son certainly has no consciousness of colour. But we were fortunate that those barriers in a way were broken for us because of the political work.

DS: You said earlier on racism still exists here in South Africa would you like to tell us about that maybe you have some incident except that song by - [interruption]

MG: No that's just I think a manifestation of something that is there. I think some of the issues that he raises are valid. And leave their motive response you can address the issues they are valid. And we need to look at that. But you know legislation against racism doesn't take it away. So you will find like even in our school you say our schools are mixed. But it's something that has to grow and I'm not apportioning blame because I don't think you can do that except to say apartheid, which we all do. But you find children if they haven't if they are not living next to each other for example right across

racial lines you can't then expect them suddenly to fall into each other's arms on the school playground. They are obviously are going to gravitate with whoever is their neighbour and their friend. So you will find racial groups, you can make a big thing of it and try and force integration but it doesn't work like that. Or you can I mean slowly you know educate, and you have got to do things like intercultural activity all of that. There is also intolerance, the older people, we tend to say the older people, but also amongst the young people because they don't know each other enough. Our Group Areas haven't really gone away. We still have townships Indian, African, Coloured townships. It's the more affluent that have the opportunity to be you know non-racial area because they can move into areas afford to buy in so-called mixed areas. But the poor people they still live in their townships in their racial group areas. So they I mean, obviously a lot of it is ignorance of each other.

DS: Okay I think we have got to come to the end of our discussion, interview, can we pause?

TAPE SWITCHED OFF ON RESUMPTION

DS: Just a few things before we end our interview. Who are your role models in the struggle against apartheid?

MG: Well you know the kind of hero-worship was for people like Oliver Tambo, Joe Slovo, Chris Hani definitely. I was fortunate to meet him I was part of the Communist Party interim committee when it wasn't yet unbanned and we did meet him a wonderful person. So those were people that I

admired. And within the country I mean, head and shoulders above everyone, is I mean we call him the old man Billy Nair. I mean we can only aspire to live the way he lived. He's you know just about - I don't know just an inspiration to everybody else. But Pravin Gordhan, who we had lots of run-ins with, and who you know we've developed a very, very good relationship through, you know working our way through the struggle.

DS: Okay what do you consider to be the defining moment in your life?

MG: This is a hard one. No I actually - .

DS: Okay looking back is there anything you would have done differently?

MG: I think lots. I can't believe that I lived through 1976, you know in my matric year. This whole thing I mean I saw this thing on TV but I can't believe that it was you know such a passive year. I really that is the one thing in my life I mean I had this whole range of reasons as to why. But still you know and that's why I say history must be taught. Because then at least we will be you'll understand, you will be more wised-up to what's going on.

DS: Exactly just pause.

TAPE SWITCHED OFF

ON RESUMPTION

DS: We are back. You were still telling me that you missed the 1976, you know it just passed on you without any realising how the impact the importance of it. But you may have missed it from all accounts you were a most dedicated activist and have the rare distinction of having worked in the NIC, UDF, Chatsworth Civics, COSATU and ANC. I think

you've done a lot, you've managed, if I would put it the other way round, you have managed to close that gap though you have missed I know how you feel, I know how you feel basically. I think we have come to the end of our interview. Would you like to you know just words of encouragement from you, especially as a teacher I mean lately you know you see school children especially in location they roam around when you check it you watch they are supposed to be in school. What is happening?

MG: Well I think you know we perhaps were in the right place at the right time. We were young, and we were able to get involved and make a contribution. That's one of my disappointments, we fought for this democracy but if you look at our youth they've very much taken over by your American, Western kind of culture. And I don't have a problem with aspects of that culture but I think what dominates our young people are the more negative aspects.

It reflects itself in the relation to you know between genders their clothes, their aspirations, value systems. Very materialistic, very label you know we are very much a label society. And I do think that our young people should think that a lot of people you know gave up their lives and sacrificed to make it possible for young people to enjoy what they are enjoying now. Lots of things that they take for granted the fact that they have access to study. They can travel the world you don't have to be afraid ashamed of your South African passport. You can take a year off and go and be an au pair if you want to.

But those are not things that just came by people sacrificed for them. And one of the things that I think our young people should look at is putting something back into our country. Whether it's by you know doing their hardest to study and skill themselves so that they can put their skills at the disposal of the country or whether its getting active within organisations. You look around at most organisations now you don't find young people in them.

And I do think that that's a problem because you know the older people also have older ideas you need younger ideas you need new blood and you need that kind of commitment. It sounds boring but you can't just have the mentality, which says we are entitled to things. We're supposed to get the education; we're supposed to get the job; we're supposed to go overseas; neither should you have that mentality which says as soon as I qualify I'm going to go and work in the US or Canada or Australia or New Zealand.

So in some sense I would really like to see our young people displaying a sense of social responsibility and commitment to building this country. Not aspiring to go to other places. There's nothing wrong with being ambitious but I think you know in terms of priorities we should also look at giving back here.

DS: Okay I think we have come to the end of our interview thank you Maggie Govender for your time we appreciate it and goodbye.

MG: Thanks.

INTERVIEW ENDS

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