

Q Ok, shall we start then with your background, can you tell me where you were born and when? A bit of that.

A Ja, well I was born in Joberg in 1935....

Right I was born in Joberg in 1935 but I don't have any memories of those very early years in Joberg. My as it were consciousness came in Cap~~te~~ Town, must have been aged about two or three.

My mother moved down there with myself and my younger brother. And we lived in what was then a slightly bohemian part of C.T., Clifton. With bungalows, wooden bungalows built on the hillside over looking the beaches. It was exceptionally beautiful part of the city in which it was possible to live very cheaply because my mother was a secretary. She did not have much money.

My father was a trade unionist - General Secretary of the Garment Workes Union. At that stage it was still a fairly poor union. He wasn't earning all that much. So we lived very modestly.

We lived in an atmosphere highly politicised. The sort of daily routine of life was very affected by political activities. It might be that there was a strike of...I remember once there was a shop workers strike, the National and Distributive Workers and people would be rushing in and out of the house with posters and going on duty and cooking soup and so on.

Then there might be meetings...meetings, more meetings, meetings, going to meetings, just come back from a meeting, got to get ready for a meeting. Have you got something for the meeting. Can you lend us something for the meeting. So, I don't know how other kids grow up but we grew up in a world in which meetings had a very strong presence.

And then there would be, this was during the Second World War now, intense discussion about the war and how the war was going and people had maps up - everybody had a map - showing the front in Northern Africa, the front in the..the Eastern front, with lots of little pins and arrows and so on. Flags put in there.

And C.T. being a port, an important port, for people travelling from the West to the East and vice versa, I also remember lots and lots of soldiers, sailors, airmen from all over the world. And at that stage there was a thing called the Peoples Club which was a sort of left wing, non racial club in C.T. in which progressive anti racist, socialist service people from the U.S., from Britain, particularly those two

A countries passing through on the way to India, on the way to the Far East or vica versa, would go. And many of them would come to Clifton during the war, for recreation. They would, sorry on Sundays, they would come there too and they would pack into this tiny little bungalow with...usually it wasn't even a whole bungalow that my mother had-maybe two rooms in a bungalow.

And so the weekends would be filled with people like that, all talking politics. And that was my first contact I might mention with Americans. These were progressive Americans, anti fascist, anti racist and they would be speaking about union activities. I remember Paul Ropeson was a great figure and a hero at that stage. That certainly gave me some of my internationalism.

Another aspect came from German refugees, refugees from Hitler. There were quite a few in C.T. People who had lost families in the concentration camps. A very poignant community. People, cultivated people, associating with the left, with the progressive movement in SA and that was also part of the world in which I grew up in.

But the most important centre of ideas, of prestige came from the movement inside SA itself. My mother was a secretary most of her life and at that stage she was secretary for Moses Kotane. It was a very great event when Moses came to visit our place.

It was a great event for different reasons. One was that she had immense pride that comrade Moses was coming to have a meal at her house and we would tidy up a little bit and so on and he was always very warm in a..if you like a special African way, towards his typist's two little kids. That was myself and my brother.

I am sure this was very important for us in terms of..you know it is not what your parents say that matters so much in terms of attitudes. It's how they conduct themselves, that is what kids pick up.

And when Moses was coming, and there was another trade union leader HJ Naidoo, when he was coming around it was always a sense of something very special. That sort of came through to us. But it was also special because this was a white suburb. Sort of more bohemian than most at that stage. Since then it has become very *chic*.

You knew that all the neighbours would be staring. That there would be social pressure, that they would also be noticing the whole thing but...and then seeing my mother behaving with a sense of excitement and happiness rather than fear. It was also very important in instilling that - those little nearly bits of courage and willingness to go against the grain of the

A community in which you are living.

Q May I ask you just to stop there at the kind of early consciousness years. How did you perceive it? I mean was Moses Kotane different than other black people? Were your parents different than other white people? Did you remember ever, aside from the kind of social ostracism or raised eyebrows or whatever, I am just interested in that idea that you would be receiving some working ... you know when you said the meetings, when you first talked about that, was that always black and white? I mean...

A Ja, I mean, yes the world of meetings and politics was a non racial world and that was where peoples energies were/went. That was what was important. There was living, there was fun, there was the beach, there was cinema...

I remember at that stage...you know it is very distant memory, but certain things were regarded as modern. There were certain kinds of canned goods, I don't know what it would be in today's terms, but that would be something absolutely ordinary, but somebody had learnt how to put some exotic food in a can. Well, that was regarded as modern.

There was a touch of vegetarianism about as well. That was also somehow a bit progressive. Even a bit of nude bathing, at a certain stage, you know. It was a part of the modern free kind of life that the left people took up.

But these were the fringe things. The central things were the meetings, with the activities, the organising, the reports, the things that had to be typed, typing late into the night or suddenly being called out to go somewhere and dropping everything for the meeting.

And the meetings were ones connections, and individual with the cause, with the struggle.

Not too long ago I was going through some old cards and photos and I saw a little card that my father sent me on my 6th birthday. 'Darling Albie, Happy birthday on turning six, May you grow up to be a soldier in the fight for liberation'. And that was a time when war was in the air. This was the war against Hitler. And every young kid, certainly every young boy wanted to be a soldier but the difference was it wasn't that may you grow up and be a soldier and kill lots of people. It was may you be a soldier in the fight for liberation.

The idea of liberation was in a little birthday card. So again these things were natural. I don't know how I took it at the time. I can't claim to remember receiving that card.

A I remember that my father was a rather distant figure.

Q Was he not living with you...

A He was...ja, he was living in Joberg, my parents were sepe-
rated so we were a thousand miles apart but not only that. He
was totally caught up in his trade union work and his politi-
cal work and conferences. A very strong, powerful person. A
mixture of extremely sensitive, introvert and a very vigorous
passionate projector of himself and his personality.

I still remember when my brother and I went up to Joberg to
visit him and we would say well, our father ~~and~~this and our
father that and somebody said our father which art in heaven.
We don't say our father, we say our daddy. Laughs. So in that
sense he wasn't daddy. He was a remote person whom I would
be more likely to read about in the newspapers than actually
have direct contact with.

But I think what came through was his passion. His feeling,
the kind of single mindedness - a sense of what is importnat
~~ad~~ not important. And even though I only got to know him as
a son, many, many years later living with him in England, I
think that that tradition of priorities in life, of involving
yourself in a popular struggle, of these things being impor-
tant, of the world being important, of all humanity being im-
portant, of history being important, culture being important,
in that sense, I think that came through very, very early on.

Q Can you talk a little bit about your parents' era? When they
were born? I was trying to find out but couldn't get it exact-
ly.

A Ja.

Q And just their background - where they came from. And how that
the non racialism was taken up....

A Well, my father was born in Lithuania. He never knew exactly
when he was born. There was no record kept so he had like a
declared birthday because everybody had to have a birthday for
the purposes of certificates.

And he came as a very poor immigrant to SA. When he was I think
six years old.

Q And when was that? About?

A ah, maybe he was ten, he was born at the turn of the century.

A Round about 1900, 1901 I think. And he grew up in a world of pogroms, of persecution, of extreme poverty. His father was an unsuccessful shoe maker.

His mother was, I believe, I didn't know her, was exceptionally hard working. She was the one who held the family together. And one by one, just as many African families migrate to the towns and maybe the father goes first and then the elder son and so on, so his family migrated and he was like more or less in the middle. First his father and then older brother and older sister, and then I think he went.

And so his schooling was in SA but he was in and out of school - he was working at a very, very early age and then would go back to school again.

A And why the trek to SA?

Q Well, it was the immigration of an impoverished and persecuted family and at that stage Jews were migrating to Argentina, U.S.S.A., to anywhere where there seemed to be job opportunities.

So he grew up in Joberg and this was a period of intense class struggle. White artisans, white mine workers, railway workers involved in very bitter strike action against the Chamber of Mines, against the employers.

The capitalists were very overt in those days; it was not long after the death of Cecil John Rhodes who was the person who put the word of imperialism on the map and this was in SA that all this was done.

Many of these workers brought with them traditions of struggle-trade union activity, particularly from Britain. Particularly the mine workers and socialist ideas and so that was the world he grew up in. White working class area.

But at the same time he worked in what was called the native eating house, just to earn some money. It would be a little shop selling some food to African mineworkers and so on and again at that early age it showed him that the most oppressed people, the bulk of the working class in SA was black. This was a new section of the S African proletariat. But he came into contact with it in that way.

Then 1922 was the great Rand miners strike which was really an insurrection. It was the first time that tanks and airplanes and artillery were used against strikers any where in the world. 100s of the strikers lost their lives in the red commandos and..

A Well, I heard about that from my father. To him this was a very important event and to him it was a glorious event. He had absolutely no doubts about it.

In recent years the...there's been a complete revision of attitudes towards the strike. The strike had progressive characteristics, there is no doubt about it. It was...the miners died literally in their thousands from lung disease. They were paid very very low wages, their lives were extremely hard and the mine owners lived in extreme enormous luxury. They flaunted their luxury, they were a new rich crowd, living in splendour and real conspicuous consumption.

And in this sense it was an heroic uprising. It was influenced to some extent by revolutionary uprisings in the West at that stage. First in Russia, then in Germany. That was one of the trends.

So it was a very strong pro workers uprising. On the other hand it had a strong racist character as well. The immediate, one of the causes of the, that precipitated the Rand Revolt was the fact that the Chamber of Mines wanted to bring unskilled black workers into what had formerly been higher paid white skilled workers jobs. This was seen as a form of diluting the crafts and this was something that workers in Britain had fought over to establish skilled occupation and to maintain a certain level of payment for that occupation. The employers in Britain always trying to use unskilled..or to use un, so called unskilled labourers to do skilled work and to pay them unskilled wages/rates.

In SA this was given a racial character and so a part of the uprising was aimed at the black workers. But to his death my father would never accept that there was a negative quality to the white workers revolt. He would never accept it. And it was something we would just have to disagree on.

He heard the shots, he saw the commandos, he saw the troops being sent in to kill the workers. There was Taffy Long, a mineworker from Wales who went to the gallows swinging the Red Flag. There were other miners then in the Communist Party who fought to the death. One committed suicide rather than be taken alive.

So that was part of his culture, culture of struggle, culture of resistance, of dedication. And then he went on to organise later in his life, the Garment Workers Union. I think he had been involved with other unions in the 20s but by the late 20s it was the Garment Workers Union.

These were mainly women workers; at that stage were Afrikaner young Afrikaner women. Also trekking in from impoverished families ruined by the Boer War, ruined by the depression,

A ruined by drought, trekking into the towns and being grossly exploited by the owners of the clothing factories. Being paid ~~apittance~~ and he called them afterwards rebels daughters. They were daughters of the Boer rebels and they had a certain tradition of resistance that came from the anti imperialist British imperialism. Cultural background. But they were extremely..they tended to be extremely racist and hostile to ideas of socialism. That was projected as foreign ideology. And not used to the ideas of collective working, identifying not as Afrikaners but as workers.

Nevertheless in the course of the struggle, strikes, activities and so on, mainly before I was born, the union became very powerful. There was quite extensive secondary industry in SA at that stage and especially on the Rand. Lots of clothing factories were set up.

Many of the leaders of the Garment Workers Union managed in the course of struggle to enlarge, open their consciousness and overcome their racism and the racism in their background. But not all by any means.

At a later stage black workers started coming into the industry. Mainly women workers in large numbers and by the time I used to go up to the Garment Workers Union office - well my dad was a big shot there and his children visiting from C.T. we were always given, made a fuss of. By then the union was well established, it was in progress building Joberg and it must have been quite a big office because I remember we used to go running and sliding up and down the hall there; my brother and I and being the kids of, as it were, the boss I think we were given a certain privilege to go sliding on the floors.

Certainly bigger than the offices my mother used to go to that were always tiny.

Q She was secretary for Moses Kotane in his capacity as...

A I assume it would have been...he was then General Secretary of the Communist Party of SA and ah, I don't have any clear memories but all I remember is all offices I knew would be in old buildings with, if they had lifts, they would be old lifts - you would be walking up the stairs - for cheap rents and so on. They were never big bureaucratic type offices, well appointed.

Q And your mother's background - when did she come?

A My mother was born in Pretoria. Her parents had just immigrated also from Lithuania. Her father was a tailor.

Q Do you know when she was born?

A About 1904. She is 81 now.

Q Where is she?

A She is in C.T. A very, very, alert, active, full of memories, of literally of decades of struggle. In the 20s she was already involved.

Q What was the motivating factor for her do you think?

A I don't know. I have never asked her how she first got involved. I never asked her because it was such a natural thing. People always ask me how did you get involved - well, I didn't get involved, I was there. To me it is normal because the ideas are so right that one doesn't have to explain why so I don't think I ever bothered to ask her.

Q But weren't you confronted in schools by kids who said what is the story. Why are your parents...the Communist bogey?

A No. No. First of all my father was in Joburg. He was the one in the public eye. At that stage in fact he had been expelled from the Communist Party. He was in the Labour Party. But he was known as a trade unionist, really active, the word stormy was always used in relation to Solly Sachs. So that was like far away. It wasn't somebody in the same city where I was at school.

During the Second World War it was a period of a certain opening in SA in general terms; strong anti fascist feeling, people openly espoused also socialist ideas. The Soviet Union was called our great Soviet ally. We used to see lots of films about the war and many from the Soviet Union and again that is amongst my earliest memories; of film shows in which the camera always broke down. And someone would say 'Dora, dora, the excitor lamp, the excitor lamp' and everyone would laugh because she was always talking about the excitor lamp and the projector breaking down.

Q Your mother's name was Dora?

A No, it wasn't my mother. It was another..Dora Alexandra, another comrade.

Q And your mother's name?

A Ray.

A No, she is now Ray Edwards. She in fact married one of the ...she was divorced from my father, one of these left... he was actually in the British Merchant Marine, passing through, whom she had met through the Peoples' Club. Norman Edwards.

He came from a family of country gardeners. I mean very poor, on a state, kind of a feudal state and the only way that he loved music and could learn music was to join the navy. So he played the piano and the French horn. He eventually stayed in C.T. in the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra.

That was another world that I grew up in, a world of music and so on. But he was also of the left.

Q And was their background ethnically Jewish; was that much of a factor?

A No, no. My parents had a battle with their parents on this question of what mattered. And they were Jewish in a kind of cultural sense. There are certain characteristics of style and humour, sometimes little things that one eats and so on that one can say it is part of a Jewish tradition. But they rejected, at that stage Zionism wasn't all that strong, but they were involved in the struggle for liberation of everybody, not just for the Jews.

That was a very strong kind of thing. The school I went to had a very high percentage of Jews. This was in C.T. And I was under quite a lot of pressure to identify and associate with them as a Jew and the only way I did was being anti-anti-Semitic. That was something that came through very early on.

If anybody ever said anything anti-Jewish or anti-Jew my parents would react very, very strongly and that is something that I have retained. So it is not a denial of being a Jew or being Jewish but it is an affirmation that comes through. It is part of a cultural background, part of our identity of an individual but it doesn't define your political activity.

Your political activities are defined by being a person, by being a South African, by being involved in a liberation struggle where you are and identifying ^{with} all oppressed peoples everywhere.

At one stage while you, while one the subject, I used to say and argue that, especially at university that Jews had a special responsibility to combat racism. To show sensitivity towards racial oppression. I don't any more and I don't believe that.

I don't believe that Jews have any more or any less responsibility than anybody else to the people. Like anybody else, everybody has a responsibility. Nobody has a special responsibility to be anti racist. It doesn't matter that their

A fathers and forefathers suffered bitterly.

I know when I went to Czechoslovakia,) years afterwards, as a grown up (and in Prague saw the two synagogues that had survived the holocaust the guide told me that these synagogues had been preserved by the Nazis to be a museum, & museums for an extinct race,)

I wept, it just came pouring out because I know that a lot of my family had been annihilated and this was something that had reached me.

But the result of that was not to make me want to identify with Israel or the Jewish cause, it was all a part and parcel of the struggle against oppression everywhere. It wasn't just Jews, millions of Jews who had died in the holocaust. It was millions of Slavs, half a million, I mean millions of Poles and Russians and half a million gypsies.

So there was no need to distinguish gradations of horror. It was a ghastly episode and Fascism and Nazism had to be ~~conquered~~ combatted wherever it was.)

So in that sense that world I grew up in wasn't a world of identification with Jewry; it was a world of identification with oppressions, and struggle against oppression.

Q And how would you explain the disproportionate representation of Jews in progressive struggles in SA? I mean it is pretty outstanding.

A I think though that there are sociological and cultural reasons for that. The sociological would be that they came in from poor families, imigrants. That the way the South African economic structure was established, Jews could enter the professions, the liberal professions in particular, through education.

But not really get into high, commanding heights of capital industry and to that extent will always....

End of side.

Side Two.

Q ..with that factor you were talking about yesterday, not quite right that you...

A Ja..

A Even though they could be very successful in professional terms, they were excluded largely from government, they were excluded from the multi national part of industry and also there was a lot of very strong anti semitism which was promoted by the internal racists.

I mean there was big business anti Semitism on the one hand and then there was Hitlerite anti Semitism on the other.

My mother tells me of seeing a big newspaper poster, one day the headlines saying 'Trade unionist shot dead' and she assumed it was my father. And in fact it was an Afrikaner Nazi who had shot dead Charlie Harris who was the Secretary of the Mineworkers Union.

So that was another reason at that stage. Now I think that this idea is rather exaggerated. When Stephanie Kemp, my former wife, she went to prison in Barbeton Prison for white women prisoners and she was from an Afrikaner background and the Security Police said oh well it is good to have one prisoner here who is not a Jew. You are going to be with all the Jews.

In fact the other five prisoners, only one was a Jew. And four weren't. But they insisted that any white that gets involved must be a Jew, must be a Jewess and the only one who was a Jew was Esther Barsel. The others were, some of them from very respectable, upper class, what in America would be called 'wasp' type families. They just weren't Jews but that was the idea, that it would be Jews heavily involved.

So I think that idea is a little bit exaggerated.

Q And looking at your father some more, the whole, his experience in the trade unions and the Communist Party, can you say something about that. You were talking about the style of leadership, going through the expulsion period. That's kind of a difficult period to handle for my purposes, in terms of the general, I mean what does one want to impart about that? Not a lot of stuff about people fighting...

A Now what was lucky for me was the trade union movement, the CP in the 20s and 30s, this was a period of, and I know this from reading and indirectly from what I heard, of very intense fierce political battles and extensive fractionalism and internal struggles. Highly personalised groups being formed and so on.

In fact Kotane moved down to C.T. to get away from that. And C.T. was seen as a city that was less involved in these fierce factional activities.

A It is a quieter city in every way. Joburg is the great capitalist city of SA, a city that did not exist 100 years ago. I think it is exactly 100 years, it must be about to celebrate its centenary.

There were just farms there and gold was discovered and the city with its glittering towers now, and its mine dumps and huge locations. It was all built on gold, literally on gold.

The adventurers, crooks and cut throats from all over the world came there and to get to the top you had to really be the greatest adventurer and crook of the lot.

Workers came from all over the world and from all over SA came there and so this was ^{the} scene for violent intellectual activities, as well as violent class struggle and national struggles.

So that was the world in which my dad moved and he had, he went in for diatribes; he used powerful bitter language against people. It was something I found astounding distasteful myself.

Well, that was a certain current at one stage; to be revolutionary you had to denounce, you had to expel, you had to establish a kind of political purity by means of denunciation and exclusion of the others who were not so pure.

Kotane was very much against that. He scandalised his comrades once by saying 'I am first a native then a communist'. And this wasn't just a question..he..of politics. It was a question of style as well.

He attacked all those who knew about the German question which was the big thing in the 30s. And knew nothing about there, the conditions of the people and the masses and the working people inside SA. So his great line all the time was that socialism, to have meaning in SA has to be related to the struggles, the sufferings, the misery, the dreams and the hopes of the masses of the people.

It couldn't just be an abstract idea implanted in SA. And this also meant bringing something, if you like of the African style into political discourse. The attempts to reach consensus. The style in which you would talk and discuss and try and arrive at a conclusion based on certain common values.

This rather than this extreme expelling and forming pure little groups on the basis of some formalised intellect-

A intellectual programme.

He was very much uncle Moses. He could be, I would say his firmness, and he could be very firm and sometimes very harsh, came more from his own fathers Christian peasant background than it came from the socialist sort of background.

On moral questions he could be very, very firm. Very demanding, very exacting.

Q It is interesting as a point - there weren't many young S African whites who would have seen too figures like that and admired something in the black man just because of an ideological point of view.

A Look, I am reflecting now on an experience but the experience I kind of remember, it is inside me. The experience of the attitudes, the feeling one got about somebody and the feeling about Moses was of this person who was..he was very proud to call himself a Bolshevik.

But to him a Bolshevik wasn't somebody who went round expelling everybody and being very pure on programmatic and dogmatic questions. The Bolshevik was in the purity of your behaviour. Your commitment to the struggle.

And the style I remember about Moses, the style was very much an African style and that is something, when later on I became active myself was the dominant style around me. Was the style of people sitting around/down and talking, talking talking to try and arrive at a consensus.

So that was one cultural trend ; it was very much the Luthuli style and it is no accident that Kotane and Lutuli got on so well. Because they would talk and would listen and had a lot of respect for each other. At that stage as experienced African people who had been in the struggle in their different ways, one in a church missionary background, the other in a trade union workers background, for many, many years.

And feeling the importance of getting together and pooling their experiences and working together in a single kind of a stream.

Q I don't want to get too far from the non racialism kind of focus. Can you dissolve this, feed into the idea that we are talking about, of non racialism. How did that relate in terms of building from these styles of operating and leadership?

A Well, I would say the biggest theme in terms of non racialism for me over the decades has been the interaction between the culture of what you might call world anti oppression, world liberation experience, and the culture of African resistance and African affirmation and African anti oppression.

Non racialism is not just a bland thing. It is not just an absence of racism and that..that's empty. And it ends up becoming, modelling itself on maybe a kind of very, rather awful, for me, English middle class, well behaved gentleman, proto type or well behaved lady. Becomes projected.

At a certain stage I think the liberal party in the 50s in SA had that idea. The non racist was somebody like that. You know, you absence of racism reflected itself in assuming a cultural style that was really an imposed cultural style that related to a certain class, a certain time, a certain country.

In fact the reality of developing a non racist or anti racist culture in SA is much richer than that. It is much more active, more dynamic, it includes language, song, it includes dance, movement, it includes laughter, includes a way of telling a story, a way of making a political point.

And whereas I find for eg. in the recent period the young African, post Soweto, post BC generation, moving into revolutionary theory, revolutionary ideas and getting an enormous charge out of being able to handle dialectics, and being able to handle historical thoughts and ideas and maybe even able to quote from this great thinker and that great thinker; I am moving in a whole different direction.

I won't say those things bore me, but what interests me, what grabs me much more, what stirs me much more, and living in a country that one might say they have never called themselves that, but a black African country, is absorbing the cultural style of Africa. Seeing even in the ANC a way of working that maybe takes a little longer but involves people much more.

Has a richness, a strength; it is popular in that sense. Popular in the sense of people oriented, people participatory. And it doesn't matter that I don't speak, it matters but is not fundamental that I don't speak any of the African languages of my country. It is a great counter cultural limitation on my part but I can absorb through the songs, the movement, through the ways of doing things, through the Lutuli Tambo, Kotani, style. I feel very enriched.

I am gaining, I am not coming into a movement bringing left wing political ideas which are then imposing on a people. The people are grabbing those ideas, they are not getting them from me. They are grabbing it...they, they are devouring it. They are looking for an explanation of their country in terms of the world, not just in terms of their country.

A They want to get out^{of} this pure white black, black white thing. They want to shatter the limits that apartheid imposes not simply on what you can do, but on what you can think. That makes your world a world complete in itself and cuts you off from the rest of the world. They want to be part of struggling humanity.

It is wonderful to sense this.

Q And is this something that you have started to reflect on now or do you think it is something that is kind of imbued, that you have always had that you are only verbalising at a later stage? in your life?

A To some extent I am verbalising, I am reflecting. It was always there but it is much stronger now. It is much richer now.

With the immense growth of the peoples movement in SA and the great confidence that has come from this these themes are much stronger. At while the black youth are now revealing in the possibilities of access to the great liberating ideas of the whole world and experiences of other countries and the anti oppression struggles in all other countries, I am revelling in the possibility of getting, becoming more African if you like.

Even though I grew up in Africa, through the movement, through the struggle, through the friendships but also through kind of cultural activities in their different ways, the main culture of liberation without doubt is the culture of struggle. And that is something I always had. That I was born into.

Who are your heroes? I think that is very important. The Americans are very keen on role models. I don't like the idea somehow. There is something rather awful that you are spending your life modelling yourself on somebody else, you should be yourself, you develop the way you want to, with lots of influences, but you are not trying to be like..it is a real model to me always gives the idea of a dummy in a window and I want to be like that, look like that, smile like that.

You know it is something often created by advertising that is false.

But our heroes were people like Hagus; my name Albie, is a softening of Albert and I was named after Albert Nzula, an African leader who died two years before I was born.

Q Did your parents know....

A And my parents knew whom they worked with, whom they admired very much and so for them it was very natural to name their child after somebody like that, rather than after the late grand father or...and so on.

I mean to me it is a bit ironical that Albert Nzula was probably named by his parents after Queen Victoria's husband. So indirectly I am named after the Prince Consort at the height of British imperialism,

Johannes Nkozi who was a leader, a workers leader in Natal lead an anti pass campaign for burning, destroying the passes and he was stabbed to death after/ at a meeting by police, in Durban in the centre.

There was another great hero. So these were my heroes as well as the more rubbishy heroes of the RAF; rubbishy in the sense that they were concoctions. RAF pilots who shot down 20 Messa Smits and Rokfis Bragan who was in a comic who was not only a great RAF pilot and shot down Messa Smits and Drunkars and so on but he was a boxer. One day he disguised himself as a German and knocked out the German heavy weight champion in Nazi Germany before smuggling himself back to Britain and killing more Nazis.

So ones head was filled with a whole washing machine mix of heroes and maybe a few heroines as well. I remember one book that I read there was an English author, Jeffrey Trees, 'Bows against the Barons' - I absolutely adored it. This was the feudal serfs fighting against the barons and so that was something that was easy for me to identify with.

Part of the world culture of resistance, peoples struggles.

So on this question then of leadership I think a major achievement of the ANC leadership, the source of its great strength in recent years has been to combine these two cultural trends.

It is very African in style and by that I don't mean that people carry fly whisks and go in for the pseudo Africanism that is done for the photographs. It is not that at all.

English is used as the means of communication. So it is not that. It's the talking things through. It's the patient way of involving everybody. It is something that we notice you know when it is there. It's an immense respect for every participant, not being rude, not being insulting.

A I don't say it always happens but this is the dominant theme. And it is very people oriented. It is looking at the people, and knowing the people has an immense variety of experiences and background and some are Christians, and some are anti Christians, and some are non christians and some are Moslems, and some have grown up in the ghettos in the cities and others are rural peasants. You know the variety is enormous and all that is reflected in the, when you speak about patience, patience means that you are allowing all these streams to come in, to articulate, to be present.

So that is the dominant thing in the ANC. But the other is the capacity to analyse. The incisiveness, the thrust that comes from world progressive ideas. The illan that comes from sensing that you are part of a world wide movement for emancipation. That is very important.

Actually there is a third stream as well and that's something that came from the school and the church. Lutuli very strong there. It is strong in Tambo, it is strong in Mandela. You use language carefully. Language is important. It is not just mish mash slogans.

You sometimes can see the school master behind Mandela. His speeches are perfect. His use of language is absolutely impeccable. It is so correct and fresh. I am sure that is something that came from the St Peters School where so many of a certain generation of African leaders went.

That is an English cultural tradition that also feeds into the ANC a very positive one. So all these cultural styles and traditions come in. It is much more than non racism in that bland neutral sense. Non racism isn't neutral. Non racism is a political concept, it is not a cultural concept.

It is a political concept in the sense that you don't in terms of political rights, in terms of access to and use of power, race doesn't enter into it. It is not a racial question. You don't categorise or classify or base power on the question of race.

But non racism doesn't mean that it is a society of non something. It means you are eliminating all the apartheid barriers in terms of access to government, in terms of freedom to move and feel that this is your country. But it doesn't describe the quality and personality of the country and of the people. That is not a non something, that is a something and that is a South African personality that that is being constructed. That is being built up.

A I was already being, that I was born into in a certain way. But it became much more established and in a later generation. Something that's active. A set of relationships, activities, styles, ways of doing things, a confidence that emerges.

Q Now all this analysis of non racialism, of the concept, for your father for that era of people was it an issue? I mean did he ever talk about the convergence of class and race...

A It was a very big issue and he was right in the middle of lots of battles on this. At that stage the main left position in the trade union movement was for complete, completely integrated unions.

My father established separate branches for white workers and for black workers and this was heavily criticised. His argument then was that he didn't say that this was simply catering to the racism of the white workers. That was the argument against him.

He said until the black workers are well organised and powerful in their own unions they will never be able to destroy the racism in the minds of the white workers.

And it is interesting that this argument that was so heavily criticised by the left at that stage, 30 or so years later re emerged. And it is still a battle that is going on. It is an unresolved kind of question but now it is accepted that the black working class has to be powerfully organised as a black working class in order to create the basis for a non racial trade union movement.

You know I think the issue is to some extent still an ongoing one. What was important was the black union or the black branch that the Garment Workers created, became an extremely significant training ground for militants in the workers struggle/peoples struggle.

Lillian Ngoyi for eg. came through there. A whole generation of ANC activists came through the Garment Workers Union. And in a way it was because it was a separate branch. That they had their own structures, they gave their own leadership, they gained their own experience in conducting meetings, in organising an agenda, in giving responsibilities, and checking up on them and discipline and report backing and so on, in reporting back.

And it was a very militant union. It wasn't a tame union or a stooge union. It was very militant. Involved in strikes, confrontations with the police and in that sense my father was a greatly admired figure because he was a tremendous fighter that...I mean he fought the government,

A he fought the employers, he fought his two wives and he fought his children. Fighting was natural to him.

But what the people picked up was his fighting power, you know his fighting the enemy. He wasn't scared and that introduced a tone of militancy that was very acceptable in the general peoples struggle. He wasn't, even though he wasn't directly involved with the ANC a lot of his methods of work and style and so on through the union movement got absorbed and infused into the general peoples struggle.

Q But would he have called it non racialism? When he had the seperate branches would he have said just look, this is tactical, it is for the time being?

A Yes, oh yes. I mean....in the Communist Party in his earlier years, in his general political activities was very strongly anti racist. Never had any doubts that the black workers formed the backbone of social transformation in SA.

So he would say these things were tactical. He also insisted very strongly on the importance of organising white workers, especially Afrikaner workers. Saying if you did not do that fascism would grab them and they would become instruments of oppresion or even more..in other words he didn't see it as a faite compli that the white workers were automatically reactionary and racist.

But he said the way to combat therracism is to mobilise them in struggle and then they struggle alongside black workers often and that is the way, not through lectures. And not through sloganising.

And in fact it is no accident that the Afrikaner nationalist government when it came into power in 1948 singled out my father and the trade unions, particularly the white workers, as their number one target I would say, for an absolutely bitter, relentless campaign. To win over the Afrikaner workers, both to their ranks and to prevent any form of internationalist ideas, non racialist ideas from getting in there. And unfortunatly with a lot of success.

The Garment Workers Union afterwards became a very tame union. Even the black section became dominated by Lucy Mbabelo, who became a collaborator with the regime, travelling internationally and opposing sanctions.

Ja....Solly...

End of tape.