

INTERVIEWEE	Imitiaz Cajee
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Q: Can you tell us what you understand, what happened the day your uncle died in John Vorster square in October 1971?

A: To me and the rest of the Timol family it's very clear that my uncle was detained, he was severely tortured and ultimately he was murdered. There's overwhelming evidence, which I have collected over the years, that proves without doubt that he did not commit suicide as the police had claimed and as the inquest findings had found it from Judge De Villiers I think it was. There's absolutely no doubt, he was murdered.

Q: Do you want to tell us a little bit about the background, why was your uncle picked up?

A: He was setting up an underground cell for the then banned South African Communist Party. He was detained at a police road block in the Coronation area, Friday evening 22 October 1971 with his friend Mohammed Salim Essop, brought from Coronation to John Vorster Square police station and five days later police claimed that without laying a finger on him, during a routine investigation on the 10th floor, he had managed to evade the interrogator that was sitting around the table, moved around him, moved around the table, opened the closed window and jumped to his death.

Q: What makes you think that this is not true?

A: If one listens carefully to the testimony of Mohammed Salim Essop in the new democratic South Africa as part of the investigations that I had done when I was writing my book, it's very, very, clear that if Salim Essop had to endure the amount of torture and police brutality, then there is absolutely no doubt that the police version of them not laying a finger on my beloved uncle is simply not true. If one also looks at the photographs of my uncle's body it's evident when you look at the bruises and the marks on his body that that was not caused due to the fall but due to police brutality.

Q: Is it possible that what we heard from the police is a half-truth that in fact as you suggest there was a considerable amount of abuse of your uncle in the days and hours leading up to his death and that this may have driven him to jump from the window?

A: Look, again I personally don't believe that there was any reason for him to have to have committed suicide. The history of the Security Police atrocities and their brutality is known and again if one looks at the statement which he had made, obviously under duress during police interrogation, he disclosed that he was a member of the then South African Communist Party, he was responsible for setting up an underground cell. He had made full

<p>disclosure. I think for me it's very clear that as part of the intense interrogation and physical torture and abuse that was directed towards him, they pushed their luck, they went beyond the limit and when they realized he was dead and the only way out for them was then to have possibly thrown him out of the window on the 10th floor.</p>
<p>Q: So do you think that they made a mistake by taking it too far in terms of the abuses that in fact it wasn't necessarily their intention to kill your uncle but torture had gone too far?</p>
<p>A: Yes, I think again of one listens to Mohammed Salim Essop, I think he comes to the same conclusion that their intention was not really for them to murder him. The same with Salim Essop, they pushed him to such an extent where they were then forced to rush him to hospital because the last thing which they wanted on their hands was to have the deaths of two detainees on their hands.</p>
<p>Q: Your suggestion then of a massive cover up following the death of your uncle suggests also that there is a cover up that involves the magistracy as well as the prosecutor, can you tell us what your thoughts are on that?</p>
<p>A: With the research that I had done and the investigation, which I had done with limited material that was available relating to the actual inquest, there's a clear pattern. You can clearly see that the security police with the judicial system were working hand in hand. The manner in which the magistrate had conducted the entire inquest when a prominent human rights lawyer like George Bizos makes it very, very, well know and very, very clear that there was overwhelming evidence that clearly showed that my uncle was tortured and yet this kind of evidence was not taken seriously by the magistrate.</p>
<p>Q: Do you think that more can be done or should be done to establish the truth of what happened both on that day and then in the subsequent weeks with the investigation and the inquest?</p>
<p>A: Absolutely! On the one hand one truly understands the remarkable transformation that this country has undergone but on the other hand there's thousands of families like mine that are looking for closure. I think the key word here is closure and as long as perpetrators responsible for carrying out these atrocities fail to come forward, fail to reconcile with the past, fail to make a full, honest testimony on what truly happened and are prepared to ask for forgiveness, it makes it very, very, difficult for families like ours to sit back and allow this matter to continue.</p>
<p>Q: So you are looking for some justice that involves disclosure and ownership of violation?</p>
<p>A: Absolutely! Ahmed's mother testified at the TRC in 1997. She died a few months after that without knowing the truth</p>

and her appeal at the TRC was that she wanted to know why her son was murdered and who was responsible for her beloved son's death and until today nobody has come forward in that regard.

Q: You've written a book about what happened with your uncle, perhaps you can tell us a little bit about that and that process and what you were able to uncover?

A: The death of my uncle had a profound impact on my life. I was five years old when my uncle died and I was always interested into finding out more about his life and I embarked on this mission after my grandmother had testified at the TRC back in 1997 and I thought it would only be befitting of me to pay the greatest respects and tribute to my beloved uncle by conducting research and eventually writing a book in his memory and also in the memory of all other detainees who died in police detention in apartheid South Africa.

The book showed me a number of aspects about life in apartheid South Africa. It also put me in contact with remarkable individuals. People such as Abdul Hejasad, people such as Amina Desai, people such as Mahommed Salim Essop. People who had suffered tremendously at the hands of the security police and it showed me that it's because of the commitment and tremendous sacrifices of people like this that today we can sit in a free democratic South Africa. I mean somebody like Rucaliah Salujee who had lost her husband Babla in the 60's who still today are prepared to forgive the perpetrators and ask exactly the same question, "Where are they? Don't they want to reconcile with their creator? Don't they want to leave this world on a good note and at least come forward and understand the pain and the tremendous torture which families had gone through?" and yet people like us are prepared to forgive them. These are the remarkable things that I have experienced, I have personally worked through and I think again most importantly, it's the tremendous sacrifice which ordinary South Africans have endured which have resulted in us living in a free South Africa.

Q: You launched your book at this police station; can you tell us a little bit about that day?

A: You know when I sit back and think back on that day, I still have goose bumps. Coming to this building on the 29th January 2005, with the sign at the bottom of this building saying "Timol book launch, 7th floor", my thought just goes back to 1971 and I sit and think of my uncle coming in a police car on a Friday evening, not knowing what his fate was, not knowing that 4/5 days later he was goanna meet his untimely death. That particular day for me is absolutely remarkable because my thoughts went back to him; it went

back to all the other people that suffered tremendous torture at this particular building. All the other political detainees throughout the entire country, and happily I dedicate that book not just to my beloved uncle but to all political detainees who died in this country and all the others who suffered tremendous torture at the hands of the Security Police.

At the book launch the South African Police Service sang the National Anthem, I sat back and again this reminded me that 30/35 Years previously if only my uncle had known that we would come back to this particular building, the Minister of Safety and Security would be the guest and the main speaker. Ministers, deputy ministers, former comrades, former detainees walking freely in this particular building knowing that nobody was gonna lay a finger on them, I think to me it puts partially some form of closure, a very partial form of closure to say that we have made some progress in this country.

Q: What does John Vorster Square now mean to you and your family? It's a couple of years since the launch of book, there's still been no progress in respect of opening or re-opening the investigation into your uncle's death. Are you still on that quest for justice?

A: Absolutely no doubt in my mind that I will pursue this quest for justice till the end. It's a mission that I've embarked on and I think I've made some progress in a number of years and I think because of projects like the one the SAHA and the Sunday Times have embarked on, it's going to assist people like me and families like us to keep this tragic history of ours alive.

For me every single visit coming to this particular building, is a very, very difficult and an emotional one, it has to be. On the one hand I feel proud to say that we can sit in the former John Vorster Square police station and conduct this interview. Obviously, remarkably we've made progress, but on the other hand my thoughts will always go back, not just to my beloved uncle but to thousands of anti-apartheid activists and who endured tremendous pain and torture in this particular building. So it's a question of mixed emotions.

Q: If you had a message to give to South Africans who would say, " Why? We don't need to continue beginning to the past; we need to move forward," what would your message be to them?

A: I think firstly one has got to make the point that people like myself and other families in the majority of cases are fortunate enough that we are not looking for financial compensation, we are fortunate. There are a number of

other people out there who have lost breadwinners and who have suffered tremendously and continue to suffer tremendously due to the loss of their beloved ones who were murdered during the apartheid regime. In cases like the Timol one, I think it's very clear: We forgive people responsible for my uncle's death, we are prepared to reconcile with them, we are prepared to forgive them, but most importantly, they have to come forward and they have got to ask for this forgiveness. They've got to make sure that they reconcile with their creator, reconcile with the people that they have hurt and the families that they have disrupted and again we understand that there was a war, there was a struggle going on in the country, people were responsible for believing in their particular ideologies. There were two different factions in the country and one totally understands that, but as long as the likes of Gloy and Van Niekerk and the others are not even prepared, not even prepared to come forward, not even prepared to give their version of events to the family, not even prepared to admit, to say, "Look, it's important for us to bury the past," not even prepared to come forward and say "Look, let's move forward together." As long as they continue to remain on this particular position it becomes extremely, extremely difficult for families like ours to ensure that we can close the past, to ensure that we can have total closure and move forward.

Q: Is that failure to acknowledge and own the past by elements of the previous police force have implications on how we should deal with police transformation in South Africa? Are the new police carrying around an unnecessary legacy with them?

A: I think personally it becomes very difficult for the new South African Police Service. Police in South Africa have got a history. And it becomes extremely difficult when perpetrators from the previous police service fail to come forward. Again this is a beauty of South Africa when people like the MEC for Safety and Security, the National Commissioner, the Minister of Safety and Security, who were former anti apartheid activists, who also suffered tremendous torture during police detention, are now leading the South African Police Service. But for an ordinary South African citizen like me it's challenging, it's extremely challenging to try and put the two in context knowing that the previous police service was responsible for my uncle's death, and at the same time we have a new police service who are embarked on this issue of transformation and who have got absolutely new challenges that they have to deal with, so it becomes very, very challenging.

Q: How would you like to see the history of this building being commemorated?

A: Again it's a question of having mixed feelings about it. On the one hand it's tremendous joy and celebration to say that what happened to my beloved uncle and all the others must and should never happen again. On the other hand, a constant reminder that we should not forget what people like my beloved uncle and others have been through. So we have to keep this legacy of our tragic history. We have to keep it alive, we have to keep it going. We have to remind our youth who are in schools or in university that this transformation and this democracy that we have in South Africa, did not just come across one particular morning when the former State President decided that, "I'm un-banning the banned political parties." It came because of tremendous sacrifice; it came because of tremendous dedication and commitment from ordinary South Africans. So this particular institution should constantly be reminded to every single South African of our tragic history.

Q: Let's talk a little bit more about what's necessary in terms of bringing more truth out about the past, what would you ideally like to see happening in relation to that?

A: During my research in the process of writing my book I had met a number of individuals, ordinary South Africans, former anti apartheid activists who gave me a bit more insight on how the old South Africa was, on what life was like for a political detainee and I think I have made the point quite clearly in the book. However, as the title of my book clearly states "Quest for Justice". The truth is still out there and my appeal through projects like yours is to ask ordinary South Africans if they have any additional information relating to my uncle's death that they would like to share with me and with the Timol family, whether they are former policemen who were stationed in the building at the time, that were not directly involved in the interrogation of Ahmed Timol, that know something about what could have happened during the 4/5 days of his horrible stay in this particular building. People that worked in the building, that were cleaners that were general assistants, policemen that were stationed to this particular institution a bit later. It's very clear that one hears so called jokes that were made about the death of Timol like "Indians can't fly." So my appeal out there is to previous members or workers that worked at this particular institution who have any information that will assist me and the Timol family in reaching this closure. My appeal to them is that if they can come forward, we would really appreciate that.

Q: Did you ever get any closer to the truth of why the former security police called Willem Coetzee was called Willem 'Timol' Coetzee?

A: Unfortunately not but these are the kind of questions that I would like to pursue. There must be a reason for Willem

Coetzee to be nicknamed Willem 'Timol' Coetzee, there has to be. And my appeal through projects like yours is to try and establish that because I truly do not believe that my uncle's death in this particular building could have been covered up to such an extent that there are not individuals out there who today have some form of a conscience who understand the tragic history of our country. If these individuals are out there my appeal to them is if they can come forward, and the intention again from a Timol family perspective is not prosecution, prosecution in this particular context is not what the family wants. My grandmother died without knowing what had happened to her son, her husband had died not knowing what happened to his son. Ahmed's brother was forced to go into exile to continue the struggle. During the time of his brother's death he was also taken in police detention and the Prime Minister at the time John Vorster refused to give him permission to attend his brother's funeral.

Now these are our tragic history. These are events that unfolded in our communities and the intention for us is not to deliberately bring them back, just for the sake of bringing them back, the intention is to bring them back as a constant reminder to us of our tragic past and at the same time for us to reach closure. The key aspect is closure and the closure can only come when the likes of Gloy and Van Niekerk, Rodrigues and all the other policemen that were stationed here in this institution that were responsible for interrogating my beloved uncle are prepared to come forward and simply explain the nature of events. The intention is not for us to prosecute is not to pursue as to why he was severely tortured. One truly understands, South Africa was at war; there were different ideologies at stake. My uncle was a devoted Communist. He was proud of fighting for the liberation of South Africa. The security police had a clear mandate. They were there to protect South Africa against the Communists and against the ANC.

So that is not the challenge that I am putting forward to former apartheid policemen, that is clear, it was in a particular context. The message is for us to move forward as a nation, we need closure and the appeal once again, is for former policemen to come forward and to make the necessary information available so that at least the family can have closure.

Q: Psychologically the situation of the former security policemen holding on to information, provides them with a certain amount of power and leverage over families of victims and survivors, in many respects it's almost the last bit of power that they do have and their ability to withhold that information from families has a tremendous effect as

we can see and as your family has experienced. It may be that a number of these people go to their deaths holding on to their secrets but it sounds as though the least that you and others like you would expect is that the authorities would do something to try and facilitate that process. The Truth Commission failed the Timol family as it failed many people in terms of not pursuing those cases adequately and now the only avenue left if these people do not voluntarily come forward officially is the National Prosecuting Authority. Do you have any thought that the NPA is going to re-open this and perhaps use its powers of subpoena to bring people like Rorigues and Gloy and so that you, at least as a family will be able to see that we have done as much as we can do from our side?

A: We live in hope and faith. We had to embark on the TRC process. It was necessary; it was required for us to move forward as a nation. The TRC process has come and it has gone with its successes and its failures. The mandate remains with the National Prosecution Authority to take this matter forward and the appeal once again is the likes of Gloy, Van Niekerk, Rodrigues are stepping closer to their graves. And if action is not taken quickly that information is going to be lost. And we will always remain in this slumber, in this darkness of not truly knowing what happened to Ahmed Timol. So the appeal again is to the National Prosecution Authority, not just in the Timol case, but for thousands of families to understand the tremendous pain and suffering that people are going through. And one understands that as a country and as a nation we have new challenges that in order for us to move forward the issues of the past have to be resolved.

Q: Is there a role for the former apartheid political leadership and the security leadership to be trying to encourage underlings to be able to come forward and to explain what happened?

A: Absolutely! The likes of Gloy and Van Niekerk and Rodrigues were not acting on their own. They had superiors and masters who sanctioned this method of atrocity, which they were conducting on apartheid detainees. It's practically impossible for 2 or 3 Security Branch policemen to have covered up the death of an individual. It's impossible! And again during my investigations, writing my book, it's clear. It's clear that my uncle was going through a process of tremendous torture. He probably died during this particular process and the only way out for the security branch was to throw him out of the window. Now in order for that to have happened, I'm sure the station commanders and the upper echelons of the Security Branch that were operating at that time were consulted. They had to be. Because how else were they gonna cover up the death of a detainee? It had to be. So

the onus and responsibility again, apart for the National Prosecution Authority who got this mandate, is for former Apartheid Generals, former Apartheid Government officials, security policemen, is to take responsibility because that would be their ultimate contribution to the new democratic South Africa. And I think apart from them, the religious community, the churches, I think they've also got an important role to play. The likes of Gloy and van Niekerk do go to church. They do pray to God and I think the responsibility is on the churches to remind them and to encourage them, not just their particular church but all churches to encourage these individuals to come forward and say, "Your ultimate contribution to a new South Africa is asking for forgiveness for the past," and that would help people like the Timol family and thousands of other families in the country to come to terms with the deaths of their loved ones in order for them to reach closure. I can only imagine that there is no way that the likes of Gloy and Rodrigues and Van Niekerk sleep nicely and sleep comfortably in the evenings, it cannot be possible, when they know that they have committed atrocities. And there are thousands of other security branch policemen across the country who have done that.

Again the Timol family is fortunate that at least some publicity is given around his death, fortunate that I have written a book to explore and to explain what he had gone through, but there are thousands of former detainees and ordinary South Africans throughout the entire country who even failed to come to the TRC, who failed to even receive any form of financial compensation from the TRC and these families are out there. So the onus and responsibility is on the National Prosecution Authority to pursue this matter, the religious committees should ensure that former perpetrators carry out this particular process of then coming forward and making full disclosure. The onus and responsibility is on the education department to make sure that projects like the SAHA and the Sunday Times Heritage Project get recognition and that these are promoted within the education sector in South Africa to ensure that our tragic past is never forgotten.

Q: I wonder if you see John Vorster as a symbol of both the progress that we've made as a country as well as the tremendous distance that we still have to travel in terms of bridging the gaps that exist between communities?

A: Absolutely! And again speaking as a nephew, we are faced with this constant dilemma all the time. Progress on the one hand, the lack of progress on the other hand. I think this particular building with its known history, the fact that we can sit here today in 2007 and conduct this interview, constantly, in my mind, poses this dilemma and

this challenge that we face and it's the challenge that we have to embark on, it's a challenge we have to take head on knowing the difficulties that we are faced with on the one hand, but on the other we owe it to the likes of Ahmed Timol and all the others to continue to pursue these particular challenging matters.

END OF INTERVIEW

