KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT : INTERVIEW WITH SHEILA MEINTJIES : CONDUCTED ON THE 28 FEBRUARY 1998

('M' shall indicate the Interviewee and 'L' the Interviewer.)

L: This is an interview with Sheila Meintjies, in Johannesburg, on the 28th of February, 1998.

M: ..not so much, I suppose, disagreements between members of the ANC in Natal and the rest of the ANC, the Provincial, organisation had, I suppose a different modus operandi from the rest of the country. And I wasn't very familiar with Natal, anyway. I knew very little about its history, I knew very little about Natal in general. So when I came to live in, in Pietermaritzburg, I started to - just to do some research. And I, I was also interested in the whole issue, the whole way in which, gradually, the State, had begun to undermine freehold tenure. And so I was very interested in Edendale. And Edendale's place in the whole urban development framework. So that's how I got to know Selby Msimang and I discovered that he was still alive and living in Pietermaritzburg, or rather in Edendale. And so I went out and introduced myself as a student of history. He was delighted to meet me, completely charming. By then he was quite old, his eyes were blue and he had that, that sort of grey - that flecks, and blue flecks in his eyes and he was, he was still writing for the Natal Witness, he wrote a weekly column. And used to shuffle to and fro' from Edendale to Pietermaritzburg, almost on a daily basis, and I remember at one point, asking Joe Alphers, to spend the day with him - which he did - taking photographs of Selby's day. So we've got, somewhere, a whole lot of photographs that Joe must have, of Selby.

L: Yes, that's very good.

M: The other thing that we've got is that I started to interview and talk to Selby about his life, and he had a very, rather an episodic mind. So it was, it wasn't going

1 to be a proper autobiography, it was rather he remembered
2 moments in his life ...
3 L: Yes ...
4 M: ... there would be no halves. And there was not a lot of
5 contextualisation of what he was doing, but I did a series
6 of interviews with him about his role in the ICU.
7 L: Yes.
8 M: Selby Msimang had a very, very interesting intellectual
9 history because, he, as a young man, he was educated in,
10 funnily enough, I think it was in Pretoria.
11 L: Really? I didn't know that.
12 M: At the Methodist College. I'll have to check that up, but,
13 but he did spend some time at this Methodist School, in the
14 Transvaal. He moved around a lot ...
15 L: Mmm.
16 M: ..he had connections with Edendale because his family had
17 been one of the original families, one of the 'nonhlevu',
18 as they call them.
19 L: Yes.
20 M: ..in, in Edendale. And they also held property at
21 Driefontein, near Ladysmith. So he had a lot to do with
22 those 2 communities, and anyway, all the families are very
23 interconnected.
24 L: Yes, they are.
25 M: He was also very much involved in - what, what one might
26 call 'civic struggle'. The term wasn't current in those
27 days, but, he - he ended up in 1990, 1980 - and 1990's, in
28 Bloemfontein and he got involved in the ICU there.
29 L: Yes?
30 M: And then he was a kind of mediator.
31 L: Yes.
32 M: Between different factions, and also, I think, between, you
33 know, officialdom, and the people ..
34 L: Yes ...
35 M: so to speak, because he spoke very, very good English. And

he knew Clement Kadalie...

L: He knew all the people ...

M: He knew all the people, from, from the sort of political elite - if one might use that term, in those days, and so I interviewed him about all those - in fact - an article - or, or one of the interviews is published in 'Reality'. I was very naive in those days about how one interviewed and - and then, translated, as it were, in the voice of the interviewee ...

L: Yes ...

M: And so I think that in fact I, I really interviewed in that interview much more than I ought to have, and so the authentic voice of Selby is not always there. But we have, in fact, got a lot of material on tape. He was also introduced by David Walsh (the tape sounds strange)..

L: Yes?

M: I think that Selby is one of the most interviewed political leaders in Natal, in the past actually. He was interviewed by lots of people, Richard Haines is another person who interviewed him. This material is all on tape, somewhere.

L: We will find it, we hope.

M: So we'll try and, try and find that, that material. So I talked to him a lot about his life in, in the Free State I think he married, while he was there - in the Free State. And he describes some of the difficulties that he had, during his, his life at that time - it was just before the Depression. The economic hardship was really beginning to tax this African 'petits bourgeois', I would call them.

L: Well, I think that's accurate.

M: I think it is. I think, you know, but also there were people who had quite a good education, and were intellectuals.

L: Yes.

M: There was no question that Selby was an intellectual. His ideological position, I think, shifted a lot during his

lifetime. He was a member of the ANC, and then I think during the 50's, he became somewhat disgruntled with the - what he perceived as the 'Africanism' emerging in the ANC, in the Youth League, and that was his generation. He was a little older, perhaps, than the Youth League generation, but, but I think he felt that he couldn't identify with the more radical aspects...

L: I see ..

M: ..of - of their programme. He was a man who didn't particularly like conflicts, as far as I could gather, and I think that one of the things that attracted him in the Liberal Party was its - perhaps much more constitutional approach as the ANC moved towards a mass movement, so Selby found himself unable to identify with what he called 'the masses'.

L: And also the Liberal nervousness of Communism.

M: And - yes. And he was not - he was not sympathetic towards any kind of Socialist perspective although, when I tried to probe him about the ICU (Industrial Commercial Workers' Union) - you see, I was interested in the fact that he'd been involved in organising what seemed to be a trade union movement. Of course, what transpired at the ICU itself, was much more of a civic movement, I think, than it was a trade union. And so he would have felt comfortable. He was a man who, who really believed in justice and fairness for all. And so I think it was in - in that respect that he was interested in a liberal ideology rather than in a more sort of radical perspective and that brings us, I suppose to the real question of what made him move into what is a very much more conservative organisation of Inkatha - late in his life. And I think there are a number of explanations for that. I mean that one is that as he grew older, he did grow more conservative. He had also, I think, been subject to such a lot of police attention, as all members of the Liberal Party were, that he - and given

his real dislike of any kind of conflict that it was for him an important way of keeping politically active without having to bear the attention too much of the Special Branch.

L: Wouldn't also his associate, Bishop Zulu, Bishop Alpheus Zulu, was living in Edendale, and he would have known him, and ...

M: Oh, very much so. In fact, on several occasions when I was there, Alpheus Zulu was present.

L: Yes, and Alpheus Zulu chaired the IFP conference in London in - when was it? '79? So there would have been that connection for Selby as well.

M: And I think also, you know that it was, it was being part of that Natal elite and the whole way in which that middle-class Natal African elite moved much more closely, closely to the Zulu elite and there was a kind of - I won't call it a coalition, but there- there was an attempt there at an entente cordial ...

L: Yes.

M: ..and I think that that was partly what was going on. Once the ANC was underground, there was no obvious political movement for someone like Selby Msimang to be attached to. And of course by the time IFP emerges, he is a very old man.

L: Yes.

M: So, where should we ...?

L: Now, at that time ... yes, this would have been early 1980's.

M: Well, when I met him in 1970 -5, 1976 ...

L: Yes.

M: ..he was already talking to Gatsha Buthelezi, he was already one of the sort of elders who had been drawn into the IFP.

L: Oh, certainly he was because he spoke to me about it in '77.

1 M: Yes, ...
2 L: Yes.
3 M: ...so that he was travelling often to Ulundi.
4 L: Yes.
5 M: But he, yes, his interests were much broader. I mean I
6 think that one of the things that might be interesting to
7 do is to have a look at, at what he writes in the Natal
8 Witness - in that weekly column. He did it for years and
9 years.
10 L: yes.
11 M: ...will give us a sense of the things that were of concern
12 to him. He was very, very concerned, concerned with the
13 degradation of Edendale itself.
14 L: Yes.
15 M: Of the fact that the rights of people who lived in freehold
16 areas were being whittled away. I mean at that point
17 Driefontein was under threat of removal and so he was very
18 eager to talk about the rights of people in these areas.
19 L: And Sheila, let's, let that take us into your work with
20 AFRA, because this was starting to concern you very much,
21 as a subject wasn't it.
22 M: Well, yes, I mean obviously I wrote a history of Edendale.
23 L: Yes.
24 M: My PhD was - what brought me to Pietermaritzburg and what -
25 once I became involved in the sort of Natal past ...
26 L: Yes?
27 M: ...I got more absorbed as a historian and I would, I would
28 have identified myself, by - by the 1980's in the Natal
29 historian.
30 L: Yes, quite.
31 M: I, I then did a - instead of looking at the current urban
32 problems in Natal I started to go back in time to explore,
33 really, the origins of some of these areas and, and how
34 they came into the hands of - of a Black elite and it was -
35 it was really the aspect of class formation amongst the

1 Edendale people and the diaspora if you like ...
2 L: Yes.
3 M: ..of this elite that really interested me ..
4 L: Of course.
5 M: ..came to absorb my whole interest and in that sense
6 Selby's ancestors became my focus of attention almost
7 rather than Selby himself and so - and the motivation for
8 doing that was precisely the threat under which places like
9 Edendale and Driefontein and other places came by the
10 State. I felt that my historical work had a present
11 usefulness because I would then be able to assist
12 organisations like AFRA ...
13 L: Yes.
14 M: ..in confronting the State with the historical record ...
15 L: Of course.
16 M: ...and that was one of my motivating factors.
17 L: I'm sure.
18 M: It was that I became really, you know, very concerned about
19 that - I mean it was a concern that had occupied me to in -
20 in the work that I was doing on, on the 40's.
21 L: Yes.
22 M: ...and, and it was sort of a continuation ..
23 L: Uhuh ..
24 M: ...I suppose, of, of my interest in the ANC and in, in the
25 struggle of African people against apartheid, against
26 segregation.
27 L: And it was becoming tighter and one was becoming more under
28 the lack - I mean a bland title like Association for Rural
29 Advancement disclosed that.
30 M: Well absolutely, and of course much of our work was with
31 communities under threat of removal who, who were, who were
32 disorganised, or unorganised and part of AFRA's work was in
33 fact to organise those communities, I think that - that
34 underlying all our work was this political motivation ..
35 L: Of course.

M: ...to, to organise people in their communities and to link them with one another so that there could be really a strong and united rural movement. I think that that was really behind most of the work that we did. We wanted both to document what was happening, to organise the people so that we could confront the State ...

L: Of course.

M: ...in - I mean there was no talk in, in this organisation process, obviously, of any, of any kind of illegal action. We were very careful because we were hardly able to move without the attention of the Special Branch. I mean it didn't matter where we went, we were followed. And apart from the fact that many of these people in these communities were themselves associated with the State - I mean we spoke a lot to the Chiefs. And, and on, one did get a sense that the kind of contribution that AFRA, AFRA was making was in organising and linking people together.

L: Yes.

M: It was a very, very significant development and I think that my - the work that I did was also involved with communities that I was studying and writing about and so it made a very big difference to those communities when I would pitch up.

L: Yes, how often did you pitch up? I can remember Peter Brown saying that you had made a speech manning the barricades - it was always very enjoyable - with that remark.

M: No taxation without representation ...

L: ..representation, yes.

M: That was one of my, ...

L: ...lines?

M: ...my lines. I, I really, I really developed a very, very good relationship with the people from the two communities that I was studying.

L: Driefontein?

1 M: Driefontein and Edendale.
2 L: Yes.
3 M: Those two areas, and also some of the other communities too
4 that we worked in around - near Cornfields - and, I've
5 forgotten the name ...
6 L: Tembalithle.
7 M: Tembalithle. We, we worked all around Ladysmith.
8 L: Yes.
9 M: ..um ..
10 L: Roosboom?
11 M: Roosboom, of course, everybody's been moved from Roosboom,
12 but we, we worked closely with Elliot Mngade.
13 L: Yes.
14 M: ...who had been moved. And had, of course, been a member
15 of the Liberal Party.
16 L: Yes. And he was then at Ezakheni, I think?
17 M: He was, yes.
18 L: Yes.
19 M: Yes, yes. And he had lots of businesses all over. I can
20 remember on one occasion when he broke down near
21 Driefontein and he - he really drove around that - that
22 part of the world very frequently in his Jaguar...
23 L: ..it must have been ...
24 M: He had this wonderful huge Jaguar, lived in that matchbox
25 house ...
26 L: Yes.
27 M: ... matchbox house with this, this very gracious motor car,
28 and he was always impeccably dressed in a three-piece suit,
29 with his hat - on the hottest day. He broke down near
30 Driefontein and the local farmer stopped to - to help him,
31 we had also stopped, and the local farmer of course thought
32 the car belonged to us. We were in an old AFRA van ...
33 L: ...a bakkie or something - yes, quite - I do remember the
34 old AFRA van.
35 M: ...and he was quite taken aback when he, when he realised,

of course that it was Elliot's car. He was - yes. There are lots of those anecdotal memories that I have of - of the kind of work that we did. But we held - one of the interesting aspects of the work that - that we undertook was that by 1983, Inkatha was becoming very, very worried about the activities of independent organisations. Fearing two things I think, the one was that we were simply a sort of a fin of something much larger that was swimming in the sea - possibly the ANC (?)- but the other was that we may well be linked with the newly emerging United Democratic Front in 1983. So by 1983 the activities of all of these organisations, and especially AFRA, because the ANC had never really had a very strong presence in the rural areas. And Inkatha, too, was not a very strong rural movement at all and it was, it was - when we began to work in many of the areas - in KwaZulu-Natal - that bordered on this and all round the township in fact, when AFRA (inaudible) Inkatha would come as well and they would either share a platform with us or they would take over the organisation of meetings that we had spearheaded because that was the point at which we really began to connect people up. I suppose it was '82 - '83, '84, things began to really hot up - it was the beginning, too, of a lot of the rural unrest. There was a whole range of tensions. There was also the tension between Inkatha and the Trade Union movement ...

L: Oh yes ..

M: ...as it began to emerge in 1983. So there were, there were really a whole range of, of tensions ...

L: Yes.

M: ... in Natal about the kind of roles Inkatha was playing, the youth were beginning to identify with the UDF, the trade union movement was, was finding that their earlier relationship, which had been very cordial after all, if you think in the 1970's Buthelezi had been one of the patrons

1 of FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions).
2 Well, first of all of two, I think. The trade union
3 administrative - I can't remember TUACC. Trade Union
4 Advisory Co-ordinating Council (it ?) stood for ...
5 L: Yes.
6 M: Before FOSATU was two TUACC in Natal.
7 L: I see.
8 M: It was just an organisational framework for - for the trade
9 unions. The FOSATU was formed and the trade unions were
10 linked very closely with that. That was when there was a
11 sort of shift away from Inkatha. But it was only in about
12 1983, I think, that Inkatha began to try and organise its
13 own trade union and then all hell broke lose - in Ladysmith
14 for example - between Inkatha and the trade unions and the
15 people whom we had been dealing with in these townships and
16 - and in Driefontein ...
17 L: Yes.
18 M: ...and AFRA, were all caught up in the struggle. So we
19 found this to be one of the issues that we had to deal with
20 in our meetings.
21 L: Of course.
22 M: And it became quite a difficult and delicate political
23 issue of how we engaged with Inkatha. Our decision was
24 that we would continue to work in the areas that we'd
25 identified were, were significant and that we would
26 maintain a cordial relationship with both the trade unions
27 and Inkatha, however difficult this was. And we had - you
28 may remember - we had a couple of quite difficult AFRA
29 meetings?
30 L: You did, indeed, because of the feelings of the Committee
31 on these two sides of the coin.
32 M: Yes, I mean, you know, it's - there were some members of
33 the Committee who ...
34 L: ..who didn't want to touch Inkatha ...
35 M: ...didn't want to touch Inkatha, and if I remember I was

one of them. I think I was very unhappy about the role that Inkatha was playing and was very worried that they were going to actually cause a conflagration ...

L: ...because these were anxious times and one's heart was with the United Democratic Front.

M: Well, exactly, I mean the point was that that was where many of our - most of our sympathies lay there...

L: Yes, yes.

M: ..but, but we also had work to do amongst people who had different - well different political persuasions. You know Inkatha came to be - for many people - it came to be seen as a representative of the ANC - it adopted the ANC colours, the meaning of the slogans was similar - there, there was a - there was a sense in which Inkatha was one of the members of that coalition. So I think there was a lot of confusion for many, many people in the tensions that arose between the UDF and Inkatha because UDF began to claim its relationship with the Freedom Charter which of course reflected ...

L: Yes...

M: ...the whole congress movement and the ANC in terms of its sort of symbolic connections. So I think that - that we, we began - to find, as AFRA, quite a diff- difficult job to work between all these different stresses and tensions.

L: And it was indeed. Now I think I must turn the tape any minute from now - it'll click.

M: Right, I'll just stop talking when it clicks.

L: Alright. Fine - because you might like a bit of a break ...

M: Yes. Well, I, I - you know, I'm, I'm not being very logical and coherent, or even chronological ...

L: You're sorting it out for me marvellously.

M: Oh well I'm glad to hear that.

L: Yes.

M: I mean it became, for many of us, we would talk very

1 carefully about how we would work in the communities, what
2 approaches we would make, whether we would approach the
3 Chief, or could do it through the Church, or if we would do
4 it with other - contacts that we had. We had many contacts
5 through these different movements. We had contacts through
6 Inkatha, we had contacts through the trade unions and we
7 had contacts through the UDF and so it became quite a
8 difficult political question who we should approach in
9 different communities and then of course there was also the
10 whole issue, which, which we also discussed, but not in
11 quite the same depth - about whether we would approach men
12 or women, because we knew that it was men who controlled a
13 whole lot of the issues of access but that it was women who
14 did a whole lot of the work - for us, as well as in terms
15 of getting people. We wanted the women at our meetings.
16 L: Yes.
17 M: And so we had a - so we decided really on a kind of multi-
18 pronged approach. And, and on the whole we would just
19 evaluate each approach in terms of what kind of
20 constituency we were trying to get at in these, in these
21 different areas that were under threat of removal.
22 L: Mmm, mmm.
23 M: How long have we been talking? We've been talking for half
24 an hour.
25 L: We've been talking for half an hour - I'm going to -
26 M: You've got about 40 minutes on there - do you want to have
27 a break?
28 L: Shall we? Let's have a - I thought a - shall we have a
29 drink?
30 M: Of course.
31 L: Tell me about Matiwane's Kop.
32 M: Now Matiwane's Kop (?) was one of these places near
33 Ladysmith, also freehold tenure, also an area that was
34 settled by the original or Ononhlevu - who originate from
35 Edendale.

1 L: Yes.
2 M: So, it sort of gets started. What happened is that
3 individuals bought farms. Individuals, from Edendale,
4 found that in about the 19 - about the 1880's, found that
5 Edendale was too small for their needs, they wanted to set
6 up farming enterprises there and so they went to places
7 around Edendale, around Ladysmith, you'll find pockets all
8 over Natal of these farms that were bought up by small-
9 scale farmers and what they did was to set up these
10 communities. You know, it wasn't just a single farmer, but
11 a group of farmers and they would divide the land up
12 between them and live in little clustered villages,
13 Matiwane's Kop was one of these. And they were under
14 threat of removal, so AFRA began to work with them and our
15 contact was, was the school master, the Headmaster. His
16 name was Hlope - we got on very well with him. He was also
17 a member of Inkatha and many of these people were - I mean
18 many of the 'Unonhlevu' had joined Inkatha in the 80's - in
19 the 70's and 80's. And they were very concerned about the
20 possible loss of their, of their properties. But when the
21 UDF/trade union struggle emerged and Inkatha started its
22 trade union, UWUSA ...
23 L: I remember ...
24 M: ..most of the people worked in Ladysmith - from these -
25 these farms and Hlope had been one of the key organisers in
26 Matiwane's Kop with, with UWUSA, and as a member of
27 Inkatha. He assisted in gathering together the members of
28 UWUSA and I think it was the Dunlop strike in Ladysmith -
29 busloads of Inkatha and UWUSA supporters went in to break
30 the strike and there was a real stand-off between the
31 FOSATU members and UWUSA. I think this was before COSATU
32 had formed and in effect what one began to see was the
33 emergence of warring factions, violence, guns, etcetera.
34 They formed themselves into, into these sort of impis, I
35 suppose you might call them. And they did it, I mean they

1 would pitch up at rallies with all their assegais and what
2 have you. And different areas became war zones. And these
3 leaders with whom we had been working, many of them, turned
4 into warlords. And it was the beginning of, initially it
5 was small scale, but it became larger and larger over time
6 in Natal when many, many people began to lose their lives.
7 People would disappear. And of course this was combined,
8 I think, with the work of the Security, force, I suppose
9 one might call them.
10 L: One could also have called it the beginnings of the 'third
11 force'.
12 M: The 'third force', yes. I mean it was, it was. I think it
13 probably didn't - wasn't known as the 'third force' in
14 those days.
15 L: No, but it was the same force of the right.
16 M: It was the same - it was, it was in the police service...
17 L: Yes.
18 M: .. the police force. But ...
19 L: ..and could be about authority - that this was their
20 intent.
21 M: And of course those authorities also began to work closely
22 with some of these Inkatha leaders to undermine the UDF to
23 smash the whole organisational structure. And this was
24 particularly evident, of course, once the states of
25 emergency were declared. The first time was in 1985,
26 wasn't it?
27 L: Yes it was.
28 M: And, I mean, since, I suppose, from 1985 onwards you can
29 begin to talk about a civil war in the areas that we were
30 working and people we knew, many, many of the people we
31 worked with, in every community began to lose members of
32 their families and you got that whole flood of refugees
33 coming into Pietermaritzburg during 1985, '86, '87, all of
34 us had people staying in our homes. I mean I would have
35 sometimes 5 or 6 people sleeping on the floors in my house.

1 L: And it was at the same time of the SARMCOL strike. That
2 was '85, wasn't it? Which was intensely concerned with
3 Edendale.
4 M: Well, yes, of course, I mean - the Edendale. So, so - the,
5 the point I'm really making ...
6 L: Mmm.
7 M: ..is that many of the people we worked with and had worked
8 very well with over, in early 80's had become, had become
9 warlords by the end, by the middle to the end of the 80's
10 and it became increasingly difficult for AFRA, I think, to,
11 to begin to move through, all these -this factionalism.
12 L: Yes, I'm sure.
13 M: At least for the field work to continue in the way that it
14 had before. And of course Natal became a very hot spot for
15 the State as well.
16 L: Yes.
17 M: In, in the Edendale area the state of emergency really
18 affected the capacity of the UDF structures to organise
19 themselves in Imbali and Edendale, again, one part might be
20 an Inkatha stronghold, another a UDF stronghold and
21 basically it became impossible for families to continue to
22 live in an area which, if they were opposed to the
23 ideological viewpoint of the ...
24 L: ..neighbourhood?
25 M: ...organisation, ja, of the neighbourhood that people began
26 to leave their homes. Their homes got burnt down, and of
27 course, at the time I was still doing my PhD, and
28 interviewing older people and it, it became clear to me
29 that the - that it didn't really matter whether one had
30 solid historical links in an area to 'unonhlevu' families.
31 I think that families became divided between one another in
32 ways that they hadn't before, and families, every single
33 family that I ever had any thing to do with, lost someone
34 to, to this horrible civil war that was appearing, that was
35 emerging throughout Natal, but it was evident in Edendale

too.

L: Yes.

M: And, well, I think life became even more miserable than it was before, because of this, this struggle, the political struggle, and whether it will settle down or not, I don't know, but certainly by 1989, we had a really severe civil war in Natal.

L: And in 1990 there was the 7-day war in Edendale, when I don't know how many people lost their lives. And the town was full of refugees - thirteen, fourteen thousand, and the deaths were absolutely horrendous.

M: yes, I haven't done any further work in - in Natal since ...

L: Yes.

M: ...since that time so that experience is, is not part of my memory.

L: really?

M: But what I've read about.

L: But your experience leads up most markedly to this.

M: Well you could begin to see emerging, I suppose, I think from, myself, I think that you could date it from the beginnings of the UDF.

L: Yes.

M: Because that was when Inkatha really began to fear political competition. Inkatha wasn't deeply embedded in some of these areas either. So, in a sense, what began to happen that some organisations, like AFRA, was that they would follow our organisational path. We, as AFRA, might organise a community and we would find that Inkatha would then come in and take over.

L: Yes.

M: The UDF never did that.

L: No.

M: So, in fact what was happening was that - in, in a paradoxical way ...

1 L: Yes.
2 M: ..AFRA paved the way for Inkatha to move into some of these
3 areas.
4 L: Yes, yes. I've never thought of it.
5 M: Not to say, I, I don't, I don't want to make too much of
6 that idea because you know there were Inkatha members
7 already in these, in these communities. But the meetings
8 that we held became an opportunity for Inkatha to take the
9 platform. We would share the platform with them.
10 L: Yes.
11 M: And I often spoke at these meetings.
12 L: Yes.
13 M: In the early 80's, and I also had a political agenda,
14 which, which was to encourage people to oppose, to
15 encourage people to organise.
16 L: Yes.
17 M: I mean that was, in a sense, what we were doing in AFRA.
18 L: Well in a sense this was missionary work of lifting the
19 downtrodden to organise themselves.
20 M: Exactly, and to make links between the different
21 communities in the hopes that - I mean - you know it
22 wasn't, - there was no underground cell work in the sense
23 that one was setting up any ANC cell.
24 L: Well, of course not.
25 M: That, that I wasn't up to. I think that at one point
26 people thought that might be what I was doing.
27 L: Oh really?
28 M: But I wasn't ...
29 L: No.
30 M: I wasn't doing that. I was in fact much more interested in
31 allowing people, or encouraging people to organise against
32 the system ...
33 L: Yes.
34 M: ..in whatever way they could and it did seem to me that
35 this rural movement was incredibly important in the work

that we were doing was important in simply igniting some kind of opposition movement, but I don't think that we realised the extent to which Inkatha would take advantage of the work that we'd done.

L: I see, I see.

M: I mean that's what I saw happening.

L: I see, that's a very interesting aspect, Sheila, yes.

M: And I, I think we were aware of it, we talked a bit about it, but we didn't - on hindsight you can see it much more clearly than you can while we were doing the work.

L: And while you were doing the work was a time of great tension for everyone and their own sympathies were involved and there were all sorts of things like informing illiterate people and so on and so forth.

M: I mean we did two things, one was to educate people about the law ...

L: Yes.

M: ... we did a lot of that kind of work. I remember Ian Lax and I going to communities and holding workshops.

L: Oh really?

M: ...where we spoke about ...

L: ...on the law? Yes.

M: ..yes, about the law, what sorts of right people had and how far they could act and then there was that Committee of Inquiry ...

L: Into?

M: There was an inquiry into removals, - wasn't there?

L: I can't remember ...

M: ...that we, we went and gave evidence. It was when Patti ...

L: yes?

M: ...was the organiser...

L: Yes, that would have been '85, '86.

M: '85, '86 ....

L: Yes.

1 M: '86. And we held, we drew up evidence of different
2 communities about their rights and I can't remember what
3 that Committee of Inquiry was ....
4 L: I can't either.
5 M: but ...
6 L: I,m beginning to remember the episode there...
7 M: David will remember, we will ask him.
8 L: Yes.
9 M: Otherwise it's all very well documented because we spent a
10 lot of time - Patti spent a lot of time, drawing up our
11 submissions to this Committee of Inquiry for different
12 communities.
13 L: I see, yes.
14 M: And of course, it was about - it was also a time when
15 farmers were giving a lot of people notice from their farms
16 and we were involved in the farm eviction scene as well...
17 L: Yes.
18 M: It wasn't simply a case of organising these committees.
19 L: No. Yes, farm evictions played, took up a lot of time.
20 M: They did, they took up a lot of time, more, probably more
21 time than they should have.
22 L: Yes.
23 M: Because there were very many - but, but it often involved
24 whole communities.
25 L: Yes, it did.
26 M: ...who'd lived in, on farms for a very long time.
27 L: Mmm, mmm.
28 M: And all of us found it very difficult because some of them
29 were, were evicted in, you know - there always seemed to be
30 ..
31 L: and not always easy pick the path to go ...
32 M: ...very, very difficult, and of course, with the
33 transition, the question became, and it was something that
34 we were talking about in 1985, ...
35 L: Yes, yes.

1 M: Already we were talking about the possibilities of a shift
2 and we debated at great length whether AFRA should become
3 a developmental organisation.
4 L: Oh, I do remember that, yes.
5 M: You were particularly, remember, you kept the books of the
6 Phakamani group?
7 L: I did, yes. I think so, yes.
8 M: And, and Phakamani was a very, very small-scale, but very
9 successful vegetable growing - more especially womens'
10 vegetable growing co-op.
11 L: Yes.
12 M: But we found that it took up a lot of our time, one, and
13 two, when we began to think of extending this and we did
14 several water projects.
15 L: Yes.
16 M: In fact one was at Matiwane's Kop.
17 L: Uh, uh?
18 M: We, we, we really struck problems in terms of the internal
19 politics in these communities about who should control the,
20 these projects and who would gain access and how much they
21 would pay. Very often our interventions turned out to be
22 quite disempowering because these were the people we wanted
23 to empower.
24 L: Of course.
25 M: So we came to a very good decision which was that we were
26 not going to become involved in development projects.
27 L: Oh much, the only decision.
28 M: Absolutely, and so we left that to organisations like
29 Environmental Development Aid and so on.
30 L: Yes.
31 M: But what we, what we then began to, to consider and
32 discuss, was the issue of our connection with other
33 organisations and it was in, with the - national networks
34 and we were part and parcel of organising and setting up
35 the National Land Committee.

1 L: Yes, and you see all the titles are now of course gone and
2 changed, but it became a real network, nation-wide.
3 M: Well, it remains a network, a real network, it's a very
4 important ... (end of side one).
5 (Side 2) :
6 M: The Surplus People's Project, which AFRA became involved in
7 as well. And that started when Cheryl (Walker) was still
8 organising, so that was very early in the 80's - the early
9 80's. Cherryl was the AFRA organiser, and then, in every
10 province there were little groups. In fact there weren't
11 always little groups, but it was decided that we needed a
12 nation-wide mapping of Black spots, areas under threat of
13 removals, areas that had been removed, the establishment of
14 new townships and so on. So committees were formed in, in
15 every centre in each of the provinces, and Laureen Platzsky
16 was the coordinator of this process. And, and this was
17 really a very, very important initiative because it was one
18 of the first initiatives, really, to, to lead to a complete
19 understanding of that whole process and a 4-volume document
20 came out of this in about 1983, or 4 - I can't remember the
21 exact date, it must have been about 1983, 2 or 3, perhaps.
22 And, and it was that work that led me into a lot of this
23 rural work and how I ended up being part of AFRA because I
24 had been part of this process in the Transvaal, and then I
25 went down to live in Cape Town and I came back to work in
26 Natal, in 1984, when I joined AFRA. And was - I was on
27 that committee - although I'd had contacts with people who
28 had worked in AFRA all the time. And in - it must have
29 been about 1985, or 1986, the exact date is one that we can
30 find, because it will be documented somewhere. But it was
31 decided - or even later - it may have been even later, it
32 was decided that we needed to form a proper national
33 structure which drew together the work of organisations,
34 like AFRA, like TRAC, here in the Transvaal, the
35 Grahamstown Land Committee, the Surplus People Project down

in the Western Cape. All of these organisations that had been working together, but not properly linked - it was really an attempt to bring together all of these organisations in a strategic national planning grouping. I think that was what it was so that we could begin to strategise, nationally, keep in touch with one another, coordinate the work that we did, so that we didn't - there weren't any contradictions or conflicts in the way that we operated, I suppose, really, it was, it was a coordination exercise. And the first meeting was held in Johannesburg and, and Dave Walwyn and I, we were the AFRA representatives at that meeting. And I can remember, I think it was, it was held in the house when they were away; there were representatives from all the different regions and it was decided that we ought to form this structure and it was then officially set up and structured. And that National Land Committee had been very, very important, really, in framing the whole national programme - it has almost been adopted and taken over by the Department of Land Affairs. I don't think that Derek Hannekom and all of those people really know the extent to which this initial group, starting in 1980, was Laureen Platzsky and Cheryl Walker ..

L: ... it provided the framework and the structure ...

M: It, it provided the framework and - and the very good understanding of, of the whole way in which apartheid land policy really destroyed, disrupted, and deprived people of their land.

L: Yes.

M: And I think that that has really been very, very important. I don't think that the people who are in those departments fully understand it. I don't think that the people who sit on the land committee today, probably understand the history of, of that movement, and how, how significant it has been in really helping us to understand the apartheid

1 past and what it did. And, and, of course, it is now, in
2 the 90's, a very much more sophisticated situation and we
3 have people who have been involved in land reform in other
4 parts of the world, participating in - talking about the
5 kinds of problems that are experienced in the land reform
6 programme and one of the ones that springs to my mind, in
7 particular, is the issue of when land is re-distributed, it
8 very often goes to a head of household, without recognising
9 that, that women have - have been deprived ...
10 L: Oh, that's an interesting point.
11 M: ..have been deprived, or aren't taken into account in this
12 whole, um, re-distribution programme. But, the, the
13 Director-General of the Land Affairs Department is Jeff
14 Budlander and Jeff Budlander was one of the people who
15 worked very, very closely with TRAC, which was a member of
16 the National Land Committee and then Aninka Claasens, who
17 was the ....
18 L: Transvaal, wasn't he?
19 M: Transvaal organiser, who, who was very experienced with
20 working with these departments and who, who - I suppose,
21 whose experience of these land issues really emerged out of
22 the kinds of - this rural movement ...
23 L: Does AFRA -
24 M: ...was initiated by AFRA.
25 L: Yes, yes.
26 M: AFRA was the first of these organisations to emerge.
27 L: I was going to ask you, yes.
28 M: And I think it was AFRA's and Cheryl Walker's work that
29 formed the basis of something that became a national
30 movement, and of course, the idea for AFRA started with
31 Peter Brown.
32 L: Yes, yes, of course.
33 M: Peter Brown and perhaps Elliot Mngadi.
34 L: Yes.
35 M: And the experience of the removals of places like Roosbom.

1 L: Yes.
2 M: Which disappeared off the map and had been flourishing
3 communities that had a long history that had formed around
4 a church, and had been destroyed by the engineering of
5 apartheid which was determined to really crush the
6 independent African middle class who were located in
7 places like Roosboom, and Driefontein, which managed to
8 survive, but only just. And, and places that - whose
9 profile would have been very different had it not been for
10 apartheid. Because I think that they would have maintained
11 their identity as rural villages really, whose main
12 occupation was peasant production and who produced enough
13 food to feed themselves. I mean I can remember speaking to
14 some school teachers in some of these so-called Black
15 spots, these freehold areas, saying that had never in their
16 lives known what the price of mealie meal was. It's that
17 kind of independent activity that was crushed by this
18 apartheid social engineering. Because what happened in
19 these areas was that was because their existence was so
20 precarious, they had begun to, in a sense, live within the
21 context of the apartheid system of control and they had
22 transformed themselves from the independent community into,
23 if you like, communities that were linked into the State,
24 through the chiefs, through the sort of authority
25 structures that were set up by the apartheid era and so
26 lots of new people began to move in and they changed from,
27 from being these sort of peasant farming communities to
28 peri-urban slums ...
29 L: Yes.
30 M: ...Because - because what happened was that instead of
31 being able to continue their farming occupations, the
32 people who owned these lands, began to 'farm' people, so
33 they would put homesteads on what used to be farming land.
34 L: Well, you see ...
35 M: We do, we have seen a lot of this kind of development

1 around a lot of urban areas in South Africa in the
2 90's, but I think it's of a different order ...
3 L: yes.
4 M: ... from what occurred in that earlier period, because, I
5 think that when people began to suspect that they weren't
6 going to be able to continue farming they began to try and
7 think of alternative ways of making a living. I mean it
8 had been part of a longer process...
9 L: Yes.
10 M: But, I think that what apartheid did was to destroy the
11 sense of community.
12 L: What a terrible think to do.
13 M: Well, I mean, that, that of course is - is the - what is
14 the ...
15 L: ...that's the history, and the tragedy.
16 M: Absolutely, I mean apartheid has, has been a very black
17 period for South Africa because it - it really determined
18 the impoverishment of the community of flourishing farmers,
19 of people who were moving into enterprises that, that would
20 in fact have, could have become a much more integrated
21 process of transformation and integration if we hadn't had
22 apartheid.
23 L: When you write your next original work, you must write it
24 on this subject. For all sorts of very good reasons,
25 Sheila, I think. I mean this is an insight that mustn't be
26 lost.
27 M: It, it does seem to me that these communities that we speak
28 about ...
29 L: Yes.
30 M: Generations of people with all sorts of fantastic talent
31 ...
32 L: Yes.
33 M: Were lost to the development of this country.
34 L: I think so too.
35 M: And the cost of that.

1 L: Yes.
2 M: The human cost, and the - the cost to the building of a
3 nation, to, to the wellbeing of the whole of society as has
4 been so enormous, one can't begin to count the cost in
5 Natal, when you have this terrible civil war.
6 L: Yes.
7 M: And that civil war- that civil war really - was caused by,
8 and was a creature of apartheid.
9 L: It was. Shall we end there.
10 (End of side 2)
11
12
13
14