

WOMEN ON AEROPLANES

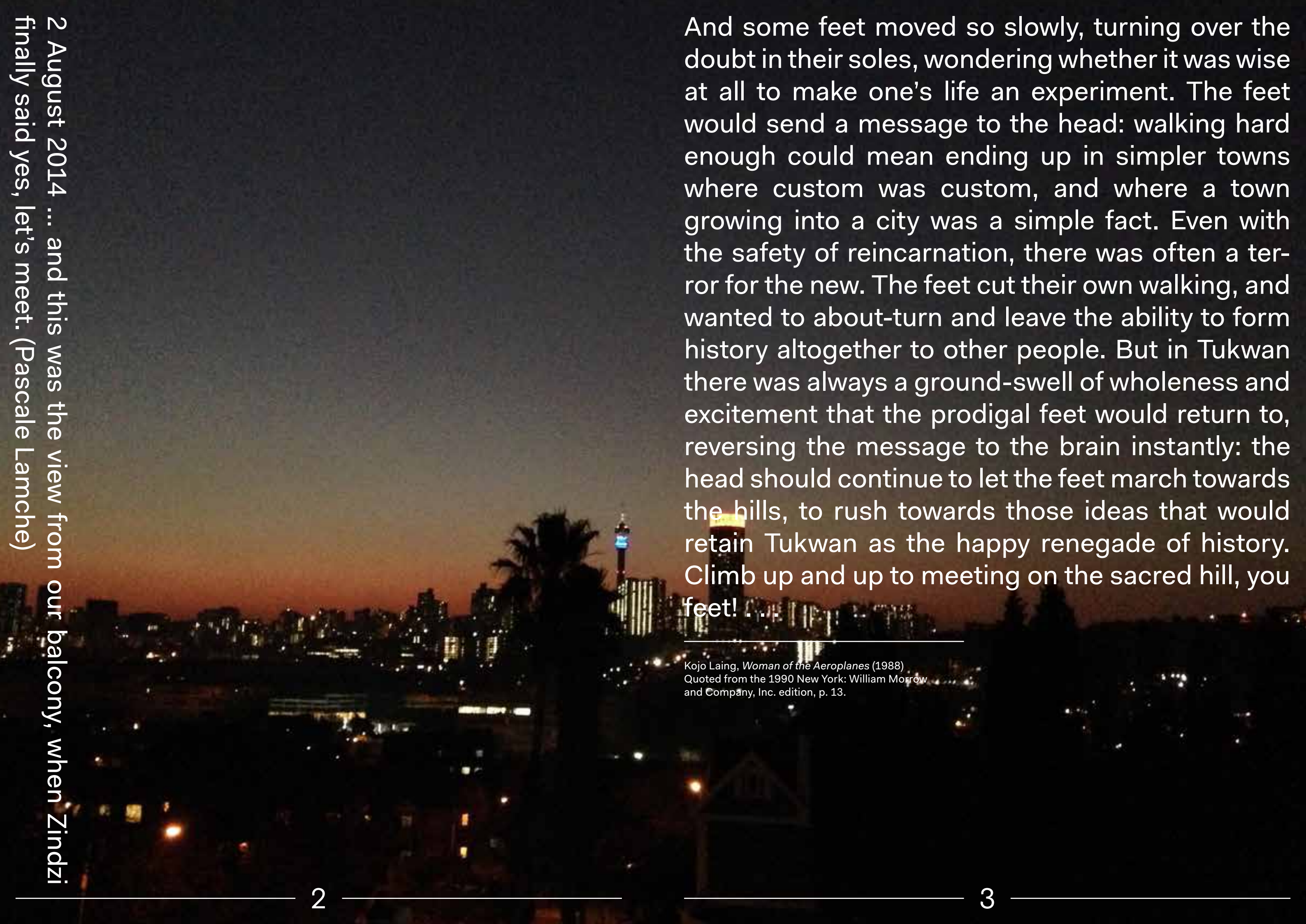
Inflight
Magazine
#6

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WOMEN ON

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AEROPLANES



2 August 2014 ... and this was the view from our balcony, when Zindzi finally said yes, let's meet. (Pascale Lamche)

And some feet moved so slowly, turning over the doubt in their soles, wondering whether it was wise at all to make one's life an experiment. The feet would send a message to the head: walking hard enough could mean ending up in simpler towns where custom was custom, and where a town growing into a city was a simple fact. Even with the safety of reincarnation, there was often a terror for the new. The feet cut their own walking, and wanted to about-turn and leave the ability to form history altogether to other people. But in Tukwan there was always a ground-swell of wholeness and excitement that the prodigal feet would return to, reversing the message to the brain instantly: the head should continue to let the feet march towards the hills, to rush towards those ideas that would retain Tukwan as the happy renegade of history. Climb up and up to meeting on the sacred hill, you feet! ...

Kojo Laing, *Woman of the Aeroplanes* (1988)
Quoted from the 1990 New York: William Morrow
and Company, Inc. edition, p. 13.



Welcome

Women on Aeroplanes looks closely at the “long history of transatlantic networks and the struggles for liberation, predating the process of independence on the African continent (and elsewhere).” And what became apparent: women were always important to those networks and struggles, and played all kinds of roles, but their stories are hardly told, their faces remain widely invisible.

As a child I used to listen to my grandmother telling me stories about her independence struggle as an African woman. And as I grew older, I wondered who will ever know which part she played.

The curators aim to not only frame women’s various and heterogeneous contributions, politically and artistically, but also create new parameters and premises of storytelling.

We really believe that, with all complications, *Public Hearings* needs to happen right now. Not only can we observe legislation change in real time due to COVID-19, but also do we live in a society with massive systemic injustice towards women. *Public Hearings* touches on these issues in many ways.

The Goethe-Institut in South Africa is honored to be a partner of *Women on Aeroplanes* and it makes us proud that all contributors were able to transform this great content into the digital space.

Asma Diakité, Goethe-Institut Johannesburg

#6 There are things that law doesn’t cover

It was a weirdly long process Everything about it. The compiling of this issue #6, but also sorting out what precisely it was about. It has already been two years since we arrived in Cape Town and Johannesburg with some broad questions around and about notions of law: how did the Constitution lay the legal foundation for and shape the transition process towards the “new South Africa”? And how would its initial promise be assessed from today’s perspective, especially with regard to women’s rights? What happened? What went wrong, and how? What’s gone right? These were questions that we used like a toolbox to enter into conversations, looking for answers to other questions we didn’t know how to ask.

At the same time we introduced another set of considerations: an understanding of law, derived from twelve-tone music. To treat every tone, every element as equally important, which also fosters a shift in hierarchies of attention and narrative: anecdotes, asides, and incidental observations can become as relevant as the machinations of power politics. A discordant methodology, the better to create new parameters and premises of storytelling.

We had planned for a *Public Hearings Festival* in Johannesburg, with a polyphony of voices reading excerpts from an array of texts—stories, transcripts, poems, songs—old and new, addressing “law” in various ways and tonalities. Then COVID-19 arrived, torpedoing all our lives, and occasioning new legal regimes. Against all odds, we were able to realise an online festival, which is almost entirely accessible via <http://woa.kein.org/virtual>. Thanks to all the many involved for making this event possible.

There were two conversations that we found too intriguing not to revisit. The first was our discussion with comrade Sue Rabkin, agent of the ANC underground between 1976 and 1990 and ANC Member of Parliament in the years since. The second was our interview with filmmaker Pascale Lamche, who shared in-depth insights into the making of her 2017 documentary, *Winnie*. Both explored a similar historical period from quite different perspectives and backgrounds, with different casts of characters. Yet Winnie Mandela emerged as a kind of interface, a prism capable of literally turning South Africa’s history upside down. These two meandering conversations were so dense in details, allusions, references, names, and anecdotes that it seemed necessary to take them even further, on paper, to extend the encounters and arguments between the living and the dead.



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In “The Case of Books” is an ongoing project where different people get to travel to different library spaces and engage in the process of dusting and talking about the books they find there. It is designed as a travelling interactive performance. At the core of this project stands the conversations that examine the anatomy of knowledge, place of books, the identity and relevance of libraries and importantly the myths and rituals amongst the participating persons and institutions. A key part of this performance is the communal ritual of dusting and arranging books on the bookshelves. All the experiences shared and issues raised constitute part of a greater ongoing conversation looking at the place, means and space of knowledge within the societies. This is at a time when the magnitude of information and its accessibility is at an all-time high and books have, for a long time now, been the most recognizable and acceptable conduits of this knowledge. It was first performed in May 2013 in Nairobi and inspired Karuti's first solo exhibition called “Where Books Go to Die” and again performed in September 2014. A 3rd edition was performed in October 2015 in Kampala-Uganda.



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As part of the Henrike Grohs Art Award 2020, winner Jackie Karuti's art book will be published by Mousse at the end of 2021.



<http://henrikegrohsartaward.africa/>

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Inflight Magazine #6

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Women on Aeroplanes pursues its flight as an independent agency for flying ideas in further collaboration with the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, The Otolith Collective, London, IRIBA Center, Kigali.
<http://woa.kein.org/>

Images

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8: Winnie Mandela and Ruth First in 1963, photo by Mary Benson, published on the website of the University of London, School of Advanced Study, <https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/3439/>.
11: Pascale Lamche, *Winnie* (2017) screenshots. Courtesy and copyright Pascale Lamche.
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20: Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, *Mother (After Winnie Mandela)*, 2013, oil on canvas, 50x50cm. Courtesy and copyright the artist.

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6: SECHABA, frontpage, August 1985, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/sechaba-august-1985>.
7: Ruth First, *Black Gold. The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1983 (cover).
9: Ruth First, *muher militante investigadora*, 17.8.1982, https://www.saha.org.za/women/leading_women.htm.
15: Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun*, Penguin African Library (edited by Ronald Segal), Middlesex, England, 1972 (cover).
18: Skip Norman, *On Africa* (1970), photo/film still, all rights reserved.
20: SECHABA, frontpage, June 1985, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/sechaba-june-1985>.

Passenger List

Jihan El-Tahri, a true woman on many aeroplanes, is an investigating, tireless questioning propelled force. She makes documentaries and writes books. and writes books, always searching until she finds the right person to talk to, the key document to read. Since 2019 she is General Director of DOX BOX.

Kodwo Eshun is an artist and theorist, a dedicated and committed listener and respondent, who might sharpen an utterance towards a continuative elaboration. Together with Anjalika Sagar he is co-founder of the Otolith Collective.

Pascale Lamche is an award-winning filmmaker who has made documentary features and series as writer, producer and director for key broadcasters internationally. Her films have premiered at many international film festivals and include *Stalingrad* (2015), *Black Diamond* (2010), *Pakistan Zindabad* (2007), *French Beauty* (2005), *Accused #1: Nelson Mandela* (2004), and *Sophiatown* (2003).

Naadira Patel is an artist, designer and researcher. She currently runs StudioStudioWorkWork, a multi-disciplinary studio for art, research, design and project management, with a focus on social justice issues, while lecturing part time in the Department of Visual Arts, Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg. Research areas include issues arising from new forms of technology that shape, manipulate or augment our experiences of our existence in the world, emerging forms of surveillance capitalism and questions on the new world of work, with a focus on ideas of precarious labour, exhaustion, and productivity.

Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi is an artist living and working in Johannesburg. Her pre-occupation is power: how it works, what structures it creates, how we relate to it, what threatens it. Inherent in her examination is an imagining of alternatives. She divides her time between her studio and the field of art as social practice. Nkosi is currently teaching a course at the University of the Witwatersrand on rethinking Modernism.

Sue Rabkin has all along been a propelling, audacious force. A few lines of "bio" seem impossible, especially for her. At the beginning of our conversation she tells us about her background: "I grew up in a part of London in which many of the white South Africans came to stay when they left South Africa after the first State of Emergency in the early 1960s. There was thus an influx of South Africans into my local school, and I started to have many South African friends. My political involvement began around the age of fifteen when I went on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) marches in the early 1960s. From thereon, I became more and more politically involved." Turn the magazine around to continue reading on page 5.



Winnie Mandela and Ruth First in 1963, photo by Mary Benson.

Of something that is impossible in life

in conversation with Pascale Lamche



Making *Winnie*: Pascale Lamche talks to Annett Busch, Kodwo Eshun and Marie-Hélène Gutberlet about questions of constructing and reconstructing, editing and uncovering the image of Winnie Mandela. An image that has been systematically distorted and obscured by thousands of images created by mass media and secret services.

or what my background was, or whether I could be trusted. Trusted to at least open up the space where some discussion could occur to problematise the very difficult, simplistic view that had been disseminated, not just in South Africa, but in the world at large. This very simple binary: her father was a saint, and her mother was a sinner. At great cost to her and inevitably to her mother and sister too. So that discussion began, I was able to meet Winnie, and that was an extraordinary occasion.

After a while we organised the first interview between me and Winnie, and that opened up the possibility of a return; what followed were a number of interviews over the course of time. Peter was still alive when I interviewed Winnie the first time, and then Peter died in a terrible tragic way which, for me, was devastating and seemed like the direct consequence of the near-collapse of the public healthcare system in the country, which is shot to pieces. Getting the strength to carry on with this project, without my partner (I was no longer living in South Africa, I was back in London) was very difficult. So, I was trying to raise money all over Europe in bits and pieces with my producer Christoph Jörg, but nobody wanted to finance this film. The amount of resistance was alarming. It was so strong that it made me push back every time. The more you hit what feels like a political, ideological wall, the more determined you get to climb over that wall.

So, I was facing real hostility from certain quarters and scepticism from filmmakers who knew other filmmakers who'd approached Ma'am Winnie before, and these were voiced publicly in the sorts of places where documentaries hope to find funding, like Amsterdam IDFA, and Sheffield Documentary Film Festival, places like that. Eventually ARTE France gave us a commission, but it was a specific slot that needed to be filled, which was the 'biography' slot. So, that then pushed another dynamic into the whole process because my producer was worried that that slot was quite traditional—a classic kind of biopic. And whilst I was grappling with all these contradictions between the various ways this film could be made, other broadcast financing emerged in Scandinavia and more from a Dutch broadcaster.

I went back to South Africa because it was Winnie's 80th birthday. By that time, I had edited quite a lot of the film. And because I don't use a voice-over narration if I can help it (I don't like it, unless it's a personal film-essay worth listening to), I need to tell a story through montage and a dialectical process with pieces drawn from interviews and archival elements or just landscape or urban scape—then somehow, out of that combination, some truth emerges. All the while that I was building a narrative arc for the film, there were little links in the construction of the film as

a whole that needed clarification in order for people watching it to be able to follow what was essentially an accretion of action and reaction within a world, a historical, economic and political reality that had, in the past, sought to frame things in a particular way.

I returned to South Africa for the fourth interview with Winnie and at that time, I asked Anne Marie du Preez Bezdrob, who had written a biography of her some time ago, whether she could contextualise this tiny little link for me. As we were filming Ma'am Winnie in Soweto during the celebrations of her birthday, and because I could only afford a limited shoot, Anne Marie had suggested that she would travel to me, to help me out with my stretched logistics. On her way to meet me, to film a second interview, her car was involved in a crash. And she was left for an unbearably long period of time at the scene of the accident because she didn't have private medical insurance, the same way Peter could not afford private medical insurance. I went to the clinic where she was finally taken and spoke with her in intensive care, then went to the birthday celebrations in Soweto to join the crew who were filming without me. When I returned to the clinic, she had died. It was shattering. So, I recount all this sadness because there was a certain amount of emotional rage in me that gave me the strength to keep going at this, because what was at stake here was an account of the struggle for a social contract and an evaluation, through the lens of Winnie's politics, of whether this nation, South Africa, during the negotiations for the transition to democracy, might have been permitted to construct a future on more socialistic terms, which is what Winnie represented. Winnie and Chris Hani, and others, during that very very critical point of transition.

That's one dimension of the film's questioning, if you like, and the other, perhaps, is the feminist dimension. Racist apartheid was a given, and easily identifiable as a structure for a story about Winnie's struggle against it. But Winnie dealing with a patriarchal system conjoined with a neoliberal capitalist system at a moment of acute crisis—that needed to be brought into focus. These twin organising systems within which we all live and function and work, wherever we are in the world. All these dynamics were what became urgent and interesting, while other things fell by the wayside, to make room, as I tried to tell this story, this structural story about power.



Marie-Hélène Gutberlet: When you mention the montage, what we can really see is that we know the archival footage, it appears here and there, it's repeated again and again, but you find ways to connect it to other elements, you enter another door, take a bifurcation that goes in an unexpected direction. There is a possibility to work against the logic of the mainstream narrative of media coverage, and that's very striking. Can you tell us how you entered these international archives, what type of negotiations were part of it?

PL: Well, it's interesting because you *think* you've seen that footage because you've seen—for example, the famous footage of Nelson Mandela standing, giving his first speech after his release. People all over the world have seen that footage, but most likely, they've seen very selected moments of the speech, in news pieces or in other documentaries, edited to focus on certain emotions or conclusions and elide complexity. And then these selections are reproduced over and over: selections are made from prior selections and points-of-media-view. Now, the moment I chose to select from the speech is the point when Nelson Mandela says, “the conditions are still the same and we will continue our armed struggle.” The reason it seemed important to me to select that piece was that the general notion was that Winnie represented the incarnation of brutal armed struggle, that she was violent, out of control, and wanted to murder every white person in the country. Which is bullshit. Nelson articulated only peace and compromise and Realpolitik, while she was this lunatic fiend, if you like. And in fact, it seemed to me that as a consequence,

her way of analysing the struggle, and her place in it, she became less and less able to control the selective image of herself that was being broadcasted and re-broadcasted into the world, particularly after the ‘Gotcha!’ moment of her public reference to liberating the country with matchboxes. She was very effectively constructed, as witches had often been in the in the past, as a sacrificial cypher. It was a way of sluicing the system, cleansing the history as though there had never been any need for violence to confront systemic violence in South Africa; as though there was no violent struggle for liberation, no violent struggle against an utterly racist system of incredible power backed by world leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. A racist system of white supremacy which was still in place until 1990, which might seem like ancient history to some young people today but is very recent. And that’s the shocking part to focus on. Not to mention the veil of silence drawn over the violence among comrades in some of the ANC camps. So, the idea that violence had been airbrushed out of the picture for reasons deemed as the greater good, and that it became sticky only when one looked in Winnie’s direction, that violence was absolutely inherent to the system South Africa had laboured under, stretching way back in history, and was consolidated under the Nationalist governments of the post-war period—I wanted to remind people of that, lest it be forgotten. To contextualise Winnie’s life and the choices she made and her thinking, within that matrix of power. I poured over the interviews journalists had recorded with Winnie, watching them at length, recognising the parts that had been used against her over and over again—points where the interviewer thought they’d cornered Winnie, when she looked like she was out of control or suddenly had a steely look in her eye, that might be translated as mania or slipperiness, which served that story’s purpose. But when viewed dispassionately, with the luxury of time and unedited material, it seemed to suggest to me high intelligence. A mind working, knowing that what is being recorded will be used politically, feeling her way through the chess game she’s trying hard not to lose. While politicians are well versed in evading questions and ramming home messages, her message, when it was simple—Free Nelson, Free South Africa—it was communicated. Even her clenched fist, next to Ted Kennedy’s polite wave, was permissible. But, when the message grew more complex as the balance of power shifted and it became clear that the system of apartheid could no longer be argued for as a bulwark in a Cold War, it turned into a wholly different, high-stakes game, in which the woman had better get out of the picture and stand by her man, a man being prepared to face ‘destiny’.

As I watched those interviews, I could follow her mind working. She could see where the journalist was leading her, trying to manoeuvre her into a particular place. For example, in the period before Nelson was released, she identified that it would be in the gov-

ernment’s interest to sow discord in the black community, so that “divided amongst ourselves, divided against each other, discrediting each other”, the work of catastrophically weakening the ANC would be achieved. And she said, “into that atmosphere, they will release comrade Mandela”, which is exactly what they did. And you see later in the film how, as it’s described by Zindzi and others, this ‘black-on-black violence’ has been artificially stoked and how the South African government is trying to build up the Inkatha Freedom Party, the IFP, as an alternative to the ANC in the talks over the transition of power. An IFP that had every interest in discrediting the ANC. In the film you see Niël Barnard, the former head of South Africa’s apartheid-era National Intelligence Service saying, “we had nothing to do with divide and rule”. Of course, that’s nonsense. It’s a basic tool in the armoury of politics, and Winnie understood that very well. She understood the political consequences of building a wedge, if they were successfully able to do so, between her husband and herself. Zindzi describes this brilliantly in the film—the power that existed in the combination of her two parents. That together they had the same objective but came at it from two different perspectives. And that this dialectic, if you like, was an essential one, for South Africa. For this to exist and be articulated by a man and a woman in leadership positions with different but complementary constituencies within a vast project of national liberation, and a marriage and intimacy—that was politics that was critical for the future; that’s a powerful couple. People could see that, of course they could. And Zindzi suggests this ran counter to a number of political interests including some that were soon flowing back into the country from exile.

Politics, Winnie knew, wasn’t like, “Oh, ok, let’s watch this play out.” Instead, there’s a massive moment of crisis, the moral compass has shifted in the world, billions of dollars are implicated and at stake and even significant sections of big business have turned against a reprehensible racist system, but, you know, “We’re going to have elections and that will determine what kind of South Africa will emerge.”

So, when you say that you’ve seen many of the archives we see in the film, no you haven’t. You’ve seen situations you recognise: Winnie wearing that dress, with that hair, on that chair. But you’ve actually seen *other* selections from those interviews: moments very carefully constructed at a very specific time, then reselected in other contexts and built into other media stories, connected to other images like, placed next to bodies with burning tyres around their necks. And don’t forget, there was a foreign media embargo throughout most of the period we are focusing on, particularly during the various States of Emergency.

So material was being recycled, over and over. And when the embargo was temporarily lifted, you see that in the film, for example during the funeral of Stompie Moeketsi, some on-the-ball journalists

asked the right questions. One or two South African journalists who saw the film at the premiere with Winnie in the audience observed that the graffiti on the walls at the time of Stompie’s funeral—‘Swap Nelson for Winnie’ or ‘Hang Winnie’—was not the language that anyone on the streets in the liberation movement would have used.

As a filmmaker, when you do the difficult, long, patient, hard and expensive work of looking through as much of the original footage as you can find, interesting contradictions emerge. And that’s where I come to another point which is that to make historical films with archives, when you want to use the archive in a way that is immersive—where you can reconstruct a sense of the time, the tone and almost the smell of it, where you’re not just pitching in bits of illustration here and there—that kind of immersive historical documentary film work is expensive. It takes a long time in the editing room.

To get access to raw footage, just to view it, is expensive. Then to clear the rights for its use in the final film is particularly expensive, especially if you want the film to be able to be seen freely throughout the world. To be able to cut a dramatic scene from an archive, you need to be able to select, say, thirty seconds from here and five seconds from there; and you want to do a beautifully seamless edit, and instill vitality into the moment. But archive companies make you pay, generally, for a full indivisible minute. So that means if I want five seconds, I pay for one minute. It is a ruinous practice. Costs mount stratospherically, and that effects your capacity as a filmmaker to build an image of what is, in effect, history.

Some of the most successful uses of archival material in the film are when the original journalist’s narration of events throws up the kind of questions my film is wanting to linger over. They are all the more powerful because they were stated baldly as simple facts and straightforward questions at the time. So, for example, for Stompie’s funeral I’ve used the original journalist’s narration to raise the question: are the authorities allowing coverage of this funeral because, for once, this is not a political funeral that’s a consequence of a police shooting, but is one blamed on Winnie’s ‘bodyguards’? And we use this device a number of times in the structuring of the film. It becomes a way by which all of those reports are linked and cut against the grain. So, as I’m looking through the material we’ve managed to collect, interesting cut-aways emerge, like: Hey, there’s the police up there filming the scene, and it’s significant. I like looking at the edges of the scene, a gleaner of sorts (as in Agnès Varda), noticing the marginalia. And you, the viewer, think you’ve seen the images before, but you haven’t seen the bits that were situated to the left or to the right of the seemingly self-evident central point of the original reportage. So, the film assembles the material that many people are sure they have seen, with an encouragement to look at things from a slightly different perspective, and that’s what ended up happening in the editing room.



Kodwo Eshun: In the idea of paranoid and reparative reading practices formulated by Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, a paranoid reading is not necessarily wrong but it is suspicious, it moves between what we see and exposing what is presumed to be hidden from view. A paranoid reading makes sense in a situation of infiltration and surveillance; a reparative reading, by contrast, seeks to do justice to what it sees from the position of what Sedgwick calls ethical possibility. It struck me that in your work you move between both modes. You are encouraging the viewer to be sceptical about what they see, for example, these scenes of national security people that paint themselves in a good light and promote themselves as such. At the same time your work assembles a group of people that can interpret Winnie Mandela’s actions, who can speak to the existing media complex that continually puts her on trial in an ongoing court of international reputation. Your film then becomes a way of restaging a certain kind of cinematic tribunal, in which different people offer different interpretations that allow you to relisten to the images that invited you to know Winnie Mandela as this terrifying, lawless, out of control figure.





KE: Could you talk a bit about that desire to encourage a skeptical reading and at the same time, a restitutive, reparative reading that offers a kind of aesthetic justice? A film that aims to render aesthetic justice to somebody that has been the subject of an aesthetic injustice?



PL: That's so beautiful! I wish you'd write about this.

KE: I would love to.

PL: When Winnie died, a lot of critical energy was released—a number of women were supposed to be writing new histories. And in the end, I see them sort of falling away. I don't think there's been a really critical picking up of this film, and some of the things that you've so brilliantly articulated—it just hasn't happened yet. A combination of trying to encourage a new critical way of evaluating things historically, weighing received knowledge and trying to read things against the grain—that's how I did a lot of my historical research. I read all the books that had been written about her and cross-referenced all the accounts—who was where, when—I mean, it was a massive amount of work. I saw how things were plausibly worked together and framed in particular ways and could be cross-referenced very carefully.

I was trained as a historian, that's what I read at university. Doing the very important, basic historical research work first and then, as I began to build the film, sifting through all this material and countering the grain and reading sceptically, as you say, but also reading as a filmmaker. I'm also thinking aesthetically, absolutely. I'm thinking about the power that is wielded by a beautifully crafted film, the power to engage one on an emotional as well as intellectual level. I knew, apart from the fact that that's my pleasure as a filmmaker, to work in that way, it was also what would render a portrait of Winnie that would be closer to the truth and to some kind of justice, after this immense process of close looking, this scrutiny.

Moreover, this classic kind of takedown—as a woman in a position of enormous political power, to ultimately be taken down on the pretext of not being a 'good wife' and having a lover. I mean, the hypocrisy of the whole thing also blows your mind. But, you know, what might blow my mind as I'm watching this material, as I'm cutting this material, as I'm sifting and thinking about it, doesn't necessarily blow the mind of another viewer who might consider it quite normal that a wife, if her husband has been in jail for twenty-seven years, should on no account take a lover. The aesthetic concerns, the historic concerns, the attention to detail, the reading against the grain—all of it was very carefully worked during the editing process. I like to work with an editor, not cut the film myself.

So, there's a dialectic involved in the construction. My editor, Giles Gardner, is there with me but is not involved, not invested emotionally or politically in this story at all. He's invested only in the aesthetics and the construction of the narrative. And there's very limited time. Time is money (the cost of his time, of the editing room, etc.). He's an English guy, sitting in Paris where he lives with his family, he has his own life. He's just looking at it purely structurally. Whereas I'm looking and feeling in a very intensely invested way, even though I am not a South African, I haven't been implicated in that system in any way. I'm an outside observer, but it's much more complicated than that because I've been, you know—I've lived there, I've been in love with somebody for many years whose whole life was shaped there. I am politically and emotionally engaged on that level. And so, I've got this kind of tension, this kind of dialectical thing going on in the editing room—there is my desire, and the editor's, kind of counter to that. Some kind of active synthesis emerges. There's also a sort of cause-and-effect structure that has to work. It's on a timeline. That doesn't mean, you can't bust a timeline. In my original conception of the film, it was going to be busted up all over the place. But in the end, in the editing room, it became clear that it had to settle back into what on the surface looks like a more conventional structure. The film doesn't look formally complicated. It looks conventional, but it isn't. And I think, that's possibly part of the power of the film.

I wanted people watching it, from anywhere and everywhere to understand that there was an active engagement to the viewing, a job to do, which was to think again, even if you only do so in relation to one aspect of the film or another little aspect. Eventually, you just hook some of these things together. And the history is far more complex than what's been preserved in a simple foundation myth. South Africa is so interesting, it computes on every level—whether you're talking about American politics, or anti-colonialism, whether you're talking about neoliberal capitalism, whether you're talking about feminism, or patriarchal structures, or how power reconstructs itself and maintains itself.

So yes, I wrestled with both the paranoid and the reparative reading, I suppose, as you described, and both consciously and unconsciously. I tried to encourage a critical reading, a scepticism, a reading against the grain, looking at images that are in existence in the archives and have been presented through the mainstream media and looking at the multi-layered way in which they have been deployed to reinforce the existing system. And then, ultimately, the film in its entirety becomes an act of aesthetic gratitude, if you like, to Winnie and all those who also struggled in parallel or with her; although, she had an utterly specific story. And there's a reparative element to that, because ultimately the film is about South Africa today, and not just South Africa but all places

in the world that are dealing still with gross oppression, and an inability to provide basic human rights which, in my view and in Winnie's view, are the rights to free education, the right to decent housing, the right to eat, the right to live in safety, the right to have the rule of law apply to you as much as anyone else and the right not to be subjected to a system in which the profit motive is the ultimate organising structure for humanity. So, by the end of the film, it is reparative in that, it also gives a sense of hope, Winnie's hope, my hope, many of us who hope for a form of solidarity that can allow for critical thinking, political organisation at a community level, for a more progressive structure for society. And with the pandemic, one would hope that some lessons have been learned about a social contract and the concern we have for one another. Winnie was always going to be the voice questioning the ineluctable power of unfettered global capitalism presented as though it was the best and only way to conduct the world's affairs. The reparative reading was to put her politics, her intelligence, her humanity, back into the centre of our idea of Winnie, our idea of South African politics, and world politics obviously.

MHG: You said before, "it looks conventional, but it isn't." Speaking about the soundtrack, there is Alice Coltrane—it sounds so nice. You have these mood moments and there is music in bits everywhere, like a tapestry in the background, but then you see that it's Alice Coltrane. What were the motives to go in that direction? Not working, for example, with South African musicians or French musicians, but to choose Alice Coltrane instead?





producers jumped on it, because it was just so much cheaper, ultimately, for the film to be 83 minutes, and it was already over budget.

So that's the version that's been seen around the world and remains. You see what I mean? Economics comes into play in all of this.

About the sound, coming back to the music, doing justice to great South African artists *Sophiatown* did that; music was the subject of that film. With *Winnie*, I needed a very subliminal but very carefully worked soundscape, not a soundtrack that could come out on a CD on the side. That was the decision, because there was too much in this film that needed to be told.

In addition because we had to build the budget left and right, and every country that invests in the film would like you to spend a good chunk of it on their people—indeed you have to justify 'French spend' or 'Dutch spend'—for example, the film was edited first in Amsterdam and then in Paris. So, I had to cut down the whole film using temporary tracks from my own music collection. And then had to find a composer who was Dutch. I asked Daniël [Hamburger], the composer, to reproduce what we'd done in the editing room because it was so specifically cut to my temporary tracks—which is a nightmare for composers, they hate doing it. It's a very difficult task of having to reproduce what is occurring and being elicited in your own articulation. But I was very uncompromising because the soundtrack had to emphasise very specific things in the edit, often subtle things. That's how the sound-track evolved—it's Alice Coltrane plus sound design and some composition embedded in it to work with the images. It wasn't a separate piece of creative composition or sound design that was worked in at the end. I don't work that way all the time, not at all, but that's what this film needed, I thought.

AB: Speaking of the process in the editing room, the cutting down for certain versions, how did this influence the structure or the logic of your narration? Are there still things you miss? Or have you thought for example about making a multi-screen installation?

PL: Well, I am massively interested in Alice Coltrane. I'd love to make a film on her even. She was another wife, if you like, who remained in the shadow of her husband, John. She was disparaged by many in the rather patriarchal jazz fraternity who held her responsible for some of the more radical developments in John Coltrane's interests and musical experiments. She was a brilliant musician in her own right, a fantastic pianist. But she got blamed and perhaps enviously side-lined for having shared the elaboration of extraordinary new musical directions, influences and ideas with him. They were another phenomenal couple who loved each other deeply and creatively and took jazz into this fantastic, very interesting new dimension. I really wanted Alice Coltrane to be in the film in the opening track, "Journey in Satchidananda," as we absorb a montage of media images—and I thought it worked quite beautifully.

I've made a film called *Sophiatown* which was very specifically about the history of apartheid, particularly the time up until 1962, that was told through the bringing together of various musicians of the time, about 50 in all, for a number of performances. The film was specifically about music and politics. I think it's very lazy to use a bit of music contemporary to the subject of the film to illustrate, "Oh here we are now in 1982," rather than building a real sound structure that works together with the image. Both image and sound are critical elements that need to be worked and then built together. I knew I didn't want to use moments like, "Oh I'll have a bit of Brenda Fassie here, a bit of Hotstix Mabuse there," because there's never enough space for them as an *also*. And because there's so much going on in the image, you can't use a track that has singing and voices and the telling of a whole story in another way.

The film couldn't be 120 minutes long. The version you can view now is the 83-minute American cut. My original director's cut was 97 minutes long, but I'd had to trim it down for broadcast on PBS, and I'd manage to make it work, basically, despite losing what were in my view some really important scenes, including one of my favourite sequences. And my

PL: When I was trying to raise the money for this film, wherever I was in the world, in America, in Holland, Paris, London, people I'd just met would go, "Oh my god, but why are you making a film about a murderer?!" The reaction was so strong all over the world that it seemed to me that the most important thing here was to make a film that large numbers of people could get to see. Obviously, because I needed to clear the rights for the archives for world-wide distribution, it was expensive. So, I made the decision, finally, that this was the most important final form for the film, *Winnie*, even though I had a screenplay for quite a different form.

To describe what was lost between my original version and the final version of *Winnie*: we managed to reconstruct an incredible scene of a roadblock where Winnie was arrested, that had been shot by different cameras. There were police cameras, there were press cameras. This was 1985. She kept returning to Johannesburg from her enforced banishment hundreds of kilometres away in a hinterland, and they kept taking her back to Brandfort.

In this long sequence, she's stopped by the police, her little grandson is ripped out of the car and stuffed back in and bangs his head, and Winnie is very angry at this treatment. Then, Winnie is forced into a police car with a white policewoman. There is a shot inside the car with the plainclothed policewoman who is sort of archetypal and dressed in 1980's shoulder pads. There's a thing that occurs between them, in the back seat of the car, where Winnie won't move to accommodate her sense of entitled presence and control, so the policewoman has to awkwardly half-sit on her lap or be left behind. It's so brilliant because Winnie's character and political position is so perfectly portrayed in that entire interchange. She doesn't care that she's surrounded by the police and that she's completely outnumbered. She knows what they're doing to her, with her, where she's being taken. She's fearless and she's enraged. And because it's been filmed by so many different cameras, like the way one would shoot a feature film, multi-camera angles, so much truth comes out of that. The material was predestined to be cut in a particular way. It was intended

to confirm a vilifying view of her wild nature, her lack of dignity and control, in which her insubordination to the 'law' of apartheid state control and her loud-mouth were reprehensible. But you look at that edit properly today, sequentially and in sync, and you think: "Wow! That woman, what she had to deal with".

You look at what's inscribed on that white police-woman's face and it's just outrageous. I dearly wanted to keep that sequence in the film. But of course, because it was such a long and involved sequence, it was the easiest thing to remove when I had to lose 14 minutes in a quick cut-down edit for the American version. The trace of the story is still there—Dali Mpofu, the lawyer, tells it in highlights—but this phenomenal part is missing, which would have made a better film.

But I was also interested in the whole process of completion of an archive-based film. So, here's what happened: The film got selected, based on a rough cut, for the Sundance Film Festival, and they would only take it if the film was finished in time, by the 5th of January, 2017. The way one works with archive material is, you edit offline with low-resolution material, covered in time codes to identify precisely the in and out point for each piece of archive. If you're doing careful, complicated editing, it means you're getting sometimes five seconds, ten second here, twelve seconds there, from different sources all over the world. When you pass to the online editing mode, to produce the film master, before you grade and do the final mix of the film, you have to replace every single second of the marked-up archive material with an identical full-resolution copy. And this is not delivered to you until the rights have been negotiated and paid for. That's how the people who control archives make money—how some make fortunes—and that's why there are organisations hoovering up all the images of the world.

So, there I was in Amsterdam trying to get, from multiple international sources, the full-res material that was still outstanding. But it was Christmas and New Year's, and people in Amsterdam have a good work-life balance and all sorts of institutions internationally close for long seasonal holidays, and all this stood between the film getting to Sundance. Quite frankly, the fact that it got to Sundance was of immense significance because it then won the Directing Award (world cinema) which was very important not just for the film but even for South Africa to see that this can be done—reconstructing more problematised versions of seemingly resolved historical stories, national myths, and women's roles within those stories. You could dig deep. And Winnie had the satisfaction of seeing that this was finally possible when it premiered at Encounters [International Documentary Film Festival]. Although, South African broadcasters remained resolutely sitting on the fence, fearful of consequences, perhaps. It was only after Winnie died, in early April 2018, that

a ferocious bidding war began between rival channels and the film was finally shown on television. It was broadcast seven times or so in the days running up to the state funeral, and it caused a storm, a huge storm. It had a massive impact in South Africa.

in a number of different ways, and building on the fact that I was a foreigner. There were online death threats. I wasn't monitoring all this, but my producers were, who were far away, and in no position to protect me. They insisted I cancel all the media commitments I'd made, which had another kind of impact, because it was made public on television in untruthful ways, as though I'd simply dropped the ball, as though I was afraid to face more public scrutiny. I also received warnings from other quarters that could not be ignored. So, the film then just had to do its work, and it did. And in fact, it was just broadcasted again on Christmas day, I believe, in South Africa.

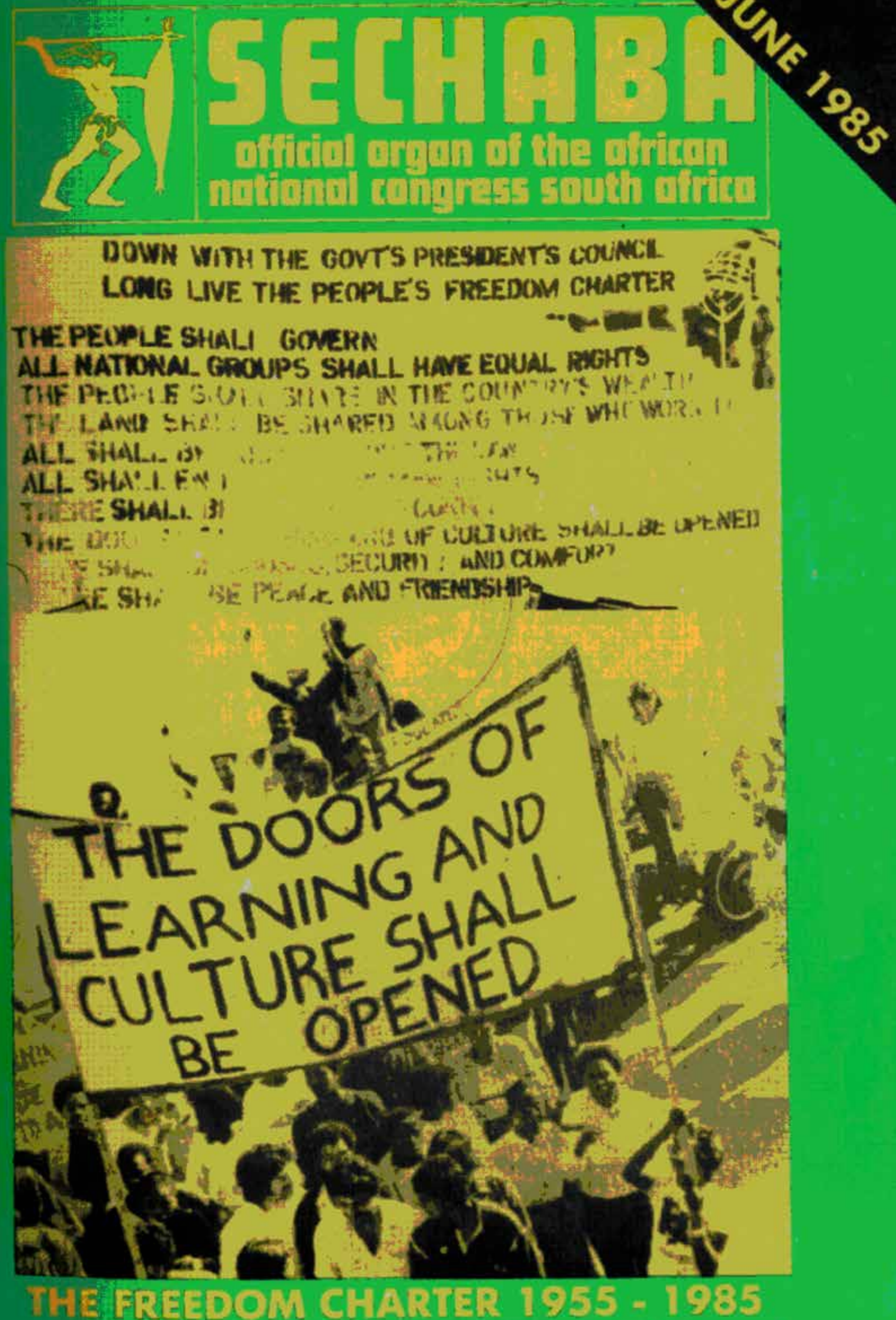
PL: Yeah!

AB: It was an eye-opener for many people?

PL: Oh yeah! Very defensive positions were taken up. Lots of controversy exploded all around, in lots of different directions. Some of it was very good, some of it was very bad, some of it was very dangerous and some of it was very confusing. For example, there's a point in the film where Vic McPherson, the head of STRATCOM (a psychological warfare programme that emerged in the twilight years of apartheid), talks about having forty journalists working directly or indirectly for him. That created a tsunami of anxious speculation. People were trying to find out who those journalists were, and then, because I hadn't foreseen the potential fall-out from this assertion and had used the only visual archive that exists of Winnie looking through newspapers at the time of the Stompie headlines, South African viewers drew literal conclusions and some people thought that this pointed to particular journalists. It's a very long story. Then a former minister called a press conference and tried to systematically destroy the film's credibility. I went to the press conference, and then there was lots of fall-out from my defence of the film in the Q&A thereafter. Things moved very fast. On one level, I was getting extraordinary responses and people, especially women, in huge numbers were thanking me for having done this work. Then the trolling began at a certain point and escalated very rapidly, engineered

KE: You know what strikes me is how much the project is really related to death. You said that your partner told you that this is a film that could only be made after Mandela dies. That becomes a kind of precondition for the film; and it's only after his death, after the construction of the myth built around his life, that the film can begin. The film circles around the afterlife of that myth. In a way, Mandela's life created a myth that silenced Winnie Mandela and consigned her to a certain kind of portrait of ignominy. It becomes possible to return to that Mandela myth which concerns the unfinished historical processing of apartheid and of what it meant to live through apartheid. What strikes me is how unrepentant many of these apartheid security people are—

KE: —the very idea of the Sunset Clauses and the idea of Truth and Reconciliation means that there is no absolute break with apartheid; there is a continuity and the longer that continues the more unbearably traumatic it becomes. It's a question of the afterlife of the dead. You spoke of your own personal loss in the making of your film. As you look back, Winnie Mandela had died, and so many others. When I think of my favourite documentaries, I think of the capacity documentary has to create a conference of the dead, in which the dead speak to each other—people that would never speak to each other in life all meet inside of documentary. I think that documentary is a question of the emplotment of the dead and the living; of something that is impossible in life, which is always running forward. In documentary, you get to stage and restage meetings between those that have died and those that are still alive. The unfinished nature of documentary means that documentary made with historical material is not itself historical; it is a contemporary account of the afterlife of the dead in the presence of the living. I wanted to thank you for making your work; I think that there's a cost to pay for talking with the dead. Documentary takes its toll; it exacts a price to make a work such as this.



Nothing is
stopping us
except us

Jihan El Tahri and Kodwo Eshun

in conversation with Sue Rabkin



We learned about **Sue Rabkin** from the documentary, *Behind the Rainbow* (2008): a film researched and directed by **Jihan El-Tahri** about the ANC’s transitions from a liberation movement to the political party in power.¹ Sue Rabkin appeared so much ahead of things, fearless, outspoken and humorous. When we asked Jihan, during the preparation for the *Public Hearings Festival* in June 2020, who she would like to talk to about the presence and absence of women in South Africa, about the legal potential of the

Constitution in terms of equal rights etc., she didn’t have to think twice. So, we had the great pleasure to meet with Sue Rabkin virtually for a few Saturday afternoons. We kept going in zigzags but returned to speaking about Ruth First. It was at that moment that **Kodwo Eshun** joined in saying, “she is a hero of mine.” The following conversation is a slightly edited transcript, recorded on 21 June 2020 and audible on <http://woa.kein.org/node/163>.

Annett Busch: Could you briefly introduce yourself and tell us how you got involved in the struggle against the South African apartheid regime, back in the 1960s?

Sue Rabkin: I grew up in a part of London in which many of the white South Africans came to stay when they left South Africa after the first State of Emergency in the early 1960s. There was thus an influx of South Africans into my local school, and I started to have many South African friends. My political involvement began around the age of fifteen when I went on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) marches in the early 1960s. From thereon, I became more and more politically involved.

Among the South African friends in my circle was David Rabkin, aged fourteen years and newly arrived from Cape Town. We became involved, on and off, for many years until he recruited me, via the Algerian Communist Party and a Syrian Communist Party Central Committee member, into the South African Communist Party (SACP). We married in 1972, and went to live in Cape Town, as members of the SACP and part of the SACP underground machinery. We operated clandestinely in Cape Town for four years producing SACP and ANC propaganda until we were arrested in 1976. David was sentenced to eight and a half years, and I was sentenced to three years which was suspended, and I only had to serve a one-month incarceration. During that one month I gave birth to my second child. I was then deported back to Britain.

One year later, I was asked by the Chairman of the SACP if I would work with Mac Maharaj who had recently been released from Robben Island after serving a fifteen-year sentence. He had smuggled out of prison Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*. I typed out the first draft of the manuscript. During the two and a half years we worked on the Mandela book, Mac was deployed by the Revolutionary Council of the ANC to head up what was then called “Internal Political Reconstruction” which was, as the name suggests, the apparatus charged with creating the underground machinery of the ANC inside South Africa. Because of my experience working in the underground, I was then deployed in Maputo to carry out this task.

Jihan El-Tahri: Before we come back to these moments in Maputo, let me fast forward and enter the stage from a different angle: the legal foundation for new SA [South Africa], so to speak. I always wondered—how did you get to such a Constitution so quickly? And getting to

it, how a liberation movement in the midst of battle, in the midst of all this, why would they be even thinking of a Constitution? Could you tell us from your side, because you were there, how did all this start happening?

SR: A number of comrades who had come into exile had legal qualifications. They were put together in a collective. The comrades that I knew well were **Brigitte Mabandla**², **Zola Skweyiya** and a bit later **Penuell Maduna**. They were put together in what I think was called the Legal Department in Lusaka, and my understanding is that **Oliver Tambo** asked them to start working on constitutional principles. Later I learned that **Albie [Sachs]** worked with them too. Comrades who attended the Kabwe Conference in 1985 reported back that Albie spoke at the conference, some-

1 “Plotting an uninterrupted timeline”—A conversation between Kodwo Eshun and Jihan El-Tahri, *Women on Aeroplanes Inflight Magazine* #5, 2020.

2 “In 1996 Brigitte Mabandla, then a deputy minister, explained that members of rural women’s organisations were ‘... more vocal about the essence of women’s liberation, they talk about emancipation from patriarchal control, the traditional system, they talk about equal access to resources, and that is profound. They also have a stand on abortion, that women have a choice. The assumption that this is imposed by the elite does not hold water in South Africa. It is, you see, the struggle atmosphere in the country [which] enabled women to at least claim the space to talk. It is not like in other countries really, even though they were suppressed in the internal days of the 1980s when we said struggle first, gender last.” Gisela Geisler, *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa—Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation and Representation* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrika-institutet, 2004), 80.

3 Albie Sachs: “Oliver Tambo mentioned to me the difficulties that the movement faced dealing with captured enemy agents, whose objectives were to destroy the organisation, to carry out assassinations, to sabotage equipment. These activities were not the result of dissidence inside the organisation, but part of the enemy’s attacks on us. Host countries in Africa didn’t want to be saddled with the problems of the different freedom movements—each exiled organisation had to make its own arrangements. And it was clear to me that he, Oliver Tambo, supported the international principles as a lawyer, but not only as a lawyer, but also as a person, as a leader, and as a Christian. His Christianity was very deep, and he often considered leaving the political struggle to become a full-time Anglican minister of religion. So I had to find the language, the legal language, to crystallise an ideal of justice inside our own ranks, one that would be manageable and that would inspire the rank and file inside the ANC. At one stage in Maputo—remember I was not part of the MK [uMkhonto we-Sizwe]—I had bumped into this man, we never asked for names, who asked

me out of the blue: ‘Tell me comrade Albie, when you join the ANC, do you have any rights?’ Now, I had never heard that question asked before. Lawyers like myself raised this kind of jurisprudential issue in class, but here was an MK soldier posing the question. When you joined the ANC voluntarily, dedicating your life to the collective freedom struggle, did you cede your right to have personal rights? Oliver Tambo was never one to issue a decree from the top. He insisted that the issue of treatment of captives be dealt with in a democratic manner at a delegates’ conference, and be discussed in advance by the whole movement. In the result, the question of whether it was legitimate to use torture, or whatever euphemism was used, against captured enemy agents whose objective was to destroy the organisation, and who might have important information about impending enemy action, was a deep matter of struggle of morality. We discussed it in our different branches throughout the world. I was then asked at an ANC conference in a small Zambian town, called Kabwe, to introduce the Code of Conduct. It operated at three levels. At the lowest level, it dealt with the legal processes to be followed in the case of people who came drunk to branch meetings and who were just disruptive, and so on. You dealt with that politically. The next level related to people who stabbed, stole, assaulted, crashed motorcars, and drove while drunk. We developed regional tribunals with a limited range of penalties to handle these alleged offenders. At the highest level, the Code of Conduct dealt with grave offences that were aimed at destroying the organisation. These included killing members, assassinating leaders, using bombs and poison to cause mayhem. In dealing with these issues, very special procedures were laid down. Offences were defined with some precision. Evidence had to be led and could be challenged. Defenders were provided. A range of permissible punishments was provided. There was a system of appeal. I think it is the most important legal work I’ve ever done.” Drucilla Cornell, Karin Van Marle, Albie Sachs: *Albie Sachs and Transformation in South Africa From Revolutionary Activist to Constitutional Court Judge* (New York: Birkbeck Law Press, 2014), 80.

thing along the lines of Humanitarian Law³. I know that to be one of Albie's areas of expertise. He was working in Mozambique, working with FRELIMO, setting up a progressive legal framework that was harmonious with customary law or African law. That's how we first heard about constitutional principles.

JET: That whole moment of the Kabwe Conference, was there a form of forward-looking thinking other than just the Freedom Charter?

SR: I wasn't at the Kabwe conference. I think there was *forward-looking* but not in the way you are understanding it. I think the *forward-looking* was that our struggle has to be rooted amongst the people for it to be supported, and the Freedom Charter is like the baseline. It's a common programme, what everybody in SA wants. So, in order for us to convey those principles of equality, which is what the Freedom Charter is all about after all, equality—that has to be captured in the political demands to be put forward. The Freedom Charter is a very human document, it places humanity at the centre of the kind of a SA we want to see. There was a very strong militant spirit at the Kabwe conference in 1985. MK [uMkhonto weSizwe] combatants and young militants were very well represented. They were

4 "In August 1987, on hearing that ANC executive member Ruth Mompati was visiting London to promote South Africa Women's Day, I devised a plan and requested an interview. A courageous fighter against the apartheid regime, Mompati was one of the leaders of the biggest women's demonstration in South African history. In 1956, 20,000 women marched on the Union Buildings—the seat of government in Pretoria—to protest at the extension of the notorious pass laws to women. Most of my interview with Mompati was about the struggle for women's emancipation, and was duly published in Labour Weekly. But towards the end, I raised the issue of women's sexual emancipation—in particular the human rights of lesbians and their role in the struggle against apartheid. This provoked an astonishing outburst that reconfirmed all the previous horror stories that I had heard about ANC homophobia." Peter Tatchell: "South Africa: How the ANC was won for LGBT rights" www.petertatchellfoundation.org

5 See also "History of Women's Struggle in South Africa" on www.sahistory.org.za

6 On the 9th of August 1956, together with Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Theresa Williams de Bruyn, Lillian Ngoyi led the women's anti-pass march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, one of the largest demonstrations staged in South African history. Holding thousands of petitions in one hand, Ngoyi was the one who knocked on Prime Minister Strijdom's door to hand over the petitions. "Lilian Masediba Ngoyi" on www.sahistory.org.za

7 "In South Africa, for example, many well-rehearsed revolting songs are often recycled and remixed, posing an added irony: whereas chants like, "Si-yaya Epitoli" (meaning: we are going, or rather, marching to Pretoria) were sung fervently in October 2015 by some of the youth marching on the government buildings to call for a no-fees-increase. That particular revolting song was pelted like a rock at the glass house now run by those erstwhile radicals of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, who sang the very same ditty to threaten apartheid, then ensconced in those selfsame hallowed halls of the union buildings. A kind of poignant switch had therefore been flipped, transposing a new band of revolutionaries at the door—in this case, the kids—out where the parents once revolted." Neo Muyanga, "Songs in the key of revolution" on <http://woa.kein.org/node/157>

8 Ruth arrived in Maputo in 1977 to direct a study on black miners, and she returned the following year, taking an appointment as Assistant Director and Director of Research at the Center of African Studies. Although it took her another five years to formally resign from Durham, she was firmly placed in Mozambique from 1977 onward. Alan Wieder, *Ruth First and Joe Slovo in the War Against Apartheid*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013, 206.

9 ancarchive.org/womens-section.

impatient with what they saw was the slow pace of progress and wanted to accelerate our efforts, especially in relation to the armed struggle. The "culture of the gun" was very apparent amongst many delegates. Looking back, I can see that it was really strategic for Tambo, at that point in time and in that forum, to introduce ideas that would become the basic principles of a new Constitution for the country. To be frank, and knowing the militancy of the time, it should be noted that the ideas put forward were listened to. I remember getting a report back in Maputo from the Kabwe Conference and how many comrades thought Albie was a liberal because of the ideas he was putting forward.



JET: Can you elaborate on what that means, "the culture of the gun"?

SR: That we love the gun, and the gun is going to liberate us. I used to be in briefing sessions when comrades used to come to train comrades on how to use an AK. And they used to stroke the AK and say, "This is our liberator." I objected to that, because it's our politics that liberates us, not the gun. But that was the way of thinking of many in MK, and it is still the way of thinking of a sizeable number of MK comrades whilst simultaneously emphasising that MK is a 'political' army.

So, to get back to the humanity. O.R. [Oliver Tambo] was a Christian in the broadest sense of the word. **Joe Slovo** used to tell me that O.R. was a better communist than half the communists in the Communist Party because he embodied humanity and tolerance. He believed in equality, in human rights, and he shared those values with **Walter Sisulu** and many of the other members of the leadership. Those values permeated the politics of those outstanding leaders. They were continually brought to the front of discussions and the development of political positions. Most of the comrades on the left were very enlightened. Slovo was very enlightened. For example, when the issue of the victimisation of homosexuals arose in an NEC [National Executive Committee] discussion, there were only a few comrades who supported the position of non-victimisation against homosexuals. There were comrades who thought and who were quite open in their opinion that "There's no such thing as homosexuality amongst Africans." I'd respond to this and tentatively say *umm*, what about homosexual practices in prisons? And those comrades would say, "No, that's different circumstances, it's the whites that have brought homosexuality to Africa." There was a lack of enlightenment on some issues.

JET: You mentioned the two elements that are always brought up as really advanced in the Constitution, that and women's rights.

SR: My understanding of how the issue of non-discrimination of homosexuals was retained in the Constitution was because, I'm sorry to say, we were looking for votes. There was a loud voice in SA society that said, "If you victimise homosexuals you are going to lose a lot of support." Non-discrimination of homosexuality was put into our policy papers, and it became difficult to oppose it. When **Ruth Mompati**,⁴ who was the ANC Chief Representative in London, made a speech in London just before the SAP [South African Party] first election and said, "We (ANC) don't agree with homosexuality, we don't accept it," the anti-apartheid movement went mad. She had to withdraw her statement. And after the elections, it was not possible to take the clause out of the Constitution. So, it stayed there!

JET: From the very beginning of the struggle, many women joined the ANC. Tracing that evolution of women's rights to where we are at today—how would you give me a beginning point?⁵

SR: In the beginning, women couldn't be members of the ANC. Women were only given membership in the 1940s, and it was women like **Albertina Sisulu and Lillian Ngoyi**⁶, and all those fabulous women from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s who mobilised women to participate in the struggle against the apartheid regime. There was the **women's march to Pretoria**⁷ in 1956, which was huge! And I think that, then, the ANC thought, "Oh oh, this seems to be a constituency, we better take note of it." When I got to **Maputo in 1978**, most women were deployed in a supportive capacity. Even women who had been trained militarily. It wasn't that women were treated badly, it's just that they weren't treated equally. You know, the cooking would be done by women, the childcare would be done by women, it was that kind of assumption. And I told you last week what **Ruth [First]**⁸ said in the first women's meeting I ever attended in Maputo, because she was actually a feminist, you know, a very progressive feminist.

JET: Tell me that story again.



SR: We go to this meeting of the **Women's Section**⁹ and it was all the ANC women in Maputo, except those who were underground. We met in somebody's flat. I'd only arrived in Maputo a couple of weeks earlier, so we're talking early **1979**. We walked there on a rainy hot February Saturday afternoon. It was the first Women's Section meeting I had attended in Maputo. There were about four older women and six or seven younger women who were part of the ANC support network. Some of these women had married Mozambicans and had come to Mozambique to join their husbands. But they had maintained their SA identity and actually went on to play a very key role in support of our underground work. The older women were very intimidating and in some ways quite authoritarian. They had been in the ANC for a long time and, I'm sure, they had to deal over time with a lot of backward men. I felt sorry for any man who crossed them.

They were assigned by the ANC to take care of the influx of young women who came out of the country in **1976** to join MK in the wake of the **Soweto uprising**. These young women went to the military training camps, but they were in such a minority that they became very vulnerable. It was becoming a problem for the ANC. Hundreds of eighteen-year-olds in one camp, and a handful of young women, some kind of authority was needed there that would protect the young women. So these older women were brought in. They had grown up in the 1930s, and in their way of thinking that young people shouldn't/couldn't mix sexually, so, all the young women had to be in their dorm by eight o'clock at night. They were very very strict with the women, very strict. Of course, that didn't stop any nocturnal activity, you know what I'm saying.

When I went to **Caxito** [ANC military training camp in Angola] in **1981**, women could only train in a camp if there were enough of them to form a group. The ANC had found that if they sent only one or two women at a time, which is how many women there were at any given time, it didn't work. There were too many men and on top of that, the men had been in the camps for a while. Women, therefore, had to be militarily trained in groups. When I got to Caxito, I was with a group of women, all of whom I knew. They were and still are serious and impressive cadres. They have all gone on to make a tremendous contribution to the transformation of the country. There were eight of us and the camp command had made us a special toilet because there were no toilets for women. There were special separate washing facilities and we were housed separately. This had its downside though. The women's toilet was set up a little way away from the centre of the camp. We had to walk past a huge black pig that was being fattened up for one of the celebrations—Freedom Day or whatever. The pig was enormous. I've never seen such a big pig in my life! And it snorted to say hello as

we walked passed, so we used to shriek "Aaah!!" The point I'm making is that we didn't go at night because we were too scared. These were the great revolutionary military combatants who were too scared of this pig! So in desperation, we used to squat outside the room where we were staying. And the second time I did that, I was summoned to the command. "Comrade, you cannot do this. We can see your bum from miles away. Your white bum is showing".

But the women were trained like everybody else. By the time I went for military training, the battle for equality in the camps had been won by the women who came before us. There was no problem when I was there. The women were trained equally in the camps. But after your training, what happened to you? Where were you deployed? Most of the women were deployed as secretaries to the leadership, to individual leaders. Most of the women weren't given the same kind of opportunity to participate in military activity like the men.

By **the time we were trained in 1981**, things had progressed. In my group of eight women, all of whom I knew well and with whom I worked at the "front"—they were deployed in the political military structures. We told the camp command we wanted to put on a show for the **August 9th ANC Women's Day**. And since the camp command didn't quite know what to say, they said "Ok". We decided to illustrate the triple oppression of women—which was the accepted political policy position of the ANC. Triple oppression of women of class, colour and gender. We decided that each one of the eight of us would represent a woman in SA.

There was a domestic worker, there was a student, there was a farm labourer, a factory worker, a trade unionist and so on. When it came to me, everyone said, "Oh well, what can Sue do?" And one of the women, who I am now very friendly with, but who wasn't too partial to me in the beginning said, "She can't do anything, I mean, what's she going to do? Don't be ridiculous."

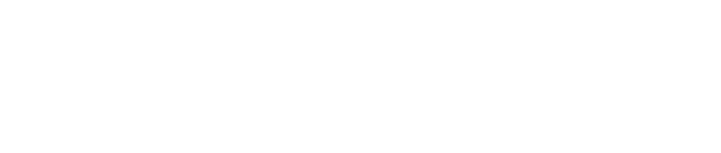
Then I said, "**I could be me.**" And they said, "Oh, ok!" The male comrades gathered round the stage anticipating our performance. Looking back, I think there was a great deal of pride that there were women in MK ranks. We all came onto the stage, one after the other, announcing who we were and explaining the kind of oppression we experienced. We were explaining in practical terms the triple oppression of women. It was hugely successful. All the comrades loved it, wildly applauding each woman. The comrades were shooting their guns in appreciation. The position of women in MK and in the ANC progressed.

You pushed forward, got to a certain point and then you pushed forward again for another step. That's how it was. It was very hard work. We used to have political discussions in the political machinery every Tuesday night, and we invited the military machinery to join us where I did one session on "women's emancipation." Everybody came including one of our leaders, **John Nkadimeng**. I asked him, "Comrade Nkadimeng, why don't you bring your wife?" And he said "Oh, ok." I don't think it had ever really dawned on him to invite her. And she came. It was the first political meeting she'd been to, in Maputo. She was wonderful, but he hadn't realised that she needed and wanted to be brought in. I ended the talk by saying that the rights of women should be enshrined in the new Constitution. And a comrade asked, "What for?" So, I said, "Just to make sure. It's clear that everybody here is in full agreement that women must have full and equal rights, but let's have it in the new Constitution." And the comrade didn't speak to me for a year. He wasn't hostile. He just thought I was over the top and that it wasn't central. He said, "I think you're overreacting, and it is not necessary. We all know that women are equal, there's no need to put it in the Constitution."

So it happened. And it is still happening. It is a journey.



JET: Absolutely! But tell me more about that conversation Ruth First had at the Women's Section in Maputo ...



SR: Back to the Women's Section meeting that Saturday afternoon in Maputo: the comrade that was chairing the meeting was a wonderful woman called **Florence Mophosho**¹⁰. She was fabulous. She was strong and brave. A force to be reckoned with. She was, like everybody else, very in awe of Ruth. You couldn't not be in awe of Ruth, because she was so clever, and her politics were inspirational. But she was a bit rough, and she was stern. The first item on the agenda was school uniforms or maybe it was ANC pioneers' uniforms. Ruth said, "Comrade Florence, let's move forward, let's discuss. Let's bring up women's emancipation. Let's discuss where we come from. Let us bury this idea that everything for women and for all of South Africans **before 1962** was wonderful. That when women went down to the river to wash their clothes, they were happy and singing and that they acted like they were free." What she was actually saying was that it wasn't the arrival of the colonialists in 1652 that led to the oppression and subjugation of women. In pre-colonial traditional societies too women were not treated as equals to men. I'll never forget it because everybody sat there knowing that nobody enjoys going to the river to wash clothes, that it's hard, hard work to carry water to your house for cooking and washing. Ruth put forward a feminist agenda and everyone accepted it, the women accepted it.

JET: Ruth obviously had a very critical role within the ANC in exile during these days. Also, inside the country, **Winnie Mandela** had a huge role. Was there any connection between these women, inside and outside? And the other question is, did Winnie in any way affect the role of women?



SR: Oh, I think so. Look at the role she played. I mean, if anybody was a symbol of bravery and courage it was her. That famous incident when she appeared at a rally—it was at the time of necklacing—Winnie stood up and she shook a box of matches and said, "This is our weapon." I think it was wonderful.



JET: Oh!



SR: The ANC was angry because Oliver Tambo had condemned necklacing, quite rightly. It's barbaric! But Winnie was showing that she wasn't taking any shit from anybody, that she wasn't frightened of anybody like the Special Branch or the Security Police. She was prepared to take on anyone who collaborated and betrayed the movement. She was in contact with the exiled leadership throughout. I'm pretty sure she was in contact with Tambo and Mbeki. Comrades like me were much too junior to be in contact with the leadership inside the country. But we, in the political machinery, did have contact with the women's organisations in the different provinces. There wasn't a national women's movement at the point. There was a women's organisation in the Cape, there was the Natal Organisation of Women [NOW] and there was FED-TRAW [Federation of Transvaal Women]. We paid attention to all the women's organisations just as we did to all other community-based organisations. We recruited from them all. I can tell you a number of women we recruited from the women's organisations, **Susan Shabangu** was one of

them, I think **Bathabile [Dlamini]** was one of them, if I'm not mistaken. So a lot of women were recruited and they were, of course, wonderful, I mean, women are wonderful. They are much better at any of this work than the men are, quite frankly, especially on the organisational level. Contact between outside and inside happened at different levels and at different levels of seniority. The ANC was in touch with Winnie throughout. A delegation from the Mass Democratic Movement [MDM] came out to see the ANC in Lusaka. I think it was **Murphy Morobe** and **Valli Moosa**, maybe also **Sydney Mufamadi**, I can't remember. But a delegation from the MDM came out to report and discuss what was happening with the football club at Winnie's house in Soweto. There was tension between Winnie and the MDM, for many years on the issue of the football club.



JET: After 1983 you mean?



SR: Ya, before the formation of the UDF [United Democratic Front]. Political activity on the mass level ['legal/open' activity was referred to as being part of the Mass Democratic Movement]. It was given organisational expression with the formation of the UDF.



JET: It was a tense moment, that brings us back to the legal aspect—what then happened to Winnie? Coming from the outside, I felt that Winnie was the only "sacrificial lamb" or "scapegoat", if you want, of the legal process that came with the transition.



SR: Look, the white regime hated her. They hated her with every drop of their blood. Because she resisted everything, she told them where to get off. She showed no fear. She was a symbol of resistance, she was a symbol of black liberation, however you want to put it, she was a symbol of the armed struggle. She publicly identified 100% with the ANC, with the armed struggle, with the Black Consciousness Movement. She was very active in the women's movement. The regime was out to get her whichever way they could. There's no question about it. And I think that the ANC floundered on this because, although, some of the things she did were out of order, i.e., she often worked outside of structures and, like many leaders, she made mistakes. Leaders like Winnie don't come in a box, a readymade package of the right

10 "In 1957, she was a member of the Alexandra Bus Boycott Committee. The repercussions of the boycott were felt far beyond the boundaries of the Transvaal province. This was before the 1960 State of Emergency, and before the ANC was banned. During the State of Emergency in 1960, Florence Mophosho went underground and continued to work as an organiser for the ANC. [...] In 1964, she was banned. She was instructed by the ANC to leave South Africa, and she went to Lusaka and later to Dar es Salaam. It was at this time that the ANC and its Women's Section decided to send her to Berlin, German Democratic Republic, to represent the Women's Section at the Women's International Democratic Federation, and she remained at that post for four and a half years. She met many women from all over the world. She compared their lives with

measurements, if you know what I mean. What eventually transpired about the football club was a disgrace. The movement had not realised that she was 100% surrounded by enemy agents. She was used, she was tortured, she went on to very heavy medication because she wasn't well, and I think she got the bad end of the stick. That's my personal view. I know she did things that were wrong, I know she did, but she did a lot that was right.

JET: Without getting into the content of what she did or didn't do, what I think is quite interesting is that the legal process, especially the Truth [and Reconciliation] Commission, that got practically everyone from the apartheid regime off the hook, what did that legal system pin on Winnie?

SR: I think she was a sitting duck. The regime could get away with it. They could put the problem on her and they got away with it and the movement did not come to her help. One of the reasons being that she was very stubborn, and she stuck to what she believed in. I can't remember what were the charges. She was sometimes out of order, as I said, but for very understandable reasons and she was very vulnerable. I remember Madiba going to court, to attend her trial at some stage. But the apartheid regime also knew that if they sentenced her there would be another revolution and I think that's why she never got sentenced. She was very popular with the masses because she lived with them, amongst them and supported them. She identified with them and fought for them. She was held up by them as a leader.

JET: Which is quite interesting, speaking of the legal framework. You started with the idea of humanism and enshrining things into a Constitution that would somehow guarantee a better life for all in the future. Then, you go into the transition where these ideas are to be transformed into actual implementable realities, but the result is a legal system that doesn't actually do that.

SR: Well, I don't quite agree with your description of the process. My understanding of the process is that the

Constitution is an enabling document. It sets down the framework and what then has to happen is that the legislation is drawn up which bring those principles into being. It's been a long, ongoing process. There have been many instances where the introduction of enabling legislation hasn't taken place or maybe it's still going to happen. One of the tragedies that we've been through, and this one is a very personal one for me and one that I feel very strongly about, is the fact that the parliament has not fulfilled its role. It hasn't been understood in the way I think it should've been understood that it is an oversight body. It has been seen more as a terrain for contestation rather than getting legislation in place wherein you implement the principles of the Constitution. That's still, very much, work in progress.

JET: Have there been any legislations that you can think of in the domain of equality, in women's rights, that have moved ahead or even gone backwards?

SR: This last piece of legislation, which is referred to as the "Bantustan Bill" ...

JET: What is it?

SR: That's not it's title, but it's referred to by ANC people as the "Bantustan Bill" [Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act] because it is so backward, it is so shocking. In essence, the legislation reduces the status of African women almost to where it was before 1990 when there weren't equal rights. I can't remember the details now. I went into it at some stage, and we were signing petitions.¹¹

The Bill was a result of consultations with traditional authorities. My understanding is that we have allowed them to remain and function because we don't want to rock the apple cart. The 'theory' is that these traditional authorities will fall away as democracy deepens. However, this hasn't happened because, in many instances, these authorities play a very significant role in the rural areas. For example, they issue birth certificates, they perform the function of a local authority—they play an important role because they fill a "governance gap." So of course, because they haven't been dissolved or dismantled, they want to have a voice, right? And as their voices are listened to, they then want rights. And in addition, they want funding. All of this is perfectly understandable.

My point is, that their role doesn't have to be reactionary. For example, when I was living in Pretoria, the woman who was the domestic worker in the house where I had a room came from Venda. She had a plot where she was building her house and the plot was given, or leased to her, by the chief and I used to ask, "Can he take that house away from you?" And she said, "Yes, but he won't." So I'd say, "How do you know he won't?" I was trying to understand. I was worried that she was pouring all this money into building this house (and I'm not talking about a mansion, I'm talking about a tiny little house on a plot in a village, in Venda) but she had no security of tenure. So, the traditional authorities have some legal authority which is recognised. This bill seems to be the result of extensive consultations with those authorities.

However, in the process, the status of women has been reversed. And there's been a lot of arguments and protest. **Nomboniso Gasa** has been very vocal in criticising this Bill. She has unpacked the details and the subsequent negative impact this Bill will have on women. She has experience in this field because she grew up in a village in the Transkei.¹²

So, you asked me for examples of how or where the struggle for equality for women has gone backwards—this Bill is a good example. This issue can be seen in the context of the legacy we inherited of a distorted 'tribal' structure. Distorted because those 'chiefs' and 'kings' who opposed the apartheid regime were removed and replaced by those who complied and did not resist the regime. Distorted also in the sense that only parts of that culture are upheld in the urban areas. This can be seen very clearly in relation to the status of women. Women who work for a wage in an urban environment are much less likely to accept an unequal status. They are less likely to accept polygamy, which is still legal in SA, than their rural counterparts. The transition in SA has also left intact royal households. Kings have status and are supported financially by the government.

JET: Without going too much into detail, has there been sort of a way of amalgamating this traditional power—because everything we're talking about *really* is about power structures?

SR: Yeah!

JET: When do power structures, then, translate what is in the Constitution and how it is implemented, to give a better life for all? The issue you brought up about traditional leaders, obviously, it has its manifestation, as you were say-

ing, in the possibility of setting back something like women's rights. But, the process itself of that power structure, amalgamating both, for something that isn't just political but rather for a better life is being translated by the structures and the legal process.

SR: You know, it's not a subject that I'm well versed in and I'm not confident of the depth of my understanding of this issue. However, I always anticipated that with the advent of democracy, the role of traditional leaders would be gradually adjusted to the new dispensation. My understanding is that that whole system of traditional leaders was corrupted by the apartheid machine. The traditional leaders who didn't agree with the apartheid government were sidelined and were replaced. My experience in the ANC has been that due to this corruption of the traditional structures, they lack legitimacy and are not fully respected by the ANC or even seen as legitimate. But at the same time they exist, and they play a role in governance. They play a role in the community, in the absence of government structures. The status of women in traditional society is not one of equality with men.

¹¹ Sindiso Mnisi Weeks from UCT's Law, Race and Gender Unit states that, "This Bill creates separate categories of citizenship reminiscent of apartheid. It strips rural people of basic citizenship rights. Those living in the former Bantustan areas will be second-class citizens, with no right to the legal representation and recourse the law allows for." The alliance believes that customary law continues to play an important role in the lives of many rural South Africans. However, the Bill does not appreciate the real-life experiences of people on the ground. The Bill was developed in close consultation with traditional leaders, rather than in consultation with the people who will be most affected by it, namely rural citizens, particularly women. "Civil Society Groups oppose traditional courts bill" on constitutionallyspeaking.co.za and "Stop the Bantustans" on stopthebantustanbills.org

¹² "Our village was 55 minutes from Queenstown, where we saw the GP, dentist and bought fresh milk to sell and supplies for my parents' shop. We went to town almost every day and sometimes twice a day. We crossed two borders, first the Transkei border on exit to South Africa. And then a few minutes later, we crossed the South African border and repeated this, with stamped passports on our way back. The bakkie was always full of village kids, singing at the top of our voices, urging my father to overtake cars and generally fooling around. [...] All these factors contributed to my fascination with land. In addition to this, we worked the land and lived off it in my village. There were problems that were introduced by the Transkei government which took arbitrary decisions about land, irrigation and development. They built an irrigation scheme in Qamata. My parents were actually excited by this development and for many years, we got produce to sell and to live off, peas, mil-lies, sorghum, potatoes, cabbage- just about every crop we planted. The land was generous. One year, without any discussion with the communities, the Transkei government entered into an agreement with Taiwanese companies. Swathes of land were taken and converted into rice paddies. Rice paddies in Qamata. People had no say over this. They were allocated smaller plots for their use and we competed with rice paddies for water. This was the time of drought so naturally the rice paddies did very well. The people, not so well. From these complicated roots of my family's complex identities, the hardship and isolation brought by border posts and the powerlessness over the plough fields and the irrigation scheme, within me, a commitment to understand the land questions of South Africa and to contribute to a better system and to free the land, grew. When I worked for the ANC in the early 1990s, this grew strongly. I was fascinated and frustrated by the manner in which the land question was handled during the constitutional negotiations. I did not have a position as such, but I believed very strongly that land is not property and should not be treated as such. I cornered President Mandela about this and he asked me to develop my position. I did and we engaged on this. Frankly, I am not sure how coherent I was but I believed that land, like the sea and the air should be treated as a national resource." "A conversation with Nomboniso Gasa" on <https://leadershipconversations.co.za>

JET: To go back to the Women's League, there were these flipping moments when particular events became dividing lines. For example, when the Women's League supported Zuma during his rape trial, did that transform the role of the Women's League into political alliances rather than concentrating on issues that actually concerned women?

JET: Is the fact that having such a progressive Constitution and saying, well, women's rights are enshrined in it anyway become, actually, something that holds it back rather than moves it forward?

SR: No, I don't think so. The issues facing women in SA are today a priority. Gender-based violence including rape are major problems in SA society. Equal pay for equal work is lower on the agenda. Why isn't the Women's League demanding this? I am distressed with the way we are approaching the ghastly problem of gender-based violence. We don't seem to be trying to understand where this problem emanates from. It's not enough to be shouting in protest. It's not enough to be drawing attention to this problem. Concrete and practical measures can only be introduced when there is understanding of why it is taking place. In my view, that should be one of the tasks of the Women's League. They should say, "We want legislation on equal pay, and we want it now." We've got a woman who is a minister in-charge of women. Why isn't she producing that legislation? Now. This minute. What is stopping her? The Women's League should be saying that there are resolutions of conferences that say that the ANC Constitution must be aligned with the SA Constitution. So why is the Women's League not doing that as part of their Programme of Action? Why are they not going to go through this Constitution to align issues? Why are they not looking at every little thing that affects women and see to it that legislation is introduced to give meaning to what the Constitution says? Why aren't they doing that? What are they doing? Frankly, I'm not clear what they're doing. When you go to rallies, half the stadium is in Women's League uniforms. It's such a captive audience, you could do so many brilliant things with that support. And as I said, it's being used to support Zuma and then it's being used to support Nkosazana, or it's being used to support someone else, and then the cry is to have a woman president. I'd love to see a woman president, but what is her programme? What's she going to do that's different?

JET: But does the existing political system allow for the Women's League to change the system?

SR: Absolutely, there's nothing stopping it. Nothing on this earth. There's nothing stopping the ANC changing, except for the ANC. And if one more person this week tells me, "No, Comrade Sue, you can't do that, that's not the way it's done ...!" We used to have the same argument in Maputo. And I'd say, "Who says it's not the way it's done? Did Moses come down from the mountain and say you will do it this way? It isn't working this way, let's do it another way, and try and find a way where it's working." There's nothing stopping us, except us. Nothing.

JET: If you had one thing you could do, just one, what would you do?

SR: I have to think about that, because there are too many things that need to be done. [laughs] That's so ironic, because I'm the one that always says, "No no, we can't have that many things we have to do. We can't have a shopping list. We must focus on one or two things." One of the things I would do is to explore how an organisation should and can function if it has proper accountability. What does that depend on? Is it structure? Is it politics? Is it both? What is it that you need to ensure proper accountability? I think, if we had accountability of leadership, many many people would fall on the wayside and many other people would rise into the leadership. That's what's holding us up, our leadership is not accountable as individuals. We're only accountable as a collective when it comes to elections.

JET: Why are they not accountable? Doesn't loyalty play a factor in that?

SR: No, nepotism and patronage play a factor in that. I can't ask Jihan because she made this film and I was in that film, but if I put her on the spot, she won't ask me to be in the next film. Already, she's married to my brother-in-law, or maybe it's because she laid out the money for a new car for me—it's *all* that. That's why I said, accountability is the bottom line. And to have accountability, you've got to have some kind of objective measure. You can't have a subjective measure. The issue of measuring competence and integ-

ity and honesty and quality is what one is striving for. It's the measurement that is so difficult to determine. Do you agree?

JET: I definitely think that accountability is the backbone, but I do wonder to what extent loyalty is a factor. Let me put it in a different way: to say that I agree completely would mean that I think that ideology and what the ANC stood for is completely out of the window, which I'm not sure is the case.

SR: No, it's not out of the window, Jihan. It's a different ideology because the composition of the ANC is different. The ANC became left-wing in the 1940s because of the growth of the African working class which was then organised by the SACP and by the ICU [Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union]. The trade union movement and the Communist Party were (and are) in alliance with the ANC. The interests of the African working class became dominant and there was therefore a dominance of left-wing thinking that continued through the 1980s until 1990. And then, a whole set of things changed, one of which was that we came to power. The composition of the ANC is no longer dominated by the industrialised African working class. We now have a very vocal, very greedy, very rapacious new middle class who are inside the ANC and pushing and influencing ANC policy to benefit themselves. Just as the working class were pushing policies that would benefit themselves. That's what has changed. So, the ideology, what you think is watered down, it's not watered down, it's different. It represents different interests. And all efforts by the ANC to analyse that balance of forces inside the country must be guided by this, because that group of people are now very influential. They are climbing up the structures of the organisation and they pay for those leadership campaigns we've just been talking about. And they pay for Jihan to be president. Because when they support her and give her money for the campaign and pay for her children to go to private school etc. etc. etc., she has to repay them. She has to repay them, somehow or the other. That's how it works all over the world and our poor little ANC is no different.

JET: It still blows my mind because the amount of money that was coming into the ANC, into the underground, as you must know, and with no accountability at that time. Money was there and it reached its destination. Why and how did money become a problem?

SR: Well, money was there for certain things. I mean, SIDA [The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency] gave us money for rents (in exile) and we had to show that the money was paid for rents. But, money didn't come into the armed struggle, it didn't come into the underground. The money for the armed struggle and the underground only came from socialist countries and the international communist movement. Where the big money came from, whether it was Britain or wherever, had to be allocated where it could be accounted for, that's the first thing. You can't really account for money in the underground. It's dangerous to keep records for underground work because you are revealing what you are doing. So it's your word that counts. If I give you 2,000 Rand to carry out a task, it's my word that I've given you that money and your word that you've received it, right? Now, the difference is that people are coming into the ANC supporting individuals and giving them money in order for them to follow certain programmes and to do certain things. It's become a patronage system.

JET: What I'm trying to wrap my head around is that you have this country that had gender issues at the top of their agenda, that isn't treating it in the same way. It's that discrepancy that I'm questioning.

SR: I wouldn't say that gender issues are top of the agenda in SA. I think poverty is at the top of the agenda in SA. There are other issues. There's equality, there's discrimination, there's poverty, there's joblessness. Those are the issues that are on everybody's lips, right? The Women's League could play a huge role in this situation because what's being revealed, even now with Covid-19, is that, as usual, the section of the population that has really been the most badly affected is women.

JET: Ok, I'm gonna ask a very weird thing, but I want you to flow with my imagination: What if **Ruth First** was here today, what would she be saying?

SR: I barely even want to think because I knew what she was saying in the 1980s in Maputo ...

JET: Ok, what was she saying **in the 1980s in Maputo** and what would she say now?

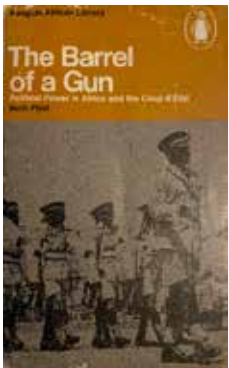
SR: In the 1980s, her main criticism was that the ANC refused to be challenged on controversial issues like, for example, the extent of our organisational support inside the country, or the tendency towards militarism, or the extent of the mobilisation of women, because we hid behind the word 'security.' We said we couldn't discuss those kind of issues because it would be a breach of security. She, therefore, felt that we didn't deal with real problems. And this was what she raised morning, noon and night. Although she was hampered and constrained in raising these issues, she did raise them. This became problematic for the organisation, and subsequently there were attempts to sideline and to marginalise her, and to some extent this was successful. She was removed from the central committee of the Communist Party because she was seen as being too outspoken, she was too critical. She wouldn't blindly follow the Soviet Party line. Inside the SACP there wasn't a tolerance for academics to seek out different opinions. She sought to get a bigger picture, derived from different views. She was criticised for that. At that stage, the SACP was narrow. You weren't allowed to criticise the Soviet Union in public and you weren't allowed to refer to China, that was our reality. That changed with time. It had to change. But at the time, she was in Mozambique, she was highly critical of that way of thinking. For her, the fact that we got important financial and political support from the Soviet Union did not automatically mean that one could not be critical of what was happening there.

She gave a public address in London during this period, and I was at that talk. She said that she had always thought that the youth was the big change factor in the liberation movement, but with time she changed her mind. She now saw women as being that change factor,¹³ and that one could gauge the level of development of an organisation and of a society on the position women held. She said, "When I look at the Soviet Union, I don't see women in the leadership. I don't see women in the Central Committee or the Politburo. I see lots of women doctors, lots of women academics and lots of women nurses, but I don't see women where power is located." She got into a lot of trouble after that meeting, it created a storm. But it was the truth. She wasn't making it up, it wasn't an opinion, it was a fact. She raised it as a fact. She was very very seriously pushed aside after that. She addressed the cadres in Maputo on the occasion of Walter Sisulu's 60th birthday. She told us how she had worked very closely with him. She talked about him in such glowing

13 "She was a passionate intellectual; in love with ideas, because she desired, she needed always to learn more; to find and consider further insights and explanations. But inevitably those ideas that mattered to her most and that became her own were those that were instruments in liberating people and personality. These came to her in the main from the rich store of revolutionary socialist thought. But she was always testing them by new experiences and perceptions; always ready to augment them. It was for her not a diversion from such thought but an essential extension of it that drew her to the cause of women's liberation and relatedly to writing, with Ann Scott, a milestone biography of Olive Schreiner. Some of her colleagues in the revolutionary movement were impatient with what they saw as her irrelevant or incompatible interests. Some of them took unkindly to her criticism of rigid attitudes. There were issues, such as the struggle of the Eritreans for their own freedom, that separated her from accepted alignments. She was firm in maintaining her own view. And she enriched the movement, to which she never wavered in her allegiance, by her independence of mind." (Ronald Segal, new preface to Ruth First's book *117 Days*, republished by Penguin Books in 1982. Preface reprinted in *Index on Censorship* 6/82, vol. 11, 6 1982, 29-30 on <https://journals.sagepub.com>

14 "I first met her in London in the 1970s, so my memories date only from the time when she was teaching at Durham University and researching the life of Olive Schreiner. We met in 1974, over an interview for *Spare Rib*. The magazine asked her for a feature on Schreiner; she was reluctant, because the scale of her work at that stage was massive—she was corresponding with libraries, following up leads, and couldn't envisage putting together a short profile summing up Schreiner's life and thought—but was willing to try an interview. She made a very vivid impression on me. For a start she was so vibrant (rather like her description of Schreiner, I felt), so enthusiastic about the project as well as openly anxious about her competence to the task. I was struck by her conscientiousness: we'd agreed I'd give her some topics to think about in advance and on the day of the interview itself she was ready with a sheaf of papers, typed quotes neatly attached with dressmaker's pins. She spoke fast from these notes, in long, complete sentences. She sought my reactions to some of the material, especially where she was having difficulty in assessing where Schreiner's thought was going. She was very interested in women's liberation and was concerned to bring a feminist perspective to bear on the work. 'I'm scared to start writing anything down. I'm just reading all the time. She does excite me much more as a women's liberationist than anything else.' It may have been this which first gave her the idea of doing the book as a collaboration with a younger writer, and one who had been active in the women's movement. ('My formation isn't in a women's group,' she once said to me.) She had collaborated on other work, including a book, and in the months after the *Spare Rib* interview I did some research for her on the treatment of women's illnesses in the 19th century, as Schreiner had been asthmatic. Ruth wanted us to 'combine our talents' as equals rather than for me to go on being a research assistant; she also knew she would be going to Mozambique. She said she enjoyed collaboration as a learning experience. But it was still a leap in the dark for her, since I was half

her age and had never done anything of book length. [...] What do I remember in particular about her way of working? Her briskness and resolve above all. 'Getting stuck in' was a phrase she used about the struggle to get going on a day's work, or a new bit of the research, or a stretch of writing. She knew how difficult it was and loathed interruptions (but unlike so many people she never seemed to seek them out). She was efficient about correspondence and prompt to return a call. She seemed frequently to work halfway through the night if the situation called for it. She was very serious about preparing talks, for 'you have to assume some intelligence in your audience', and she was very critical of speakers who seemed not to. I went to hear her speak in December 1974 on the changing balance of power in Southern Africa. Her talk, which was on the legacy of Portuguese colonialism in Africa, was meticulously researched and delivered with great zest. She spoke for nearly an hour and yet in the lunch break came and talked with equal energy to me and the women I was with about a conversation she'd had with a Durham psychiatrist about anorexia among women students. I can't now recall the link, but she also brought up the problem of women's timidity in seminars. Ann Scott: "Ruth First (1925-1982)", in: *History Workshop*, Spring 1983, no 15, Oxford University Press.



terms, I never forgot it because she didn't have that high an opinion of many people. This was a rarity. Years later, I had the honour of working with him. One day I asked him, "What was it like working with comrade Ruth?" I was interested to hear what he had to say because so many comrades were uncomfortable working with her because of her criticism. He replied, "It was absolutely wonderful." I asked, why? And he said, "Because she challenged every single thing I said. You had to think before you said anything. That's what she was like."

Kodwo Eshun: Good afternoon. I was really pleased to hear you talking about Ruth First, she's a hero of mine, for many people. But, you don't hear so much about her these days. I am a big fan of *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'Etat*, her analysis of military coups on the continent, her case studies of Ghana, Nigeria and Sudan, I think it's a phenomenal book. I think it's the other essential book on the dilemmas of decolonisation, after *The Wretched of the Earth*. Going back to the critiques Ruth First faced within the party—how much do you think that has to do with the roles she played as an academic, an activist, a comrade, a public figure, a public intellectual? She was good at building communities around her, but I've also read that she was quite isolated. Who were her main interlocutors? Who was she in dialogue with when she was working out her ideas?

SR: When she was released from prison and came into exile, when she went to Britain, she went to Durham University¹⁴, and she started opening up communication lines with left wing academics inside SA. One of whom was quite a problematic character, according to the movement, called Martin Legassick, and this intellectual relationship made her very vulnerable to criticism. I don't know why, because he wasn't powerful or anything, but as a Marxist he was very critical of the movement. She really came under fire for that. He was critical of the ANC and the SACP, of course, and she started to get really pissed off with the narrowness she was encountering. It was a very very bad time in exile because the SACP was very narrow.

I think she was on the the first SACP Central Committee delegation from the SACP **to China in the early 1950s** after the Chinese revolution. She went with John Nkadimeng and she came back absolutely glowing about the revolution in China. This didn't go down at all well because if you remember, the Soviets weren't on such good terms with the Chinese etc. So there was all that background of her being outspokenly different. Anyway, in Durham, she opened up lines of communication with left wing intellectuals. The one I knew about was Martin Legassick. She took quite an openly critical view of the movement and what we were doing and why we were doing it, especially the tendency (not often talked about now, but very prevalent then) towards

militarism. Then she got offered a job at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo¹⁵, and she was working with **Aquino de Bragança**, who was very progressive. She once said to me (I saw her a lot in Maputo), “I love this job because I can do what I want,” and she started to do educational work amongst FRELIMO cadres. She took her students and researchers and went into the field. There are lots of people that can tell you about this who are still alive, one of them is **Bridget O’Laughlin**¹⁶ who’s based in the Netherlands, who was in the room when the bomb blew up that killed Ruth. There’s also **Rob Davis** who has just stopped being a minister, he worked with Ruth and Helena Dolny. They all worked with her at the University Eduardo Mondlane, and she loved that work. She felt she was making a lot of progress, that she was making a difference and she was not being constrained. I don’t know much about the nature of her work because I was not involved in the affairs or programmes of the university.

One of the reasons she was so critical of the ANC was that, at that stage, it was divided into what we called “internal” and “external”. If you were involved in “internal”, it meant that you were involved in secret work inside SA building underground structures inside the country, creating conditions for armed operations to be carried out etc. It was secret work. You couldn’t talk about it, obviously for obvious reasons. But the “external” operated differently, more openly. She always asked, not out of curiosity but out of political interest, “What are you telling everybody *inside* the country?” And she was rebuffed all the time with, “It’s not your business, this is secret, you can’t know”. That’s why, as I said earlier, her big thing was, “You’re hiding behind this security screen, and it’s not acceptable”. When I arrived in Maputo, I was deployed in the political machinery with the aim of building the underground organisation. Mac Maharaj, who was directing this work, told us to go and see her about creating a syllabus, a political syllabus, that we could use for the comrades that were coming out of the country, secretly for a day or two, for political training. We had to create a political syllabus to cover a whole range of political issues that would expand the consciousness of the comrades whom we had recruited and were training. I’d only been in Maputo about three months when we trotted of to see her. She was so scathing. “Excuse me, what are you coming to me for? You’re the ones who are supposed to be doing this work. What do you think should be in the political syllabus? What tasks are you giving comrades?” I was so embarrassed. She challenged us until we were forced to think things through. She took everybody on. She challenged everybody and everything. She had political arguments publicly. There was one fight in my flat in front of a whole lot of comrades where she took on Ronnie Kasrils ...

KE: Oh!

SR: ... about the Soviet intervention in Hungary. They were arguing about something in relation to the Soviet Union and she turned to Kasrils and said, “I suppose you supported the Soviet intervention in Hungary.”

KE: Was that 1956?

SR: Yes, '56.

SR: And he said, “I did.” And she said, “You would, you would.”

SR: After she left, Ronnie was frothing at the mouth he was so angry. After he left, I remember one of the comrades saying, “Jesus Christ, I hope I never have to be in a class with her.” Let me tell you the story of what happened after the Sasol operation. After the Sasol operation, the Commander of Special Ops, the late comrade Obadi, and the commander of the Transvaal Military Machinery, General Nyanda and I went to have a celebratory drink with Slovo at his flat. When we arrived, it was just him and Ruth and us three. Ruth, Obadi and I were in the same SACP unit which was secret. Party membership was secret. Joe opens a bottle of whiskey, and we were sitting chatting about the forthcoming first elections in Zimbabwe. After we had a couple

of shots, we were all quite relaxed and happy. Obadi, who is now nicely relaxed says in this very flippant way, “Well, it’s quite obvious that ZAPU are going to win the elections.” Ruth asks, “Why do you say that?” And I thought, here it comes, poor Obadi caught offside. He didn’t know what to say. He’s casting his eyes around the room and finally he says, “Well, we’re in alliance with ZAPU.” There is silence and then Ruth leans forward and says very quietly, “Comrade, alliances change because organisations change.” And I’m telling you, not one of the three of us had ever thought of that before. We had never thought that the ANC or the SACP could change. We were too young. Too politically naïve. The organisational discipline was too tight, it was too constraining. You didn’t ask questions, you weren’t supposed to ask questions. When I was recruited, I was told, in relation to the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, that “There is no room, comrade Sue, for someone in the SA communist party who disagrees with the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.” I went home and said to my husband, “Then they’ll have to do without me.” But he talked me into it, “Who do you think you are? For god’s sake, you can have your opinions, but you don’t have to tell everybody. And our participation in this struggle is bigger than your little opinion on Czechoslovakia ...”

15 “Ruth traveled from London to Maputo with an initial mandate to study Mozambican mine workers in South Africa. When she arrived, Maputo was a city that had suffered a great deal of damage from the Portuguese colonialists before they exited the country. Ruth stayed with her good friends Moira and Zé Forjaz. Moira had helped Tilly care for Shawn, Gillian, and Robyn in 1963 when Ruth was in prison. Ruth had other friends in Maputo, Pam dos Santos and Albie Sachs, and through Pam’s connections she subsequently rented a two-bed- room flat on Julius Nyerere Street, overlooking the Indian Ocean. The project that de Bragança had brought her to work on that year was in many ways a demonstration of the collective research that Ruth would facilitate in the years that followed at CEA. Aquino had assembled a staff of history graduates, and although the composition of the Center would change greatly in 1978, Ruth’s 1977 research group included Aquino’s staff as well as a number of expatriates who were on the faculty of the university—specifically Marc Wuyts, who taught in the Economics Department; the historian Alpheus Manghezi; and David Wield, who was in Engineering. In total there were fourteen researchers supervised by Ruth and Wuyts. The study consisted of surveys and fieldwork. Fernando Ganhão, the Rector of Eduardo Mondlane University, gave Ruth only seven months to complete the project. The 1977 CEA study was published after Ruth’s death as *Black Gold*. In 1978 it became the theoretical, methodological, and substantive model for Center studies. The CEA librarian Colin Darch’s participation in the project illustrates the collective nature of work at the Center of African Studies. Research from the study had been presented at a 1978 conference in Zambia, and the report was printed in Portuguese. Ruth wanted the study published in English. However, she believed the report required further work, and she assigned

Darch to write a chronology and a section on health and safety in the mines. When he explained that he knew nothing about mines, Ruth replied, ‘Well now is your chance to learn.’” (Alan Wieder, 212)

16 “Our focus on production was, however, not just a practical expediency; it was theoretically informed by the assumptions of Marxist theory. We presumed that socialist revolution meant a fundamental shift in relations of class and the ways in which production was organised. We thought that socialisation of the countryside would be a lengthy process, not to be achieved simply in an instant by the construction of new forms of living—the communal villages—and working—the state—farms and cooperatives, even if these were not formulaic imitations of Soviet or Chinese models. This process was the real focus of our rural research and the area where we tried to contribute to critical reflection within Frelimo itself. Perhaps our greatest contribution was to maintain debate. Contemporary anti–globalisation movements are more concerned with the politics of difference than with the politics of production. The language of class analysis has been displaced by the language of human rights and rights are usually conceived as individual rather than collective. Yet the questions posed for the researchers of the CEA in Mozambique still holds: you know what you are fighting against but what are you fighting for and how do you propose to get there? The answer Ruth First gave to this question: ‘Focus on the transformation of production’, came from Marxist theory and practice, but it embraced no general recipes for socialising production or suspending the logic of markets. Yet this focus gave some starting points and troubling issues of continuing relevance for social movements today.” Bridget O’Laughlin, “Why was Ruth First in Mozambique?,” in: *DEP*, Special Issue 26, Dec 2014, 39. On www.unive.it.

[laughter]

So, some of us came into the organisation on a compromised position where we just kept quiet. She didn’t keep quiet, that was the difference, and the result was that she was pushed to one side. She told me, one day in Maputo, when we were taking a walk and we were looking out to sea at the Soviet trawlers on the horizon. She said to me, “You know, they’re stealing all the fish” and I said, “Who’s stealing the fish?” And she said, “The Soviet ships are stealing the Mozambican fish. Those are factory ships.” You know, I was so shocked, I could hardly believe it. The Soviets stealing little Mozambique’s fish when there was such poverty and hunger in Mozambique. But I knew she wouldn’t make it up because she was an academic. She dealt in facts. It was such an incredibly important thing to say because that was the first time there was a seed of serious questioning in my mind about the Soviet Union. What is going on there? How do they steal the fish from Mozambique, the poorest country in the world, with those factory ships? That’s what she was like, and she paid the price for it. Sorry, that was a very long answer.

JET: That was wonderful!

KE: She never thought of leaving, right? Her point was to critique from inside not from outside.

SR: Absolutely, absolutely. She was very brave. She didn’t shift her position, although I am certain that if new facts were presented that changed her outlook, she would have had no compunction about adjusting or changing her position. In one of her courses at the university, she critiqued the GDR. They were giving aid to Mozambique by sending tractors but they hadn’t taken into account that the soil in Mozambique is different from the soil in Germany. The result was that the tractors couldn’t perform, they kept

breaking down. It was true, I saw it for myself. Wherever you travelled in Mozambique there were tractors all over the place that had broken down, and the GDR hadn't sent replacement parts. She criticised this openly. And do you know what happened after that? The GDR party sent a delegation to the SACP and said she should be removed from the SACP.



KE: Oh!

JET: Rather than fixing the tractors.

SR: That was specifically about the tractors that they said she should be removed. After that, a delegation from the central committee met with our SACP unit in Maputo. They said, they were visiting all the Party units, but I'm not sure that was true. They asked us about Ruth. She wasn't there at that particular meeting, obviously. We looked at them, "What are you asking?" We were shocked. "No, no, we're just inquiring as to what kind of a position comrade Ruth is taking." I mean, it was unbelievable. We were furious and did we give them hell—it was one of the proudest moments of my life. All of us, to a comrade, said, "She's the most fantastic thing that has ever happened to the SACP, she's wonderful, blah blah blah". And she didn't get removed.

KE: Yeah!

SR: That was what was going on then, that's what it was like.

JET: Would you say at the time of her killing—I mean, was her killing convenient, somehow? Not that I'm accusing anyone, but had she come to a point that if she continued to be vocal she could have either been kicked out or ...

SR: No, she would have never been, we all supported her. She was very highly regarded, she was extremely highly regarded. After a trip to Vietnam by the leadership—do you know about that trip?

KE: No, I don't. What year was that?

SR: It was in 1978. There was a lot of dissatisfaction in our ranks in exile at that time, lots of moaning and criticism about the leadership for the lack of progress in the struggle. There was a feeling of betrayal by the leadership, disillusionment and anger. It was a very worrying situation inside the ANC. The leadership took the situation seriously and took off for a meeting in Vietnam with the Vietnamese party leadership. Our delegation was composed of our top alliance leadership, lead by Tambo. Although it was a secret meeting, it's all been documented now. I'm giving you an account in my own words: When they got to Vietnam and explained the situation, the Vietnamese said, "Well comrades, you're doing everything wrong." Our leadership asked, "Why?" And the Vietnamese said, "Because yours is not a military struggle, it is a political struggle. It is a mass political struggle. You're not dealing with the American military, for example, like we are. Your armed activity is armed propaganda, it's there to support political action." As a result, when the leadership returned, the unsuccessful strategy that had been employed until then, until that point, was turned on its head. The new strategy was expressed in what was called the "Green Book," wherein it was directed that the political struggle would dominate and determine military work. Mass struggle stimulated by armed propaganda was what we were striving for.¹⁷ Ruth would have been very, very pleased with this change in posture, although she didn't see any evidence of it in practice, none of us did. I would imagine that Ruth was aware of the existence of this new strategy and was challenging whether it was being implemented. It was a huge struggle by the way to implement this volte face. Amongst the other things the leadership learned on this trip to Vietnam was that, there must be no mixing between the political structures and the military structures. The political structures must not know anything about the military structures, and vice versa. This is to protect the underground, so that if a

person is captured, he or she can't give too much away. We call it now, information on a 'need to know' basis. Well, this started to be implemented in the most mechanical way and the political machinery challenged this because we were supposed to be creating the conditions for the military to base themselves amongst the people. That meant, there had to be some exchange—some interaction, especially at the higher levels, so that there could be an integrated approach to the struggle. Over time it got very heated, and I, for one, got into a lot of trouble. Slovo went on some trip, and when he came back, he was told that I'd been visited by the top leadership, that I was undisciplined and that I was not allowed to mix with the military. And furthermore, that since I was not taking any notice, disciplinary measures would have to be taken. So Slovo said to me, "Jesus, I go away for five minutes and you're already in shit." He must have told Ruth, because she contacted me and said, "Listen, what are you up to? You are to come and have lunch with us every Tuesday and I want to know what it is you're doing. There's no getting you into trouble here." When I reported this at the political headquarters—that I've got to have lunch with Ruth every Tuesday, and that she's going to put me on the spot—the comrades all said to me, "Oh my god, you're so lucky. You've got to keep notes. You've got to tell us what she said. You've got to report back." That was the level of respect the cadreship had for her. They would not have allowed anything to happen to Ruth. So, that's an answer to your question. Yes, she was marginalised by the leadership, because she used to put them on the spot. But I can tell you that if she had been alive when Madiba and Uncle Walter were released from prison, the first person Uncle Walter would have asked to stand by his side would have been Ruth. And she would have stayed there until the day she died or he died. That was what he conveyed to me, face to face. Because when you've got real leadership, they want to know what people are thinking—not to enhance their own power but so that they can understand and deal with the situation. That's what Uncle Walter was like. When I travelled around the country with him in 1994, before the first elections, whenever he convened a meeting with a local organisation, he would ask everybody to speak first. He wanted to hear what the comrades on the ground had to say. And he always said, at every single meeting, "I'd like to hear from the lady comrades first, please, because otherwise their voices get drowned out." Every single meeting, he would ask for the women to speak first and he never said anything until he'd heard everybody. Oliver Tambo was the same—there were no long speeches. Ruth was the same. She listened to everybody. She was interested and took note of what was being said and that's why comrades respected and valued her. That's why, in a way, she was untouchable. But she was very unpopular in many quarters. Stalinist quarters especially.

JET: Are there any women of that kind of a profile still around? Not necessarily in the leadership, someone you think like, "Damn, Ruth would have liked her."

SR: Ruth would have loved **Thandi Modise**. She was an MK operative and cadre, trained in Angola. Now she's Speaker in the National Assembly [since August 2021 she is Minister of Defence]. She's very outspoken. Ruth would have loved **Thenjiwe Mtintso**, too. Those were the kind of women that she liked, women like her.

JET: And can you hear their voices in South Africa today?

SR: Ya! We hear them, we listen to them. They have our support. They know who we are, we know who they are.

17 "The core of [Govan Mbeki's] book concerns the re-emergence of the ANC inside the country following the decade of post-Rivonia 'paralysis'. [...] He places his main emphasis on the 1980s—and sees this decade's politics as the product of a change in ANC thinking manifested in a 'Green Book' which was produced in 1979 after a visit by a delegation to Vietnam late the previous year. For Mbeki, its main importance was in its effect on ANC work with relation to mass organisations. 'From 1979 the ANC leadership was firmly united around the strategy of integrating the military struggle with mass political organisations'. He quotes from the Green Book: 'the armed struggle is secondary at this time'. Mbeki suggests that not merely the United Democratic Front, but the host of community organisations established from 1980 onwards, were consciously organised by the ANC as products of this change of line. [...] This seems to me to give too much credit to link-ups from outside to inside the country, and too little to the 'spontaneous' activity of activists inside. In the 1970s the tendency in ANC thinking was to regard organisation inside the country purely as a recruiting channel for MK. The post-1979 ANC change to seeing a role for mass organisation in its own right was welcome. But the community organisations developed as mass organisations out of a response to local grievances, encouraged by the militancy of the youth and the resilience of trade union organisation. My reading of the situation is that the switch from black consciousness to ANC politics took place through a recognition (the result of experience) among trade union and youth activists of the significance of the black working class and of class struggle—as a solution to national as well as social grievances—rather than through direct intervention from outside. [...] The ANC was conceived of as standing for revolutionary social transformation, and the Freedom Charter was understood as a programme for socialism. The masses, in other words, chose the ANC rather than the other way around—with the expectation that, in power, it would produce a radical transformation of society." Martin Legassick, "Myth and reality in the struggle against apartheid" [Review of Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki and Allister Sparks books]. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 24, no 2, 1998, 443–458.

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