

Interview with Elaine Unterhalter by Eoin O’Cearnaigh on 3 October 2013 for the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee project Forward to Freedom

Eoin O’Cearnaigh: Could you please give me your full name.

Elaine Unterhalter: Yes, I’m Elaine Sara Unterhalter.

EO: And when and where were you born?

EU: I was born in Johannesburg in April 1952.

EO: And what do you do for a living?

EU: I am an academic. I work at the Institute for Education, and I’m a Professor of Education and International Development.

EO: And have you been involved in any other political or campaigning activity apart from the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

EU: Well, I was a member of the ANC when it was in exile. I was involved a bit with CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] and then I guess local things. I’m active in my trade union branch at work now. I guess the Anti-Apartheid Movement was quite an influence on me, and that this kind of popular protest, the kind of rainbow coalition, beyond the fragments kind of politics, the politics that’s quite public demonstration underpinned by local organisation, that’s the sort of, the kind of political – I wonder what the word is – practice that’s very familiar to me.

EO: And maybe going back, do you remember when you became, how you became aware of, political issues in South Africa?

EU: Well, my family was quite politically active. My father was a member of the Liberal Party, which was very – it’s hard to situate it in relation to Liberal Parties in Europe, because it had some of the same features with a kind of stress on and concern with free press. I’m not that well informed about what their economic policies were, the South African Liberal Party, but the significant thing for me as a child growing up in that house was that they believed very strongly in ‘one man one vote’. That was their phrase – not ‘one person one vote’, I guess, which is the sexism of the time. My father was a lawyer, my mother was initially a social worker and then she was a university lecturer. The kind of social milieu of their friends was much more conservative than they were, in that they might have voted, I think, for the Progressive Party, which was the party Helen Suzman represented in Parliament, which believed in the qualified franchise. In contrast there was that very strong sense in our house of ‘one person, one vote’, which was like something we were brought up to eat and breathe. The other thing about my parents, and particularly my father, is that he’d been at university and then had known through childhood friendships a number of some of the quite leading members of the South African Communist Party, who were banned at some point in the time I was growing up. And although he disagreed with them politically, he was very supportive of them personally. So he would go and there were these kind of memories – I have strong memories of him as a child, going on walks and there was these couple of houses where key members of the South African Communist Party were all house arrested. I’d be endlessly walking up and down with the dog as he was talking to people through the fence. They weren’t allowed to talk to more than one person at a time, so he ... And he also represented quite a lot of political activists. So politics was very much part of my childhood. Sorry, that’s a terribly long answer.

EO: No, it’s fine. It’s great.

EU: I went to school and university in South Africa, and I was quite active in student politics in NUSAS, which was the National Union of South African Students. And also very caught up in the split of SASO, which was the black students' movement that was headed by Steve Biko, which split from NUSAS. And so I was there involved in some of the very intense conversations with Steve Biko about black consciousness and what white students were doing or could do. And then issues around a kind of move to the Left, I guess, in the student movement. So one of the things we started to do in this cohort, from the '70s, was we became active, we set up these workers' committees, which were later to blend with workers' committees that were being set up in workplaces. So that was one thread of student activism in the '70s, when I was a student. The other thread, sorry there is a point to this, because I think it leads into the kinds of politics and flavour of the work in the AAM, but the other thread was a kind of turn to culture. So, using music, theatre, very in your face art. There was one day on the library lawn, which was this big grass square in front of the library, where we put up hundreds of little tombstones to commemorate people who had been killed in the Sharpeville massacre. I know these kinds of demonstration are now, many people have used them, and we probably were borrowing the idea from somewhere else. But it was that kind of use of politics through cultural means that was all quite influential. I'm sorry, I'm just going on, just interrupt whenever.

EO: No, that's fantastic. I don't think that's at all long. That's great.

EU: I think the other thing to say is that South Africa, as I am sure you know, was an incredibly segregated society. Even though my family was very politically engaged and talked a lot and thought a lot about politics, we lived culturally and socially in a very white environment. And socially, I'd say it was very conservative with a small 'c'. Issues about ... very conformist expectations about women and men. It was shocking in a way not to be married by 21 and not to be married to someone who was going to be a professional success. So I think that is another kind of small feature of the kind of political groupings I was hanging out around, is that they were pushing some of the social boundaries. But, I think that is very typical of the late '60s and early '70s. The racial segregation, I think, was much harder to confront, because I think it was so very deep and unconsciously deep in us. When I finished my degree, I went to work for nine months in a very rural area of Zululand, which had the most profound impact on me, because I'd never lived in a rural area, I'd never socialised with people who were not, give or take, quite a bit like me. I hadn't worked in another language. I didn't know about ... the whole language thing is extremely absurd because I had a nanny who always spoke Zulu all around me, and yet at school we learned French and Afrikaans. In the end, I ended up learning Zulu formally, only when I came to, when I was doing, my Ph.D in London. But that's a kind of index of the levels of segregation and insulation. Sorry, I feel I'm kind of drifting into so many areas that are not ...

EO: I don't ...

EU: You don't mind?

EO: I think it's fantastic. I'm really happy.

EU: Ok, well alright. So, being in Zululand was an incredible experience. I think it in some ways was ... Well, the experience in the student movement was very radicalising, because the ideas were very dynamic and they were kind of challenging many of the things I'd grown up thinking. But in some ways, it was still in a bubble of white privilege. I had a motorcar. The kind of real life issues were still quite insulated and far away from me. And I was quite good at talking through ideas. But in Zululand it came up very close and personal, partly because it was a time that the area in which I was working was an area that was very much affected by forced removals and people were being

dumped in those areas, as the Bantustans were being set up or trying to be made viable. And people just couldn't live and more or less a child died every single night in this hospital through malnutrition. And that, that confrontation, coming up to that level of poverty, cruelty, heartless, I think that just about never left me. I also kind of couldn't cope with it. So it was an extremely powerful experience and I made some very very deep friendships through it. But it also made me feel I couldn't deal with the society. There wasn't a place for me. And I think that the black consciousness thing was really quite powerful as well, because the notion that: you're really part of the problem, there is nothing to do. Those things kind of impelled me out of the country.

EO: Could we go back a bit to the ... you mentioned Steve Biko and splits in the student movement. Can we give names to the acronyms and maybe flesh that out a bit?

EU: Yeah, OK, so. The argument made by Steve Biko, which was an argument that I have enormous respect for, but at the time it kind of challenged my complete *raison d'être*, because his argument was that white liberals were denying a voice to black South Africans, and the way they constructed the history, the way they constructed the politics, they always had to be the articulator, the interlocutor, it was always through their frameworks. And he made this argument with great charm and great persuasiveness, and yet this completely took away from someone like me – who thought I was sticking up for principle, because I was isolated in relation to a lot of the white social circles in which I was growing up. So I felt quite virtuous that I was sticking up for, or standing by, principles around political representation and equal rights. So to be told that your framework is imbued with colonialism, you're unwittingly a voice for white privilege, was terribly challenging and terribly unsettling, and something I guess I was grappling with all the time I was involved in student politics. And then when I was at Nqutu, which is where this hospital I was working with, one of the nurses was married to someone who was in the black consciousness movement and he was arrested one night. I think he was actually at the hospital. The security police might have come to the hospital. So it was all very present. And the attacks on everybody, I mean I think this is hard to convey. Again, sorry it's all so much, as if it were the prequel. But, there was such levels of censorship, such levels of fear, such levels of isolation of people, that it was extremely stifling, you felt very trapped. You didn't know where you could go, and in a strange way, it was harder for this kind of libertarian, leftish grouping, which was very nascent at that time. Because, if you were in the Communist Party you had absolute, you had your, you had a kind of iron discipline and solidarity, and the Party was there. If you were involved in township activism or the black student movement, you generally had networks of relationships, be it through the church or the neighbourhood or the family or whatever. And I think we were a kind of dislocated group, which is partly why that group was very highly infiltrated by the security police. So some of the devastating effects of that were on a number of my close friends at university, some of whom got very long prison sentences, because they were very easily duped by horrible secret agents. And then the kind of more fractured engagement that someone like me has with the process, where I both feel utterly committed to it and yet I've got to get out, which is what brings me to London. Does that really make sense?

EO: Are there names of groups associated with this milieu or was it just a scene?

EU: I think it was a scene, I think that's what. That kind of white student, I mean in a way NUSAS, I suppose the National Union of South African Students. And I think this is possibly an interesting point, where you want to take this. It had in the mid-'70s a reorganisation and there was someone from the NUS, who came from Britain, so a student activist from Britain. I think it was Tony Klug, who's been active in Jews for Justice for Palestinians. I mean I know I run into his name now. I'm pretty sure it is either him or his brother. So he came to, he spent some months with NUSAS, and NUSAS split into three branches, which were attempts to give form to this: one was concerned with economics, one was political prisoners and politics, I think; and then there was one called

Aquarius, which makes your toes curl – that was the arts branch. So I was involved in the economics one and the Aquarius one. And then later, the wages committees kind of blended in and a lot of the people who had been active in that became some of the leaders of the trade union movement. So NUMSA, which was the metal workers union, had and even the – maybe not the NUM, but the textile workers union. They were all led by, or there were some key activists who'd come out of, the white students' movement. Was that what you were asking?

EO: So, you had to leave. What happened next?

EU: So, I actually ... It made no sense to me for many, many years why I left. So the account I am going to give you is the account I give to myself. It's got nooks and crannies in it, I'm not completely comfortable with it. I came first to study in 1975 and I went to Cambridge to do a history degree. And it was an incredibly alienating and depressing experience, because I felt ... well, I think British universities then were really, really different to the way they are now. I mean, I think only about 3% of the population of the age [inaudible] went to university. I think there were only three people who weren't white that I ever saw. One of whom ... so there was one other South African student, who was Njabulo Ndebele, who became the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. He was on a student scholarship. So he was the one person I could talk to. Actually, there was one Tanzanian person and then maybe there were five people from India and that was all. And I also went to a college that had been all male up till then. So not only was I South African, not only had I been very close to this powerful experience of poverty and inequality, and then I was in this centre of privilege and disassociations, which is how I felt it. But there seemed to be no one who looked like me, or spoke like me, or had any connections like me. But there was some small student activism around South Africa. So one of the things we did was, we were looking at the shareholdings of the colleges who had shares in South African companies. And I remember doing that on the student newspaper, and then us having discussions about how it could be used, because how it would be read around the colleges would be just: 'Oh, X has got shares in Barclays bank or Rio Tinto Zinc'. It wouldn't be read as shameful that they had it. So how could we present that information? Which was interesting. I was determined to go back to South Africa after that degree, because I felt so alienated. But at the time when I was trying to decide what to do Abraham Tiro, who was a student leader in Botswana, he was a black consciousness man, he was assassinated with a parcel bomb. He was a friend of Njabulo's. And then my friends who were, who'd been in my loose grouping of friends in South Africa, started to be rolled up, because ... Breyten Breytenbach had been a Afrikaner poet, he was part of the Sestigers movement. It was a movement of Afrikaans writers who were critical of apartheid. André Brink was part of them as well. Breyten Breytenbach gone into exile in Paris, and he'd decided in the mid-'70s that he was going to go back and mobilise white South Africans to connect with the ANC. He'd been completely set up by the security police, and he was followed from person to person who he went to see and then they were all locked up. And so this was as I deciding to go back to South Africa. I suddenly found all my friends were being locked up, and I really didn't know what to do and was quite desperate about my confusion. So I was persuaded to stay and do a Ph.D. and I hoped that just beginning the Ph.D. would buy me a bit of time, and it did. And then I started to do bits of work for the ANC and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. But, at that stage, a little bit under the table, because I was going to go back to collect the fieldwork for my Ph.D. And I went back to South Africa in 1977. So '76 was a very big experience for me. I had just started my Ph.D. In '77. I went back to start collecting my fieldwork and I was collecting some documentary materials that some people working with the ANC had asked me to get for them. I also thought that I would come back to South Africa. I would take all this material I'd gathered for my Ph.D., I'd go back to London and, remember it was September, I'd do one term at SOAS where I was registered and then I was coming back. And so at the time it made no sense to me, but in retrospect what I think happened is: the week I was due to come back, Steve Biko was killed. I spent that whole week going to protest meetings and being completely traumatised by those events. And what I think is, I got on that plane thinking: I can

never come back, I'm going to burn every bridge and then I'm going to very openly be in the ANC and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I can't come back to this society that's done this. So I wasn't thinking rationally. So, sorry, that's extremely incoherent ...

EO: So you were in South Africa when ...

EU: Correct. When Steve Biko was killed.

EO: So, then you came back to ...

EU: So I came back to England. So, this is now ... it must be '78, and I'm really disorientated and really quite confused. So I did a lot of things that were around the loose Left activism of that time. I remember I was going to Grunwick. We were there, where there were demonstrations around that. There was quite a lot of stuff around the Anti Nazi League. There were Anti Nazi League concerts. There were demonstrations in Brick Lane against the Anti Nazi League ...

EO: Against?

EU: Sorry, against the National Front, with the Anti Nazi League. There was a lot around music, there was film, there was ... I think there was CND stuff, but actually the big CND protests were in the early '80s, that I can remember. In all of that melange ... so the Anti-Apartheid Movement was only one of a number of different threads of things I was doing. I was hardly doing my thesis. And then, I felt I had to get a grip. I met my husband in 1978, and I realised I didn't have any money, or very little money, and I had to get this thesis done. So then I started to focus and I finished my thesis in '79. And then I started to be much more locally based in, I guess – I came to live here in 1980 – in Hackney Anti-Apartheid group and got very involved in the Women's Committee. Sorry, this is such a long lead in.

EO: No, no. It's fine.

EU: Is that alright?

EO: I think so. OK, so that's sort of the context of you getting involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement. And then what ... how about your involvement with it? What sort of committees or local groups, to start off with?

EU: So, there was a Hackney Anti-Apartheid Group, but I don't think it ever did very much. Although, what I've found is my little membership card from it. And I found notes about what we were ... actually, can I get out these little artefacts. This is a note from the ...

EO: Shall we get them out, and then talk?

EU: OK.

EO: Otherwise ...

EU: [inaudible] This note is quite interesting, because what it tells you about how the Anti-Apartheid Movement was working, which is why I'm just [inaudible]. OK, so this is a list of the people who were at this meeting. I was always the Secretary, taking minutes, which is why I've got all these things. One of the things we're doing here is making ... here's this ... of the need to target groups, different people we need to target. Sorry, here are these minutes ... the different people, the local groups we have to contact: the Labour Party, the Liberal Party, the Communist Party, the trades

councils, schools, religious groups: Catholics, Anglicans, Quakers, miscellaneous Christian, Muslims. It's interesting, although it is in Hackney, that it's really quite limited groups. It's limited about what it says about our knowledge of religious faith communities – women's groups, which is me and two or three others, youth groups, minorities, housing co-ops, libraries and CND. So, that's how we were planning. And then, I've got these notes here of Cedric or someone saying: 'Cedric introduced a discussion of how to launch the consumer boycott campaign in Hackney and Tower Hamlets. He said we should examine how change happens, why people are the way they are and hold the attitudes they do, and maintain a vested interest'. I think this comes after we'd spent a day on Ridley Road market handing out leaflets and just feeling very upset that the majority of people who we were trying to give leaflets to were black and that we didn't seem to have any point of contact. So we were not connecting with their issues at all, and we didn't seem to have a way of connecting. And this politics of handing out the leaflet was just passing everybody by. So, I think that's the background, and so then this is Cedric Mayson, who was an ANC member actually, but who was in our group.

EO: So you were Secretary of the Hackney ...

EU: When it was set up, yes. So, that was the Hackney one. But I didn't stay that active in Hackney, because my main locus of activity became the Women's Committee, and that looks to me from these papers as though it was formed by about 1981. This is the Women's Committee newsletter and it looks ... number 3 is 1982. And so the first one is up till about '85 or '86, I edited this newsletter and then I was also on the National Committee, again up to '85-'86. By about the mid-80s, although I stayed an Anti-Apartheid Movement member and I think I wrote quite a bit for *Anti-Apartheid News*, or wrote every two or three months for *Anti-Apartheid News* – by the mid '80s I was doing much more work for the ANC and my engagement with the Anti-Apartheid Movement was mainly to go on demonstrations or to go to meetings.

EO: Can we unpack maybe a bit more about, other memories of what you have of what you did through the Hackney group to start with.

EU: OK. Well, I think a big focus of what we did was the consumer boycott. So we had demonstrations outside Sainsbury's, and I think there was a connection with the Co-op. So, the Co-operative movement at that stage had a local presence, or a local presence that someone like me could connect to. I remember going to some meetings, yes, so there were leaflets around the consumer boycott. There was also raising material aid for people in the ANC camps. We did a petition. So there is in this folder, there is a 'Boycott South African goods' ... there's stuff about – we wanted the Council to pass this declaration. And then there was one of the tower blocks, one of the Council-owned properties was renamed Mandela House, and I remember we went to the opening of that. Here is this: 'We representatives' shall I read it out? 'We representatives of many people in the London boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets declare our abhorrence of the racist regime in South Africa and its illegal occupation of Namibia. We believe that the apartheid racist system of South Africa is an affront to human dignity and a threat to world peace and racial harmony. Accordingly, we pledge that we will work to end all links between people in our boroughs and the apartheid regime. In particular we will: (1) cease to buy goods that originate from South Africa' – so quite a stress on the council engaging in the boycott. (2) discourage economic links with South Africa/Namibia and promote better relations with the developing economies of the Third World; (3) encourage the positive teaching of history, culture and struggle for self determination of South African/Namibian people; and (4) seek to ensure that local people that are considering emigrating to South Africa are fully informed of the implications of living under apartheid; and (5) support campaigns for the British government to impose sanctions against the South African regime. We call on all people of good will in the boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets to join with us in this pledge and to express their solidarity with struggles and sacrifices'. And then I seem

to have crossed out 'sacrifices of the' it was the 'ANC of South Africa and SWAPO of Namibia and the people', and it seems to go 'solidarity for the struggle for freedom of the peoples of South Africa and Namibia'. And there also seems to be something: 'We believe that the time is rapidly running out for the Southern African region. Only the dismantling of apartheid will save its inhabitants from the inevitable conflagration'. I think we wanted this declaration signed, and so this is the housing block named after Mandela. And that declaration, we did a run around the borough, to publicise it and got it signed. I can remember setting out from outside Hackney Town Hall.

EO: Yeah that's fantastic.

EU: So that's ... I think I probably was only active in the local branch for about a year.

EO: OK.

EU: And then, I seemed to blend into the work on the Women's Committee, which is where I think a lot of my activity went and then some into the National Committee.

EO: OK, then let's start off then talking about the Women's Committee stuff. Shall we tidy up a little bit?

EU: I think I had always been very engaged with women's rights issues, feminist activism, really, from the time I'd been a student in South Africa, and I was very interested in it as an area of academic work, but also very interested ... you know the slogan of the women's movement 'The personal is political' is a watchword for the way we were living and working, I guess. That kind of very loose sort of politics. So, in some ways it is not so surprising that that was where I was going. There was quite a lot of hostility in the Anti-Apartheid Movement to the formation of a women's committee, and in fact the women who were in the Women's Committee were quite similar in that we were all younger. We were probably all in our mid-20s to mid-30s. So, older women in the Anti-Apartheid Movement didn't join the Women's Committee. And, I think at the time, most of us didn't have children. That was another feature, the links between us were sustained when we started to have children. So, it ... I think it was something that was generated in London, but looking through the Women's Committee's newsletters, I can see there is correspondence with other women in Leeds and in other big cities. So I think that kind of grouping of women who were mobilising around women's issues, which were focused partly on health, they were focused on women in prison, they were focused on Depo-Provera, which was a drug which was being used in a kind of forced family planning. It was a contraceptive drug, but it had really bad side effects, and it was being used in Zimbabwe and South Africa. So there was campaigns against Depo-Provera, there were campaigns in support of women in prison. There were campaigns around the pay of women workers and the discrimination against women workers, and there was quite a lot of solidarity with the ANC women's league and SWAPO, and women in Angola and Mozambique. So there were those issues that women around the world had political struggles in common. And there were a number of comments and quite robust discussions about whether the Women's Committee was divisive, why it should be there and what was the purpose. And looking through the Women's Committee Newsletters, there are discussions about this and arguments made about why a women's committee was important. So I think we had profile, we were given space in the movement, partly because Margaret Ling was a member of the Women's Committee and she was on the National Committee, and was the editor of *Anti-Apartheid News*.

EO: You were?

EU: No, Margaret Ling was. She was a very stalwart supporter of the Women's Committee. A number of the office staff in the AA office were also in the Women's Committee, so we had access

to the printing press and things like that. I think it is very hard, nowadays, to appreciate how important having a leaflet, a newsletter or a newspaper was. I mean, the lack of access to information was quite profound and the importance of being able to circulate information, even though it's incredibly clumsily produced. The style is clumsy. But that was a really important vehicle for political expression.

EO: So, maybe could you describe that process. How did you do that?

EU: How did ... Well, we used to sit in meetings and discuss what would be in each issue of the Newsletter. And I just looked through them before you came, and I think what's interesting is that virtually none of the articles are signed. There are a few opinion pieces that are signed and one or two letters are signed, but there was this very strong ethos that it was a collaborative process. So even though I can tell from articles who wrote them, and I can see ones that are familiar to me, it's my typewriter, there was that stress on communal production. In the years I was on the Women's Committee, I wasn't aware of stresses around feminist politics. There's a lot been written about women's politics and women's movements, and I know from the ANC Women's Section, which I was also active in, there were considerable stresses around what you could and couldn't talk about, and quite a lot around the sexual politics. In this grouping there wasn't, and I think it was partly because there was quite a uniformity of age and this kind of urban mix, big English cities.

EO: So what were the sorts of points of contention, what were the debate issues that played out elsewhere that didn't seem to affect ...?

EU: So, for example in the ANC there was a very, very strong issue around race, and a difference between younger women, or women who were not married, and around sexuality, which often couldn't even be spoken about, and a very strong ethos in the ANC around protecting culture, trying to support marriage. And for a long time HIV ravaged sections of the ANC in exile, and people were too ashamed to talk about it. In the AAM Women's Committee, people were talking about sex, they were talking about sexuality, they were talking about men taking the dominance in meetings, not allowing women to talk. So all of those things that we couldn't really raise in the ANC's Women's Section, and ... What I've heard around ... or what some of the women have said around Grunwick, or other struggles of ... those were also struggles in the '70s. But in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, we were seen a little bit as a group of maverick women. I'm only saying that because of the answering back, the articles – we seem to have spent a lot of our time justifying ourselves in those articles. So we are obviously answering back to somebody, who thought that we were troublesome.

EO: OK.

EU: Oh, the other thing and the photos I want to find for you are this demonstration. I don't know which of the anti-apartheid demonstrations it was. But I think it must have been, probably, 1981, and at that demonstration we had this kind of moving tableau. So we had these slogans saying: 'A diamond only brings happiness to some people!' and we had this picture of this women dressed up as a bride. And all of the black miners were chained to her. So we were using colourful cultural forms of protests that at that stage were not that usual. We were pushing some of the boundaries I think. And again that was because of the mix of people who were in that women's group. I think later – and I think a number of people have written about the Anti-Apartheid Movement – about how it was a big tent in terms of different political strategies, and we certainly felt very included for doing that. But I think there was a kind of creativity and dynamism that that little group was generating, that was a bit new. That sounds like blowing my trumpet too much.

EO: [Inaudible] and what about your role on the committee?

EU: Well, I think I probably edited and put together the Women's Committee Newsletter for many years. Maybe up to about '85-'86 when my daughter was born. I was also ... and we did lots of demonstrations, particularly outside Next, which was a new clothes shop at that stage. And I think they must have had factories in South Africa. But I remember we were particularly targeting Next and demonstrating outside Next. I did a number of talks for them. So the feminist movement, the women's liberation movement, operated in these very amorphous ... popping up in lots of different places. I remember going to do talks for the Women's Committee in places very far flung from London. So, going to Durham or going to a small place in Ilford or somewhere, maybe it was a trades council, maybe it was a co-op. I got that feeling of the kind of breadth of AAM as an organisation, I guess, through this. We went to meetings. Hackney Council organised an International Women's Day event with Angela Davis and the ANC, and I remember speaking at that event on behalf of the Women's Committee, and there are photos of that.

EO: Would you like to tell people who Angela Davis was?

EU: Angela Davis was African American, a black political activist, a very articulate political theorist, as well as a very committed political activist. And she'd been arrested because of her support of George Davis,¹ I think. There were a number of members of the Black Panther Party, who were arrested on very trumped up evidence. And she was arrested for her support for them, and I can't remember how long she spent in prison. She was charged with really terrible charges, but finally released. And she was a very articulate critic of racism in America, and the way that racism in America connected with racism and violence and discrimination all around the world. Yes, I've just recently been doing some research into the speeches of Martin Luther King actually, and the Black Panther Party, and it's really, really interesting the way that the significance of South Africa and the connection of human rights, and their knowledge of South Africa was really staggering to me so – that's just an aside.

EO: Shall we get back to the Committee? So, you were travelling around the country. So you were chair of the Committee?

EU: No, I don't think we had a chair. I just put together the newsletter, and we probably had a rotating secretariat. We often met in the Anti-Apartheid Movement offices, first in Charlotte Street and then later when they moved to Mandela Street. We also met in Spare Rib's offices off Trafalgar Square. I think there were a lot of women's organisations had their small offices there. The big national women's liberation conferences – I think there was one in 1981– or what year did? – anyway, the year Charles and Diana got married, whatever year that was. Because I remember the badges were 'Don't do it Di!'. Anyway, we talked at that. So we had presence. We were kind of networking in with the women's liberation networks, and then with women in trade unions, that was a big part of what we were doing – connecting with the trade union movement. A lot of the articles are about talking to trade unions and connecting with trade unions, bringing trade union members to the boycott demonstrations and ...

EO: And what about the dynamics within the group? Do you want to expand on that at all? Within the committee?

EU: Within the Women's Committee? I was possibly the only South African there – oh no there was one other South African. There were two other South Africans, sorry. So the majority of the members were British, and I think that was very wonderful for me, because I'd had this experience of feeling very alienated, as a student, and then felt the kind of disorientation, I guess, of being an immigrant in this city and not quite knowing how to connect. So it felt like an important opportunity to make friends with British women. So that was also quite an important dimension. Very, very

difficult to connect with the black British population, and I just looked down the list of members, and it was primarily white. And there are some articles in the paper which we were writing about, why don't we take up the issues that are of importance to the black British population? And writing about the immigration laws and the controls on people, which is another interesting dynamic of it. There was another big piece of work I was doing in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which somehow was going parallel to this Women's Committee stuff. There were two bits of work I was doing. Let me get ...

EO: Shall we stop now and get ...

EU: My father was defending the Sharpeville Six, who had been ... oh I'm going to get this wrong, I might need to just ... Shall I look it up?

EO: No.

EU: OK, they were, I can't remember if they were ANC members or if they were community activists.ⁱⁱ Anyway, they had been held for a very long time, arrested in South Africa, and the trial was absolutely barbaric and the torture, and the use of state evidence. Everything about the trial was absolutely terrible. And Mike Terry, who was the AAM Secretary General, I guess ... I happened to mention to Mike that my dad was defending them, and that then became quite an important channel of communication, by which we were trying to get information out of South Africa to the international community, to support campaigns, because they were given the death sentence, and trying to get information from the international campaigning to people on trial. So, that work on political prisoners, and particularly around that campaign, was really personally important for me and ... The night that they – I can't remember how many of them were executed, maybe all Six – was just absolutely devastating.ⁱⁱⁱ And I had a very small baby at that time, but we were on a vigil for very much of the night, and then I remember going to the service in St Martin's in the Fields church, and it just felt so important that we'd done the political campaign and yet so ... fragile, up against such an absolutely terrible, cruel heartless abusive regime. And, I think another thing that I'd forgotten is how much the Conservative Party was so much in bed with the apartheid regime. When Botha came here in the early '80s, the joke is that my little boy – who is now 31 – his first sentence was saying 'No Botha!'. So that was a big demonstration, but a kind of sense that the government was so in collusion with apartheid. And then, I know the tale is now told as though they were all against apartheid, but that wasn't the case at all. So the sense of feeling alone and isolated and the importance of international solidarity, that feeling of being up against a wall was quite an important ethos of how we were operating.

EO: Can we go back to the Sharpeville Six case. So you were a sort of channel of information?

EU: Yes, I think so. I was helping, I kept trying to. Mike and I guess Abdul Minty was the one who was constantly phoning. And so my father was trying to get information out to the international campaign that might help with the campaign, particularly once they were sentenced to death, with them not being executed. And they were trying to get information back in, and I actually can't remember all the ins and outs of it.

EO: Because I imagine there were logistical issues?

EU: There were lots of logistical issues and issues about who said what to whom, and in what way. And, I can even remember on the day that my son was born, Mike coming to see me at the hospital that afternoon, or early evening, because there was still information that we were trying to get across.^{iv}

EO: So, how did information flow? Were you able to write letters?

EU: Well, sometimes we were writing letters. I used to have a weekly phone call to my parents and we were trying to get information that way. Sometimes people came to visit and we were sending things back and forth. So the campaigns against political prisoners was something I felt very strongly about, and the demonstrations outside South Africa House in response to the deaths, the torture. Yes, that was something I did quite a bit. And the sense that, you know, sometimes they were people that I knew. So, for example, Jeanette Schoon, who I had known as a student activist. She was killed with a parcel bomb in Angola. That was a terribly distressing demonstration, to have to go and stand up. So were others when people's brothers and sisters were in prison, or they didn't know where they were. There were some very powerful emotional bonds forged between people, and I think the demonstrations were quite important moments to express that.

EO: And you mentioned another strand.

EU: The other area? Yes, the other strand of work I was doing, and I'd completely forgotten this, the National Committee seemed to have had a whole plan for work on education, so that they wanted to contact local schools, and they wanted to develop materials that could be used to teach about apartheid. And so I seem to have been involved in a sub-committee that was contacting teachers, putting together materials, and I suppose that took me into the work I later did with IDAF, because I wrote a book for IDAF on forced removals.

EO: Sorry, IDAF?

EU: International Defence and Aid Fund. They had two strands to their work. They were collecting money, and sending a lot of money for the defence of political prisoners in South Africa. But they also had a research department that was cutting the South African press and was collecting a lot of information. They had a really good library and so on. And IDAF commissioned me to do a couple of books, so I did one book on forced removals.

EO: Which was the forced removal of ... ?

EU: It was looking at different kinds of forced removal. It looked at the forced removal of people into and out of Bantustans. South Africa was divided into about ten nominally self-governing areas, but people were moved from areas, from one bit of land to another. There was also forced removal from the cities. Parts of cities were zoned for whites or Coloureds or Indians and people were moved. There was also forced removal associated with the pass laws, which was a kind of labour control legislation that operated up until the '80s. And then there was forced removal, there was a lot of informal settlement of shack dwellers, and then the city councils would come and clear those. So yes, I wrote that book on forced removals. I think the National Committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was quite interested in forced removals, because there seem to be articles that I've written on that for *Anti-Apartheid News* and for various briefings, for these education briefings. Then I did another book for IDAF on education and culture and opposition to apartheid, and all of that started to blend into what then, later, became my more formal career, working as an academic in that area.

EO: Great, so you've talked a bit about some of the campaigns you were involved in, but I don't know if there are others campaigns, or details ...

EU: More details ... I think the big campaigns that engaged me a lot were the campaigns to free political prisoners, particularly a number of women political prisoners, but South African political prisoners and Namibian political prisoners. So I think the way we used to work, we used to get a

particular name of someone. I think I did Ida Jimmy, a Namibian political prisoner, Theresa Ramashamole was a South African. And we'd profile them, we'd write about them, we'd campaign, we'd use the newsletter, we'd use the meetings, we'd hold demonstrations. There would be letter writing campaigns. Late in the day we seemed to connect with Amnesty and I'm not quite sure ... I think there is a politics about why Amnesty wouldn't take all the political prisoners that we were campaigning about. I think there were politics in Amnesty around that. But we used some of the techniques. But I think the main form of activism was the demonstration outside South Africa House. The other was the attempt to get things into the British media. So I remember we had a meeting at the Africa Centre, where we tried to invite a lot of journalists on the women's pages of the newspapers, trying to get them to write articles. It wasn't easy and I just, we didn't seem to be able to break into the mainstream. It remained a very fringe kind of interest and concern, which I think also speaks to some of the conservatism of the society in the '80s. I think another thing that was quite dramatic was that the miners' strike was a really big political rallying point. I remember at a number of the Women's Committee newsletter meetings that people were collecting money for the miners, or were saying: 'Oh, the miners' children are coming to spend holidays with us'. So that issue of diversifying into other areas of British political opposition, that's quite a bit of the flavour of the time.

EO: This is the British miners' strike?

EU: British miners' strike, yes sorry.

EO: And are there any other incidents maybe that stand out?

EU: Hmm

EO: I mean, you talk about demonstrations. I don't know if you could describe what a demonstration at South African House ...

EU: A demonstration at South Africa House or some of the big anti-apartheid demonstrations?

EO: Whichever, what they entailed.

EU: The big demonstrations were amazing. For example the 'No Botha' demonstration or the '76 demonstration at the time of the Soweto student uprisings. I think a really interesting feature of them was that they were very diverse: diverse ages, diverse kinds of people. Because there was a very strong trade union presence, there was a strong kind of local council presence, of people coming from different parts of the country. And then there was this kind of urban swirl of people, more a bit like me, the kind of student movement. And then there was the ANC and SWAPO, so there was quite a big exile contingent as well, often right at the front and very serious and you know, discussing things in great depth. The demonstrations were a very visible expression of how widespread the movement was in terms of its constituency. And I think I always liked that very much, that sense of being connected with lots of different people. That was quite inspiring.

EO: Can you think of any other high points?

EU: I think that some of the high points were these huge demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, sometimes with absolutely magnificent speakers. Although having said that, now I'm not going to be able to remember a specific ... I mean, Trevor Huddleston was always very very inspiring, both as a person and in the way he talked and his demeanour of being with other people. I think he was extremely notable. My memory of Nelson Mandela coming here is very much coloured through the whole ANC experience. So while I think, and I know, he had made important presentations and

incredible connection with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, for me the most powerful moments there was him addressing the ANC membership. And him standing with Oliver Tambo and this incredible moment that nobody ever thought we'd see, them together. Very very ... I hope I'm not making that up. I can remember Mandela very, very clearly at the school of ... Holloway Road. And I have a sense that Tambo was there, but I then have a doubt that maybe he wasn't there and that maybe he was already ill. I'll have to check that.

EO: And the low points?

EU: The low points. I think one of the low points that people must have spoken to you about was the conflict with the Kitson family about the non-stop picket. Have you heard that... yes? This was a group, I think, that formed around Norma Kitson and her children. And it was the City Anti-Apartheid group. That was what they called themselves. And, they committed themselves to a non-stop picket outside South Africa house until all ... initially it was until, possibly until Mandela was freed. Maybe it started until David Kitson was freed, then till Mandela was freed, then till all political prisoners. It was a very big conflict within the ANC around political leadership, which affected the Anti-Apartheid Movement. And the Anti-Apartheid Movement turned on the City branch, accusing them of hijacking the Movement. And I think at the time, I didn't like that politics of exclusion, even though I didn't have a name for it, and I could see that the City Anti-Apartheid group were taking a sectional interest and so on. So it was an interesting moment about the nature of political inclusivity and direction, and I suppose exposes the limits of that libertarian kind of politics that I've been talking about. It had its attractive features, but then it also ... What happens when people go off message? Or what happens over contestations over power? It's probably naïve, a bit incoherent.

EO: And looking back, what are your feelings about your involvement in the anti-apartheid campaign?

EU: Well, I think I got the most powerful experiences of opportunities to work with people who were very creative, who were very politically committed, who were very astute about how they understood social change and how they understood confronting inequality. I got an experience of a very diverse movement, working at many levels, from engaging with governments through international organisations – I didn't mention a trip I made to the UN in the 1990s – so, government, international organisations, trade unions, peace activist, environmental activists. Being able to see every facet of social life as having a very political dimension, and being amenable to people coming together, and being able to critique it and try to change it. I think all of that I got from being involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and seeing a kind of practical and inclusive politics. And seeing that sustained, I mean that's the other thing – other movements have had this for short periods of time. I think I saw this in the Anti-Apartheid Movement from the mid-'70s to the early '90s. It's a very, very long time. I kind of grew up and had my eyes opened by the depth of that everyday vision, everyday politics that was the clear commitment around equality.

EO: Could you tell us a bit more about your trip to the UN?

EU: I went on behalf of the Canon Collins Education Trust. And it was in that period, it must have been early '92, when it was still completely uncertain whether peace would be negotiated in South Africa. And there was a meeting of the ... the UN had a Special Committee against Apartheid and it was a meeting and people came. You know, there were government departments, there were UN organisations there, there were some of what I think were the big funders of the anti-apartheid movement and different offshoots. And I just had to make a small presentation on behalf of the Canon Collins Education Trust. But that was my sense that suddenly this is a very big international movement. I don't think being involved at the local level, at the Hackney level or the Women's Committee level, or even going on the big national demonstrations, I ever had the powerful sense

of it being a very international movement. And yet when I look back at it, that international sense of international sanctions, and again, when I look through the papers, we were very international. We were corresponding with people in Holland or in France, or in different parts of Africa. And so I suppose that is another thing I got from the Movement, was this sense of international networks, which has been part of the way I have been engaged in other work around education rights. All of that I learned from the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

EO: Great. You talk about how there is a transition from working with the Anti-Apartheid Movement to working more with the ANC. I don't know, do you want to talk about that at all?

EU: Yes, I haven't thought about why ... Oh yes, I suppose there is a formal reason and an another ... What I think was happening, by about '85-'86, I think, I stopped being on the National Committee, and I started to have a much more limited connection with the Women's Committee, but I was very active in the North London ANC unit. I was the secretary of the ANC unit. I think why I shifted my weight to the ANC, the weight of my interest and engagement, was because of the state of emergency in South Africa. And things were becoming very ... extremely repressive in South Africa. Hundreds if not thousands of people were being arrested monthly as the emergency went from the mid '80s. And that just built and built and built in a crescendo. I also then formally had a job from '86. I was working on a research project on education in South Africa, which was partly doing research for the ANC Education Committee. So that seemed to take much of my energies. So in some ways I started to recalibrate my politics. I was very, very focused on South Africa, very focused on thinking about an education system in a future South Africa, very engaged in connections with education activists in South Africa. And that was my day job and my night job and my whatever ... And so the Anti-Apartheid Movement became a bit more, a place where I had lots of friends, I had lots of people who I knew, but it wasn't what I was doing all the time.

EO: OK, is there anything else you'd like to say?

EU: I can't think. If I think of others can I ... Yes, there were a couple of other things I maybe want to say about being an academic. Because I think that there were things about the issues that we learned, and campaigned about, and spoke about, in our political life in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and later in the ANC, that really had a big impact on how I developed the disciplinary areas in which I came to specialise, which are gender and women's studies, education and international development and, I guess, comparative education. So to the extent that those disciplinary areas have become interested in issues about inequality, issues about exclusion and inclusion, issues about popular mobilisation and issues around how ordinary people bring about change, all of that, I think that kind of formative experiences in the Anti-Apartheid Movement actually also had intellectual ripples in terms of how ideas developed.

EO: We were just chatting after we'd stopped the tape, and you suggested that it might be good to put it in context in terms of internationalism more generally.

EU: Yes, I think I had forgotten, until I looked at those papers that I'd picked up. I'd clearly been to a meeting in 1978 and I just put all the leaflets together that I'd picked up at this meeting. So they're leaflets from the Anti-Apartheid Movement, they're leaflets from the ANC, they're leaflets from ZAPU in Zimbabwe and SWAPO. Then they're leaflets from Eritrea. They're leaflets in support of Irish political prisoners and then there is a kind of intense sectarian disputes going on between the ANC and the PAC, another socialist group, in relation to South Africa. And what it triggered for me was that sense of ferment, of international groups that were all working in London. I can remember being a student in SOAS at the time of the overthrow of the Shah in Iran, and there were a lot of ... I think they must have been members of the Iranian Communist Party who were students there. And there was a lot of discussion and people being acutely aware of issues around

Iran. There were issues around Palestine and ... The different formations in relation to Palestine, critiques of Israel, which were being made by Israeli activists who were also, I guess they must have been, possibly in the Israeli Communist Party, also studying at SOAS. I've spoken about the Irish. I think there were Italian activists as well. So this whole sense of political dispute and debate, in which South Africa commanded ... a sense of being an anti-apartheid activist commanded a lot of respect. Oh, I also didn't mention Kenyan opposition activists. It was a period of intense repression in Kenya and a number of political activists were imprisoned or had come as exiles to London. So, yes, that sense that activism against apartheid in South Africa commanded a great deal of respect and people were in dialogue all the time with us about other struggles in other parts of the world. It's a very rich flavour of the time.

EO: Great

ⁱ Elaine is referring to George Jackson.

ⁱⁱ Elaine's father defended the Sharpeville Six, who were community activists caught up in a demonstration at which a black deputy mayor was killed, and three Umkhonto we Sizwe members, Johannes Shabangu, David Moise and Bobby Tsotsobe, known as the Pretoria Three, who were charged with sabotage. Both groups were sentenced to death and later reprieved.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elaine is remembering the vigil for Thelle Mogoerane, Jerry Mosololi and Marcus Motaung, three Umkhonto we Sizwe activists who were hanged in June 1983.

^{iv} Elaine passed information to the Anti-Apartheid Movement about the trials of the Sharpeville Six and the Pretoria Three. Here she is referring to the trial of the Pretoria Three.