

Collection Number: AL3290

Project Name: Anti Privatisation Forum

Date of Interview: 2010-02-19

Location of Interview: Johannesburg

Language/s of interview: English

Length of interview: 1:49:38

Name of interviewer: Dale McKinley

Name of interviewee/s: Prishani Naidoo

Name of translator (if any): n/a

Name of transcriber: Olga R Pickover and Selpahi Sibanda

Notes on access and use (if any):

Audio file name/s of interview: AL3290_Naidoo Prishani_2010-02-19



Dale: Okay it is the 19th of February 2010 and this is Dale McKinley and I am interviewing Prishani Naidoo. Thanks Prishani for making time for this, appreciate it. Okay ... just for the record ... what's your full name?

Prishani: I'm Prishani Naidoo.

Dale: And Prishani before we start going into asking some questions and talking about the APF, I just want to know a little bit about you, the background of the individuals who were in the APF. Where and when were you born?

Prishani: I was born in 1973 in Durban but I was taken almost immediately to Port Shepstone where I grew up and spent the first eleven years of my life. And then moved to Durban until I was seventeen, then up to Johannesburg and I have been here since then.

Dale: Okay well that answers a set of interesting places where you've lived. Just tell us a little bit about your family ... you have, brothers and sisters?

Prishani: I have two younger sisters and they're both now doctors.

Dale: Okay and your parents are still alive?

Prishani: Ja, both my parents are still alive and they live in Durban, they're also both doctors

Dale: Both doctors as well, so they are very medical. And schooling, just tell us a bit in terms of your schooling.

Prishani: Until I was eleven, I went to a state aided Indian school in Port Shepstone. Then I moved to Durban to go to a private school called Lonsdale all girl's Catholic school, and ja I matriculated from there in 1990.

Dale: All right, then from after matriculation?

Prishani: Then well I took a year studying general BA courses at the University of Durban Westville. I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do with my life. I got a scholarship to do that, and during that year decided that I wanted to study medicine so I came up to Johannesburg. So I got accepted at Wits and I ploughed through two and a half years of medicine and decided I hated it. So then switched back to the BA and finished my BA with English and Sociology majors. And then I did my honours in comparative literature and the department was sadly closed as part of the restructuring that happened at Wits University. And then I started to work in my honours year. First at Khanya College doing basic trade union education particularly with women in NEHAWU and SACCAWU; and worked on their first

three year Gender Programmes that those unions put together but that initial time at Khanya was very short. And then I left to finish my honours and then I got a job as the Gender Programme Officer of the Heinrich Boll Foundation Southern Africa office based here in Joburg.

Dale: Just explain what the Henrich Boll Stiftung/Foundation is?

Prishani: It's a German political foundation that's allied to the German Green Foundation. So the way the German political system works is that every party that is represented in Parliament gets money to do what they call development work, like the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. And the Heinrich Boll Foundation at that time had three programmes - media, gender and environmental programmes that served Southern Africa. So I was their first gender programme officer who put together their gender programme which operated in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Mauritius. So I did that for two years and I was a little unsettled, disillusioned by the time I decided to leave. Partly also because I couldn't play the role politically that I was playing as a South African activist being in a German political foundation. And then the opportunity came to go back to Khanya. I went back to Khanya and rejoined the gender programme which was growing at that time, and Khanya was then taking on a different focus and it had lost a lot of trade union work it had been getting and started working with new social movements and community movements. Nina Benjamin was at the time co-ordinating their community development worker program and I came in as the gender coordinator and started working with Nina doing the research component of the community work and headed up the research work that started with Orange Farm. Started with their participatory research work with the Khanya women's consortium at the time in Orange Farm and, ja, together with Nina basically built those ties with the Orange Farm community and during that time actually in Orange Farm, a Water Crisis Committee emerged. I can remember our first meetings and Nina and I were calling in Rob to come and speak to people in Orange Farm and encourage them to join the APF. I was at Khanya for about a year and a half and during that time also the APF emerged and I got active in that. And the media started and then the World Conference against Racism came up. And I decided not to remain at Khanya for a lot of reasons, and started doing independent contract research work together with Ahmed and Nicholas - started a little research collective called Research and Education Development (R.E.D) and through that did quite a few research projects related to various things. I'm trying to remember now ...

Dale: Ja ... that's fine.

Prishani: And then in the last two years I decided to apply for a job at Wits University. Quite unplanned really and encouraged by Ahmed and I also just wanted to get back into an academic space, also having had the experience of going back into a masters program with the Centre for Civil Society, Patrick Bond. So it lasted almost two years at the end of this

year by lecturing in the Sociology Department at Wits. First year globalisation and health sciences and third year sociology work.

Dale: Okay quite a lot to fit in the year that you've been around. Okay just briefly describe how you became politicised, how you became an activist?

Prishani: I grew up in a family that was political. At least my father was the first General Secretary of the revived Natal Indian Congress in the 70's in Durban. But well, just after I was born [he was] threatened with banning, then left the NIC but still maintained links. So I grew up in a family that was connected politically and who was always active. And I grew up with friends of theirs around me always being politically active, always aware. And then to my own experience as a black South African growing up under apartheid, feeling oppression in various ways and being conscientised then through that experience and the fact that these things were always being spoken about around me, things always being organised, fought against and even South African history also being taught to me by my dad and friends. My parents were at University at medical school in Natal in the 70's. So there was also the influence of their friends who were from the BC (Black Consciousness) movement who was the congress and black consciousness traditions that I was aware of growing up. But I only really became involved in organisations at organisation level in 1989/1990 when the ANC was started, when I started to know the ANC was going to be unbanned, political prisoners were going to be released. I was in Standard 9 and in matric at the time and getting involved in those initial establishments of ANC branches, ANC Youth League branches, getting involved in that early period in the '90s and initially really throwing my weight behind the first elections, setting up our own ANC branches in Durban Western areas which was also a good learning experience to me - I was a very excited young person at the time. People in our branch, in our ANC Youth League branch, I was general Secretary and Malusi Gigaba was the chairperson at the time, and then people in the branch, like Alec Erwin, Jahendra, Jay Naidoo, small Jay, Ismael Meer, Fatima Meer, Farouk Meer. So I mean a lot of people I looked up to growing up and ja, but also learnt very quickly of the dangers with being so in awe of these big names and not knowing for myself and rather following rather than trying to think through for myself. Oh Pravin Gordhan was also around at the same time and at the same time going to the University Durban Westville I joined the South African National Students Congress and then when I came to Wits at that time, there was also the merger happening between NUSAS and SASCO and I became a member of SASCO.

Dale: Sorry, just when did you get to Wits, what year was that?

Prishani: In 1992

Dale: '92, okay.

Prishani: In '91, I was in UDW.

Prishani: And I think the biggest learning experience for me at that time was the merger between SASCO and NUSAS because they also had all these political traditions and tendencies and for the first time I started to see the differences within the Congress Movement and started to have defined my own voice, and started to have to think through for myself, what I actually believed in rather than just following blindly things that were unfolding. And we were in that merger process, particularly that black consciousness tradition and in terms of the higher education sector the black student's societies at the time being quite vocal against the merger wanting completely different kinds of approach to this idea of non-racialism to those coming from NUSAS and a less critical understanding of non-racialism. So I mean those initial debates and discussions around non-racialism and what the congress tradition and myself also being quite naïve in certain positions. I took time learning I think through that.

Dale: Okay.

Prishani: Your question was just how I came to be a political activist.

Dale: Ja I mean you feel free to share what you want ... at that point when SASCO and NUSAS merged, just tell us a little bit about from that point on during the '90's because your activism obviously changed as a result.

Prishani: Ja I mean also growing up in a very nationalist family despite the BC influence from friends and reading and learning all about that. In those first few years in SASCO I was very much within the Congress tradition, very much a defender of that history and that even though I was becoming a little critical I would always abide by organisational discipline, being uncritical, understanding democratic essentials until I myself felt my own voice completely silenced or unable to actually make myself meaningful in certain spaces. And I think in particular in the mid-90's as I started to take on leadership positions in the student movement, I was supposed to just follow SASCO, but then got deployed by SASCO to Wits SRC and the National South African University Students Representative Council. And at that time there were all of these discussions around macro-economic policy of the ANC movement that I was going to adopt - GEAR started becoming the policy that was going to be introduced. There were a whole lot of debates within the SASCO branch. And at national level and becoming more vocal against GEAR at a national level and then institutionally there's another discussion around just forms of protest action and how I, mean learning through those debates which I think would take us another day, I won't go into them completely but I think through that process then learning the difficulties with the ways in which the Congress movement operated and the way organisation happened and politics was made to happen in that space. And through that experience then becoming a little disillusioned; more and more disillusioned with the ways in which the alliance and SASCO as an ally of that, well an aligned movement of that alliance, was relating to the broader positions that would have been taken in particular around GEAR and new policies were

introduced. And that's how I then started to look for, to look to other ways of acting politically relating to these discussions and debates and by the time the APF started to be, but it wasn't really the APF that started to be ...

Dale: Well, just tell us a little bit how you got to that sort of point?

Prishani: By 1998 I already got my honours so I wasn't officially a student anymore, but I was always thinking of doing this weirdest thing with this Masters, but I already started working. So 1998/99/2000 I was this kind of lost body without a real organisation, but I would go to SASCO branch meetings and I mean Ahmed and Nicholas were still my closest friends at the time and Daniel Hutchinson and so I would relate to ... my activism was really something that happened through my links through them, through the SASCO branch and attending SASCO branch meetings and participating still in those kinds of discussions. And when Wits University started to introduce its plans for restructuring along neo liberal lines in 1999-2000, the SASCO branch then started to, or members within the SASCO branch started to make links with other parts of the alliance in particular the Joburg branch of SACP and the Anti-Igoli Forum that had emerged in Joburg, particularly through Trevor Ngwane. And when some of us heard of a conference that was being organised by the University in conjunction with the city that was also embarking on its privatisation plans in the form of Igoli at the time we started organising or started talking about organising actions to protest this conference called Urban Futures in 2000 and it really happened. I mean the way I remember it, it was just a very kind of ad-hoc way, it kind of emerged and I mean there were meetings that started through a few people from SASCO, the party and Anti-Igoli Forum coming together and particular individuals who were more invested in the conference, like Patrick Bond trying to eh bribe... I can't find another word certain people who were trying to protest the conference, from getting involved in the conference. I think it was Ahmed and Nic who went to meet with him and he offered them a hundred tickets for people to attend the conference. And then, well these kind of debates just continuing between people and then eventually people from COSATU, I think some meetings were happening at COSATU House, some meetings were happening at SAMWU provincial office in town. The people I can remember, John Apollis from COSATU, Rob Rees, Maria and Oupa were also involved at the time and a couple of students, ja they kind of just pulling those protest actions together through those meetings that just started to grow. I think we ended up calling it activist forums and then the conflict itself, we protested in various ways from the throwing of water balloons at people speaking at scheduled events in Newtown to comrades just going into lunches and eating food and these meetings started to happen through the invasion of that thing. The meeting in the Great Hall at Wits where Bundy was chased and I think you and Ahmed had to intervene when he was held up by someone. So I mean that's how I remember the emergence of the APF and then slowly as that activist forum started to grow and meetings started to become more regular it took on a more formal sense and over time became an organisation. But even in those initial years that the

organisation formed I can remember it being debated and discussed quite often until it took on the form that we know today.

Dale: Okay well you've covered quite a view of the subsequent questions ... that I had around the formation of the APF. But just one additional thing ... what do you remember when the APF actually formed itself as the Anti Privatisation Forum, the component parts of that?

Prishani: It would be the SASCO Wits branch and I think broader than that what was called the Wits Crisis Committee at the time which might have included people who do not formerly align themselves with SASCO, the Johannesburg branch of the South African Communist Party, members of COSATU. I can remember initially us wanting COSATU to come on board formerly, but a number of attempts failing, and then John and a couple of others as individuals coming on board. Some were members ... and then individuals, we were not necessarily coming there as representatives of organisations.

Dale: Okay and for you specifically, why the specific interest in issues of privatisation and how did it coalesce around that sort of concept, around anti-privatisation for you?

Prishani: I think that it was mainly because of the policies that were being introduced at the time. In particular the Wits 2001 restructuring at Wits along neo liberal lines which included various forms of privatisation and the plans for the city that were being discussed in this document called Igoli 2002, that were making overt calls for various forms of privatisation in the city. And I think that's why and the Urban Futures Conference showcasing those plans for privatisation meant that the protest took on that character of wanting to challenge and well, be anti those privatisation policies.

Dale: ... given what you talked about in terms of where you came from politically in your own experiences, how did that sit politically or ideologically with you in regards to your past in politics and involvements? ... now you are pretty much opposing at least at a macro level, the ANC and the Government and parts of COSATU at least.

Prishani: Look I mean, at the time it felt almost natural because we'd been fighting for sometime within SASCO, around initially GEAR, which was, I mean quite an abstract thing in the first few discussions and engagements that we had within SASCO at the branch level and at the national level, but then over time that also became very evident in the individual kind of policies that were starting to be rolled out and that was spoken about. In terms of higher education and if you look at the higher education sector and what we've been saying - when I came into the student movement there was this vision of the student movement as not being a sectoral kind of movement or sectoral organisation but one that was very much rooted in the broader struggle, in the struggle for a broader vision for transformation of South African society as a whole and seeing the transformation of a higher education as

contributing towards that broader society of transformation. Over time ... well it happened pretty quickly if you look back now from 1993/1994 when we started to be told that you know you need to be disciplined within the student movement, you need to start thinking about how your struggle is going to, you know, focus on that, that particular sector by higher education. And we started to be pushed into a very, very sectoral struggle around that space of higher education and we also started to be seen and characterised very differently within the broader movement. And when we started to argue against GEAR, when we started to insist on also interventions from the broader liberation movement in the struggles that were happening at particular institutions like Wits we constantly started to be told that you need to fight this on your own, on the one hand but then when certain kinds or forms of protests were undertaken like Operation Litter that was happening in 1993/1994 the movement become or the leadership of the movement would come back and say, you behave yourselves, be disciplined, you're not contributing in the manner that would be expected of the intelligentsia or of the student movement. So then we were already feeling those kinds of contradictions and changes from those early years and I think over time within the Wits SASCO branch we had been sidelined as a branch initially within SASCO and in terms of the broader alliance and then slowly within the branch a group of us will be marginalised in terms of our views within the branch. So I know I am not explaining this very well, but, I mean if you look at it just in terms of organisational discipline and the ways in which the changes that we can quite clearly see now looking back at the liberation movement or the ANC alliance, how initially where as we were being disciplined from outside, from the leadership of, of the liberation movement, over time that discipline started to be taken on by individuals within SASCO and within its SASCO branch. So we started to become a smaller and smaller group within that movement making these calls or claiming that the programme or the historical programme of the liberation movement was being sold and that the possibilities that we had imagined were there in the early nineties around forms of governance, around ways of organising, around the kinds of economic policies that were going to be made through struggle that those slowly started to become narrow, become narrower and narrower. And by the time the APF emerged and those struggles that led to the birth of the APF emerged, I think there were quite a few of us who felt like there was no other way, this was the only way we could see and that way was actually being made at the time by us together rather than some kind of fore-thought plan that we were rolling out.

Dale: Were you aware at the time leading up to the formation of the APF that the other components that eventually came together to form the APF might have had very similar experiences where they were located?

Prishani: I think that was what was ... inspiring is the wrong word, but that's what also kind of drove us at that time. You could also feel there were others experiencing similar problems to that in similar spaces in the alliance and I think that was what encouraged us to

participate in the formation of the APF. We were coming together with people experiencing the similar things from different parts of the alliance and thinking similarly about different ways of approaching these problems.

Dale: Okay. Now when all these groups came together and started forming the APF, there were different individuals as you say, others were from unions, SACP so forth. There was quite a bit of ideological heterogeneity. When you came into that milieu, did you see that as a strength, weakness, you know, forming this what was called the social movement, it was something different than what had come before?

Prishani: To be honest, initially I don't think that even played a role in my thinking, initially it was just this, and you know we've got a common programme; we've got something to act around in common. It was only after those first protests when we started to sit down and talk about actually seeing this as an organisation that heterogeneity started to show itself and initially I celebrated that as a strength. But I mean also because as I said it wasn't as though we had answers, we were kind of just finding ourselves in coming together with others, so it was also a way of thinking through for myself, new ways of approaching these questions. But over time I think others or some groups that came together with us, wanting to homogenise this diversity you know, wanting to make us always speaking one voice about one alternative, about one way of changing things. I think that led to many of us then becoming very defensive of positions that we might not always have been completely wedded to...

Dale: Can you give us an example?

Prishani: I mean like I can remember most clearly the most recent ways in which this unfolded. I think also the first discussions, whenever there were discussions about a political party or changing organisation into a political party surfaced, I think the ways in which we approached that discussion and debate closed down any possibilities for thinking about alternative ways of doing politics because different groups were very defensive of their need to either make us a political party or not; so you know, in putting forward just set pet arguments, for or against a political party. I don't think we allowed for proper engagement amongst ourselves about a real political alternative, not just in terms of the APF as an organisation but I think at a national level, thinking through different ways of governing and emerging, thinking through alternatives, to current state forms. I think every time that party discussion surfaced it kind of ... I mean the potential for anything to be produced anything mutually produced just kind of shut down. There were moments when I think that could've happened and some of us did come with views towards having that discussion. But particular groups and I think yeah, the Socialist Group, DSM and those kinds of formations in claiming to know what this alternative is, prevented us from actually having a proper discussion.

Dale: That's very fundamental in terms of the early formation and the shaping of the APF. How do you remember the participation in those kinds of key strategic discussions with regards to what you called the seasoned activists and those with the skills coming from the middle class background and the community members that were beginning to join the APF after that initial year?

Prishani: Ja, no I think that was very unfortunate that it was the so called seasoned activists and the leaders of these small groups that tended to dominate those discussions and that's also partly I think what closed down this potential for having a different...

Dale: Okay I thought you might have a question to follow up there. From your recollection outside even of those political parties, social movements and community organisations around issues and kinds of debates, how do you remember what came to be the founding vision or the principles of the APF?

Prishani: What exactly are you asking?

Dale: I mean at some point or another the APF was going through discussions and trying to identify itself essentially what it was and what it stood for, what was it about, why did all these people come together to form this thing and what were they going to do? In other words, I mean the founding vision, strategic vision, what was it about?

Prishani: For me that discussion was quite disappointing and I mean the whole discussion around socialism for me is another example of this kind of closing down potential for the production of something new, something different. And I think there also we saw quite a defensiveness in terms of different individuals or different groups defending their vision of what socialism is. And I think again many of this division that you make between the more seasoned activists and the activists who had emerged from the community, different community struggles around specific issues, that there might not have been that kind of characterisation of these struggles as socialist in the same way. I think that the possibilities for thinking about these struggles and imagining them outside of that frame of socialism as imagined by these seasoned activists ... I think that was, that was a real divide and those voices were not really allowed to be heard partly because of the ways in which that discussion was framed.

Dale: And again from your recollection of understanding at the time as one of the founding activists of the APF, what did you think at that time the APF had agreed to, what it was hoping to do to achieve practically, what was its aim?

Prishani: I think at a practical level it was wanting to fight specific issues wanting to make specific gains around specific issues; such as gaining access for people to basic services fighting for an alternative way of ensuring the delivery of basic services like water, housing, electricity. So I think in terms of the specific demands and the specific aims I think those

were representative of the majority of members of the APF but I think that the framing of those around the whole discussion and debate around the framing of those within this idea of socialism which I still think is a very contested term within the APF in spite of us having a...what is the word?

Dale: Long term vision?

Prishani: Vision that broke, ja, for me it's neither here nor there, whether there's socialism or constitutional principles. I think that was it. What I mean by having foreclosed proper discussions that we still don't know what that actually means and I would argue that different members have different ideas of what that vision is and how that vision is.

Dale: So ... even though in the last while you've been outside the more regular activities of the APF your sense is that that's still something that had never quite been properly discussed and strategised around and dealt with?

Prishani: Well I mean I haven't been there in discussions for a while so I have to say that I can't comment on the recent discussions and debates. In my experience, I think that even when we had those workshops around socialism, I mean I was completely, completely upset by those workshops on socialism partly because they were led by members of particular socialist groupings within the APF and they were designed in a way to smash certain individuals and specific approaches within the APF. I can remember one discussion where I was asked to present, they told things like you know the women in Soweto who is fighting for water does not have any understanding of the broader struggle for socialism or things like you know, describe what the multitude is, describe what the working class is, oh you see the multitude is just this. When none of us were even using those kind of words ... so there was this kind of false mobilisation of approaches and concepts in order to, I actually don't understand what it was there to do whereas if those workshops were actually started with the experience of people in communities and move from their own understanding of what they were doing in those struggles broader than just seeing them as struggles for their immediate survival we might have developed a different language around socialism or around this vision. And I mean another example there would be just how different affiliates understanding of their struggles have not, I think, been heard within the APF in terms of how these debates and discussions have been structured over time. I mean if you look at two very, very different affiliates the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee and the Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee for example very, very different ways of approaching organising and of understanding why they are struggling in the ways that they are. And also making different choices at different times about their observation in the APF and how they were going to relate to the main structures of the APF. And I think at one point particularly around when Operation Khanyisa emerged and that whole shaping of the APF's programme around that time I would argue that Orange Farm withdrew at that point and partly because it was being forced to vocalise its struggles in a particular way and were meant to fight in a

particular way within the organisation. And I think there could be other examples that could be given. So I mean I include myself in this criticism. If we look at how discussions and debates have been structured in an organisation even the research subcommittee, the education subcommittee, I think while they all did good work and have made good contributions. I think at another level just the way in which they framed participation and they framed the elaboration of this vision and ways of engaging politically that we might not have taken into account certain other ways of thinking about these things.

Dale: That sort of ties back to one of the previous questions that I was asking with regards to what you were saying. You know the individuals and the activists that came as a political group, that came into the APF initially, starting it as the activist's forum and then communities beginning to join over a period of time in those early years. Those were the years when you were very active in the APF ... just straight up front how did you in the context of trying to form what was called a new social movement - trying to be inclusive in other words not shutting the door, saying you can't come because you are from that point or this point - at that time did you think there was anything that the APF could've done differently other than framing the debates and then other things in relation to the power relations that came into that ... in that context to try and form a new organisation out of nothing?

Prishani: I think some of us could've silenced ourselves a little, taken a little bit of a back seat but I think you could only say that in hindsight partly because the ways we came to this formation were such that we each kind of knew or thought we knew what we wanted to get through this. And I mean other than that I think there's no way of knowing beforehand and I mean if we are just thinking of particular experiences like the research sub-committee, the coming in of large sums of money around particular projects creates a whole series of problems and very difficult dynamics to manage and then do you really want to be managing those relationships or do you allow them to play themselves out amongst the group of people who have come into a common struggle you know with their individual ways of understanding and how these things unfold? And that's partly with the research subcommittee towards the end when I kind of withdrew because I felt that I had a little too much power when I was in that space and I was being asked to manage particular kinds of relationships specifically around money and who got access to certain resources at an earlier stage of the organisation. I am not sure how things could've been done differently.

Dale: That might be ... it's not sort of how things might have been done differently but how in some ways did you think that it ... given the historical picture you painted the contextual picture you've painted the individuals who were part of that ... whether or not that was almost inevitable? I know it's an open question but a very interesting one as well. Specifically in the first year of the APF it had no external financial resources [but] then made applications to get those resources and [was] successful I think in 2002 or late 2001/ 2002.

How did you understand - there were debates in the organisation around that, there were differences - what was your recollection of that?

Prishani: In the initial days as I said it was very kind of ad-hoc resources when you could get resources and I mean a couple of us were working in funding with organisations and NGO'S and kind of just drew on whatever we could and often lied about things and made up kind of proposals to get little bits of money for particular projects. In the debates I don't remember them very well around funding in particular.

Dale: But what was it when you look back at that time ... your opinion as to the accessing of significant financial resources? You just mentioned one of the practical impacts that that had on your work in the APF and how that in a sense for you negatively impacted. I guess the question would be in a context of a movement whose predominant constituency became mostly unemployed not working class of people, which didn't have a financial base, was that something that was at the time - for you - thinking that well this is okay as long as it's done properly or was it just something that was from the beginning problematic?

Prishani: I think this was always a difficult issue for me. I think on the one hand we needed to secure funds in order to undertake proper campaigns and ensure sustainability of the work of affiliates and organisation as a whole. I think that it's constantly been a problem in organisations like these and in the, the media as well there have been horror stories around gaining access to even little bits of money but I think generally while having money has allowed for that to happen, allowed for the organisation to grow to sustain itself, campaigns to be undertaken itself, I think it did also lead to the organisation taking on a bit of a different character and I think that we have to be open about the fact and honest about the fact that it did create a number of problems. And I mean the fact that the organisation, that many times started to be seen by different groups and individuals as a way of generating a little bit of income for sustaining themselves. This has had to be something that has been managed as it's a reason, I 'm not sure how else it could have been then and I think that they were in a better position than me to speak about all the different incidents.

Dale: I will be interviewed as well ... on that front.

Prishani: And problems, I think that it allowed certain individuals the power in the organisation. I mean particularly people who got paid positions and those that had to be dealt with as they've arisen and over time there'd be different fights that have been waged around those issues at an affiliate level and the broader organisational level.

Dale: How do you remember the discussions and debates ... from the early part [of] the activist forum translating into more formal structures of the APF and how it became structured organisationally?

Prishani: I can't remember that period too well. But I remember celebrating the initial form that the APF took and I still think that if we look at other new social movements and in spite of all the criticism I've raised that the form of the APF has taken in terms of its providing the space for as many people from as many affiliates to contribute to the shaping of the broad programs, that the APF stands out in terms of being able to provide that broadly democratic space. I think the problems that I raised, the criticisms that I've raised, have over time been dealt with as they've arisen and unlike other movements like the Anti-eviction Campaign for example, like the Concerned Citizens Forum in Durban, that the fact that there's been such a broadly representative and a broader representative ability for individual members to actually raise their problems in the democratic space has been what's set it apart from other's and that allowed it to deal with these problems as they emerged.

Dale: Okay and to what extent do you think that the way that the APF eventually got constructed - how was that influenced by previous ... where people were coming from the liberation movement itself and all the different experiences?

Prishani: I think, I think that played quite a big role. And that experience being both what we had been schooled in as well as what we learnt from in terms of the negative experiences we'd had. And I think we've also been able to learn through the experience of the APF because the forum has also changed over time. But I think also one, I mean aside from the actual formal structure that it took representing those histories of the individuals that made it up I think particularly in the more recent struggle that I was part of, when the Socialist Group in particular started to dominate the organisation. I think we saw some ugly traditions that people brought were starting to emerge and in particular in organisational process and structures being played in very much the same way as I had experienced and witnessed in the ANC Alliance structures; from things like elections being rigged or people who haven't really been part of the organisation been bussed in to participate in the discussions or dominate voting processes. Things like that I think those negative experiences from previous participation in organisations has also have had some effect on the organisation.

Dale: The APF started out with a fairly big bang in the first two to three years with a whole range of big events that it was part of - the World Conference Against Racism, World Summit on Sustainable Development and a whole range of activities - and there was a sense probably amongst a lot of the people that it was a very exciting and very active time. How did you experience that period in practical struggle terms ...?

Prishani: I mean like you were saying it was a very exciting time though it wasn't really things we were thinking about we were just kind of acting and being part of this movement that we were celebrating being built. I mean there were lots of little fights and debates and times when you felt like you were under attack for having the positions you took, but generally you know contributing to the organising of those big events or those big

campaigns or at a very practical level I felt like part of something, very much part of something new that was being built. I mean you've spent quite a long period of time in the APF. The thing is in those initial years I was very, very celebratory and then there was a time when I kind of withdrew for a little bit. And it was ironically around Trevor's arrest and the Kensington '87 and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee coming under fire that I was kind of going to reinvigorate, but I mean I am using that example to show also that it wasn't necessarily this one kind of experience. It was celebratory but celebratory in a way that understood that there were different kinds of experiences that you were going to be part of and that was also part of building a new movement. I mean to answer your question in terms of practicalities talking about specific things that I did or ...?

Dale: I wasn't specifically referring to things that you did but I mean please mention them, because you know that's the way through which we often want to remember these things is to experience them, is our roles in that. But I was asking a broader sort of umbrella question ... how did you as a result of a lot of those initial activities and mobilisations and everything that put the APF on the map, so to speak on the political map, there were a lot of responses from various quarters including you know, from the state, the ANC - how did you think that impacted in particular on the development and the subsequent development of the APF?

Prishani: I think it made it stronger. I mean it allowed us to feel that we were actually having an effect and it united people in those first years. I can remember, I can't remember the exact year but it was those first few years it was one of our first June 16th protests in Soweto at the Hector Peterson memorial and I think at the time we were all a little unsure of each other. It was fairly small protest, it was Trevor, you were there, Daniel and I mean those first SECC members and I can remember very clearly a divide between the ANC and the ANC Youth League supporters and ourselves and us just coming together at one point where we would be like scolded by the ANC people and fighting also over those flags at that time because we were still carrying the ANC colours and the SACP colours and we didn't have our own flags yet and our own symbols. So there was this coming together of all of us around this kind of defence of something we were being critical of you know, if you really think about it. So I think those kinds of attacks on us forced us to unite around particular issues even though we might have - in terms of a broad vision or ideological tendencies - been divided and I think it forced us also to clarify in terms of those particular demands we were talking about, or the particular gains we were trying to make on what we were actually saying, what our programme was.

Dale: At what point, if there was any point, at what point do you think that that translated into the APF defining its own identity? Because that happened at some point and time, as opposed to as you say trying to almost defend the old alliance kind of you know like the Freedom Charter and all those things. How did you see that process happening and what contributed to that, those kinds of events or other things?

Prishani: It's a difficult question because like you saying there isn't some point at which it happened except I think that we were also struggling with the fact that we had been part of these different parts of the alliance but were wanting something different, something new and needing to also speak in our own voice and speak in our own name. So I mean I can't say exactly when and how it happened but I think in those different campaigns in ... in needing to say what we meant in these different campaigns, for want of another word in branding different campaigns in Kensington in 1987 and the different ways of making a media around these different campaigns. I mean I can very vaguely remember the discussion around the logo and some of the fights over that and I think in those different struggles and the engagements within the movement around how you spoke about that, the APF identity.

Dale: Okay, okay I guess that a follow-on question would be - would you locate that process, if it was a process, predominantly internally or predominantly as a result of external events?

Prishani: I think it's a combination.

Dale: A combination, okay. What kinds of (combination) just speak to that?

Prishani: I think initially it was probably driven by the external. But over time I can almost remember as we started having our own media workshops for example and putting together APF newsletters and starting to come together as a group outside of just fighting against or fighting, you know fighting in those particular campaigns and it started to become a mix.

Dale: Okay and ... you talked about the one experience in Soweto - June 16th - with the ANC and ANC Youth League and the confrontation that happened. Do you think that the historical period within which the APF was formed, in 2000, right at the beginning more or less of the Mbeki administration, that this had a fundamental shaping of how the APF itself developed with regards to what was being done under the rubric of the state and in the name of the ANC?

Prishani: Definitely.

Dale: In particular, how would you locate that?

Prishani: I think I have spoken a little bit about it already. But I think that the fact that within the alliance, within the different parts of these alliance there was a sense that difference was being or different voices were being silenced that debate was no longer or certain kinds of debate were not being allowed to happen in terms of particularly of macro-economic policy and the introduction of neo-liberal policies of privatisation - that criticism was not being allowed and that these policies were being implemented in spite of dissent and I think that's where we came to be.

Dale: I just want to follow this, just a little bit because I find it fascinating myself. For me in some ways it was almost a joining of some of the individuals who came from a predominantly political perspective being marginalised organisationally, not being able to have their own voices ... and others coming predominantly from these socio economic experiences where the cost recovery and privatisation were hitting, very specifically hard in that context ... the joining of those two in a way I guess is what I was sort of referring to. Would you concur with that?

Prishani: Ja, I'm with you. Look I also mean, this is something I'm still thinking through, it is hmm, how do we, how do we characterise those struggles that we always speak about as struggles for survival, struggles that are responding to immediate socio economic needs. Is it true that those groups of people only imagined those struggles as immediate struggles for survival or did they imagine them as a let down in terms of their own vision and were they not also part of history, you know this belief in something else being promised to them in '94. So I am not sure, well I mean I agree with you, I don't think there is such an easy separation between those characterisations.

Dale: How do you remember or recollect – for lack of a better term one could call the early APF's organising model or mobilisational model?

Prishani: Sorry could you repeat that?

Dale: I said how would you characterise that, how would you recollect for lack of a better term what might be called the APF's organising model and mobilisation model? In other words its, its identity and its profile was formed through activities not the internal model the internal activities, the way in which the APF went about actually building itself?

Prishani: I mean it was very much through struggle, it was very much through confronting very immediate problems and difficulties and needs and coming together of people seeing those problems as common problems and seeing the possibility of struggling together against those problems or for those needs. And I mean I said earlier, ad-hoc. I mean there isn't, I can't find another way of describing it, it's you know fighting on your feet, fighting as things emerge as they happen, thinking things through in the immediate context.

Dale: Okay and the particular role of specific individuals in that organising model. Did you see that as something that was just a natural outcome or...?

Prishani: In hindsight, we were just naive or stupid or ignorant of other things going on. I'm sure you will hear through these interviews that other people imagine the initial formation of the APF in many different ways, but I mean I know now and I've spoken to, there might have been small groups of individuals speaking about how to make this organisation happen, or make these protests happen, direct things in different ways. So I mean I can't comment properly on the contribution of certain groups but I mean at that time I imagined

us as being individuals within different parts of the alliance and from outside of the alliance seeing a need to come together to fight a few manifestations of a problem.

Dale: Again in your recollection and experience, why do you think that over those first, let's say two to three years in the APF's existence a fairly sizeable number of the initial components of the APF left the organisation?

Prishani: I think largely because it was a space that wasn't easily going to adopt one specific approach or one particular political ideology ... I mean it was a space in which these things were going to be thought out and thought in common, and ja.

Dale: Okay you've addressed several of these other questions. [Can we just pause for a second] Okay, we're back we just took a bit of a pause with the interview with Prishani. Prishani how do you remember or what do you remember about who the APF worked with and its allies in particular during that first four to five years? How did that develop because that was an important component or became an important component of the APF's activities and identities?

Prishani: Look, for me it's difficult to say organisationally because the way I remember it is people coming there as themselves rather than representing any organisations or structures. If you're talking about practical resources and things like that I mean initially there is Khanya College I mean Florencia would get some stuff from CASE, I would get some stuff from Heinrich Boll Foundation.

Dale: I am talking more about the political relationships that the APF developed.

Prishani: Politically, I mean we tried for a long time with COSATU. I don't think that ever materialised except for individual members of COSATU coming on board. SAMWU initially I think there is a province that came on board and I mean if you talking about the founding kind of members it would be SASCO- Wits Graduate School, WITS Crisis committee.

Dale: I am talking about outside the APF. In other words, at that particular time, let me just recast the question. At that particular time, there were a lot of other movements that were born in the country, a lot of other struggles were taking place; how do you remember the APF relating to what you were saying were national allies in that regard.

Prishani: Sorry.

Dale: No, no that's fine.

Prishani: It's kind of, I mean outside of your older political formations would be your other new social movements. So the Concerned Citizens Forum the Anti-Eviction Campaign, later the Landless People's Movement; and then I mean over time those alliances would develop into a more formal relationship in form of a Social Movement's Indaba which was born also

again through struggle and in particular struggles of the new social movements in relation to these old formations like COSATU in the context of the broader ways of engaging with the United Nations system through the World Conference Against Racism and the World Conference Against Sustainable Development. So I think there again you were able to see how it was a very organic process; the APF starts to build a broader set of political alliances and become involved in struggles beyond the immediate concerns of communities and the issue of privatisation.

Dale: Okay and on the international front what do you remember?

Prishani: On the international front I remember specifically around individual campaigns, initially getting support from movements and individual activists who were involved in similar struggles in other parts of the world. And I think just from my own individual experience the formation that I was most involved in at the time following the formation of the APF in the media, Independent Media Centre which allowed for quite a big network globally to contribute to particular struggles and campaigns and specifically around the World Conference Against Racism and around the World Conference on Sustainable Development; draw in a number of individual activists and organisations and movements into actual struggles. So not just contributing in terms of resources or you know, solidarity statements and so on, but coming here and becoming active in struggles of the different affiliates not just with the APF but also the other new social movements. And I think the role that within the media, particularly from 2001 to I would say about 2004/2005 was quite important in cementing that, those global networks in terms initially of participation in struggles around the World Conference Against Racism and the World Conference on Sustainable Development but then also in allowing individual activists to come and work in the APF from other parts of the world and then initiating that internship campaign which might not be imagined as happening through in the media, but I think that the initial groups of that come from the media and so people from specifically Canada or Montreal coming and working in the APF communities sharing skills in terms of media production but also learning in terms of activism here and many of those interns having also worked in different movements and campaigns, they're being able to share and build a network in that way. So I think it is important to understand that global network, not just in terms of you know the ordinary ways of solidarity statements and giving of money and other kinds of material resources but facilitating of a real network in terms of people participating in struggles here and also members of the APF being able to go to other parts of the world and work in movements there. I mean the World Social Forum is another space that the APF was able to have some experience in although limited to a few individual activists but I think through that space allowing for different experiences from this growing global movement to start filtering into APF programs and activities.

Dale: So for you that was a very positive development across the board?

Prishani: Well think it was positive generally but it also showed some of our limitations. But I think that should be expected in any new growing movement that struggling for resources as well we spoke about all the problems and resources but you know expecting ... and I think this speaks to problems within the global movements just in terms of how participation of activists from different parts of the world and different groups in different parts of the world happens in ways that don't reproduce the inequalities that are there in global struggles. I mean that's a whole other discussion and debate that's ongoing in the World Social Forum as well.

Dale: Okay and how would you characterise and who would you characterise, in those early years as being the APF's main adversaries or enemies, if that is even an accurate way of describing it?

Prishani: Well I mean the ANC and alliance partners definitely ... enemies?

Dale: Those that we targeted, that the APF targeted, I guess.

Prishani: Oh well Johannesburg Water

Dale: Entities within the State and within the ANC. Anything beyond that you think applied at the time?

Prishani: I don't think so.

Dale: Okay

Dale: Just a few questions around your specific work in the APF. Just give us some indication of what you did and how you worked within the APF on a personal level?

Prishani: Initially I was part of the activist forums in those early days trying to raise little bits of resources here, there. Contributing to some of the early media work, general organising in those initial days; and then I would say later on coordination of the Research Sub Committee was probably the biggest formal role I played in the organisation. And that was also a learning experience for me and I mean I wish we could've done more with that but I think we confront problems as they arise and the way it unfolded didn't allow for it to play out in a way I had imagined it. But I think for a time, at least three years, we were able to bring together members of the APF in a collective research project that produced reports that could stand up against the research that was being produced by Joburg Water and that contributed to the Phiri court case, you know that allowed for certain demands to be made in a substantiated way in different campaigns and that allowed individual members I think also to imagine themselves differently within the organisation. And I mean I think if we had to write that history up, a very short history, would also be a contribution to thinking through alternative ways of doing research and writing and ways of thinking about participatory research in which these divisions that usually exist between academics,

students and ordinary community members are openly confronted rather than wished away and kinda just replicate those divisions. Because there were some interesting debates in that structure as well I mean before we got into the fights over who was going to get what money and things; around simple things like ownership and like whether a name would go on the report or not. So I mean you revive those kinds of old debates that happened and the production of activist newsletters or things like that ...

Dale: And in some ways related to that experience in the research committee of the APF, how would you describe the relationships between the various component members of the APF, in the actual work that was carried out?

Prishani: Look in that particular sub-committee we fought a lot about these particular issues and I mean there weren't ugly fights but I think they were necessary fights to be able to confront those taken for granted positions that people would hold coming into the sub committee. Just to make it more complete; for example professors or you know appointed academics coming into that space with a certain amount of knowledge and with the thinking that they would be contributing in a particular way from a certain position of power that they would imagine themselves to hold and be openly questioned, those taken for granted positions being openly questioned by members who might only have a Standard 5 or 6 and not see the same relationship to knowledge production as that person coming in. Or students coming in with a certain arrogance about themselves or seeing themselves as only contributing to the analysis and writing up of field work that was going to be done by others from communities. Or international students coming in with similar kinds of ideas and needing to negotiate those in a common space where different roles are spoken about, where there's also effort made to try and equalise. I'm not saying that we did always, because we also can't in such a short space of time and with limited resources and very, very definite aims in terms of putting out research for court cases, campaigns and things, be able to confront those properly. But I think there was an attempt to try to do things differently by confronting those different positions of power, and different hierarchies and I mean it was a painful process at any time. I mean also because of the workshops that you had to go through to get people to the same level in terms of understanding issues you were going to start research. The simple task of putting out a questionnaire in which everyone has contributed to, you know the structure, the questions that are involved, understanding what each question means making sure that they going to be translated in the same way all of that took a lot of time and commitment from individual members. And I mean even within that sub committee there were quite a large number of people who stayed from beginning to end, but there were also a very large number of people who left. An additional question that needed to be confronted was the issue of representivity because the sub committee itself didn't operate on the basis that every affiliate would have equal representation in that sub committee but it was people who showed interest; who had the time and who were committed to this experiment in trying to do this differently. Once, well

we constantly had to confront that problem because you'd get new affiliates coming into the organisation you'd also get new members and affiliates wanting to join and then as resources became available you'd get individuals wanting to come in, in order to gain access to those resources. And then when the political differences started to emerge within the organisation, you also then started to get particular groupings starting to question the sub committee on the basis that it wasn't representative. So I mean those were also issues that had to be dealt with.

Dale: Okay just two or three more final questions. As the APF developed, over this time that you were active in it, for you and the way that you experienced the work, did the initial key strategies and tactics that the organisation adopted from the beginning in a way that it defined itself as we talked about - did that shift or change do you think, over that time period?

Prishani: Yes I think if we are talking about the demands, the kinds of changes that the organisation wanted or was fighting for, I don't think those necessarily changed but I think the ways of approaching how the changes would be fought for, have changed. I think we've, I mean in the early days it was really driven by protest actions that emerged in the immediate context. Over time there would be a lot more thought given to campaigns that would be broader than just single issues or in a single community or a combination of a single issue and broader campaigns that brought together a few struggles. And then I think most, well for me the biggest change would be the adoption of the legal strategy, what changed in the understanding of the use of the law and in particular the Phiri court case would come in here. I think that, I mean things similarly emerged through the struggle that was being taken up for immediate change in the lives of people who were being directly affected by a particular problem but through engagement around that, the building of links with other individuals and groups beyond the immediate group in Phiri and beyond the APF through the Coalition –and also the Coalition itself is a different tactic - and then the evolution of legal strategy that wasn't responding to just arrests and people being denied the ability of doing certain things, but the undertaking of a court case that became a Constitutional court case that drew in legal experts. I think for me that was probably one of the biggest changes in terms of how the struggle was undertaken in the APF and I think today struggles are imagined in a much broader sense of what the possible ways of undertaking these things up and that's been through learning and experience and building of alliances.

Dale: Okay and overall, your time period in the APF, first of all when did you sort of leave the APF so to speak? I mean, you had not necessarily left it in a formal way but basically stopped being an activist on a regular basis with meetings and responsibilities and those things?

Prishani: I can't remember the year, but after that last blow up - there probably have been subsequent blowups - but after that first organised kind of fights between the Socialist Group and you know manifesting in terms of that split in the SECC which then carried on through to the APF and that AGM I think would probably be the last one.

Dale: That was 2006 wasn't it? Okay, and from the time that you started, the entire time that you were a part of the APF on a regular basis then as an activist member ... however you want to describe that, what would you describe as the biggest strengths and weaknesses of the APF in your time there?

Prishani: I think the biggest strength would be the willingness to be open about what the possible strategies are; the understanding that we have amongst us a commonly defined problem or enemy or need to change and that amongst the majority of us we don't really have the answer and that, that answer is made by us coming together in struggle and thinking through these things together. And for me I think that was probably more characteristic of it in its early days. I think its biggest weakness has been the very opposite of that; that some constituent members in the forms of particular groupings have felt that they have had the answer and tried to impose that on the general membership of the APF without respecting that openness and that commitment to needing to struggle for the answer in common.

Dale: Just one follow-on from that; it's not getting into an academic or theoretical debate necessarily, but in the context of the building these and such newer organisations, do you think that those kind s of problems and weaknesses are almost a natural part of doing so?

Prishani: Ja, I don't think we can escape that.

Dale: Something you just have to go through?

Prishani: Ja [laughs]. I think even the World Social Forum which many people have celebrated and continue to celebrate; since 2006/ 2007 has been experiencing exactly the same thing and I mean this need for one single alternative and that open space to then become the vehicle for that one single alternative is something that emerges in every one of these new social movements that we've seen.

Dale: Okay, is there anything that I haven't asked that you specifically would like to say or talk about in terms of you know what this, this project is about is trying to capture the widest possible history of the APF and its experiences from those that had been involved in it. Is there something that you want to add?

Prishani: I think I've covered most things, but I think one thing I might have given the impression that it was only alliance organisations that formed the APF and I think while that can be said of the early days, it was mainly, you know different parts of the alliance. I think

over time there have been members of different or other political groupings from outside of the ANC Alliance that have come into the APF. And I'm thinking particularly of the Orange Farm affiliates, but there have been others. I mean Phineas has a different, that Vaal grouping who also has a different history. And then I think something else that has always worried me and I think that none of us have confronted properly even though we have tried to in the APF is the gender question and the problems that I think both men and women have faced in these struggles and in organisations. And I think that has partly got to do with our own historical inability to think through this gender question properly. I think it's been very easy for all of us to argue for a women's forum or a separate space for women to meet and I mean, I've argued that historically as well, but I've learnt that over the years that even though those spaces are necessary, it's probably more important to find ways of bringing men and women together to confront the problems that, you know re-emerge you know even though those separate spaces are there. And I think in the APF we've seen and in other spaces, we've seen separate women's spaces also sometimes becoming the domain of particular women and you know particular women being able to become powerful in their own ways through the resources that are made available there or you know the affirmation that they gain through being active there. And I mean what has been very sad for me in the APF particularly amongst the younger members we've attracted is that you always get a sense that there was something else happening you know, within the organisation in terms of gender but we would never, we were just unable to not even able to speak about it properly ... we weren't able to make it possible for those problems to be brought to the fore. I mean the whole Zuma thing has taken a completely different picture now, but I can remember a time, well around the rape case and I think we were having research sub committee meetings and you know male members of the sub committee being really harsh about any problematisation of Zuma and us just not being able to get beyond kind of shouting at each other to have a proper discussion about what was going on in that rape case. I mean in other simpler things that we just haven't found ways of making part of our everyday conversations in the APF. And I think that's a problem that goes throughout social movements; you know it's probably something that we've inherited from wherever we've come.

Dale: Okay, thanks so much for the time.

Prishani: You're welcome