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Interviewee: Mamphela Ramphele Session #1 (video)

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark Cape Town, South Africa

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Q: Dr. Ramphele, thank you so much for joining us today.

Ramphele: Thank you for inviting me.

Q: I wanted to ask you something about your early life in terms of the positive influences that led you to become an educator.

Ramphele: I don't think I had much of a choice, being a daughter of two educators. Both my parents were teachers. In a strange way I said to my father, when he asked me what I would like to pursue as a career, that one thing I wouldn't do is teaching. But I went through roundabout routes to get to being an educator, and that comes out of a variety of influences, the first, obviously, my parents, and particularly my father, who was a great lover of the written word. I grew up on books and read very widely, even things I didn't understand at that age.

But also being a person who had an understanding that there was something wrong with our society, I didn't know what it was, but I just knew there was something wrong. And growing up in a family of five very big brothers and being the smallest of the seven children, I busied myself with matters literal rather than matters physical. But also I was

very aware very early on in my life that I did have talents which I could use, particularly because I didn't have the physique to do other things, so I decided to concentrate on my brain, which was a joy, and I was encouraged very much by my father and later on by teachers.

But it also makes a difference to be a woman growing up in an environment which was very male-dominated, which was very constraining. The only way I could carve space for myself was to seek the extraordinary, because the ordinary just were not the kind of things that attracted me. I didn't want to grow up and get married and have six children and die in the rural area.

And so I guess it was inevitable that I would seek to do the nontraditional things. But it helps also to know that one has the capacity to explore things which other people have not explored, and that's what my father encouraged me to do.

Q: In terms of your own values formation and the development of your values, what impact did watching the poverty around you have on you?

Ramphele: Huge, particularly because in relative terms my family was well off. Having two parents as teachers, we were able to have a very comfortable life, a reasonably comfortable home, comfortable arrangements in terms of food, and my father was not just a teacher, but he was a development worker, because for all the time that I grew up and lived in that area, we always had children from poorer families living with us. Some of them we didn't know from the surrounding farms and villages, he didn't know either, but parents would bring their children and say, "I would like my child to be educated, but I live X

number of miles from here. I don't have money to buy a uniform. I don't have money to buy food," and he'd take them in. So we grew up in a family that understood what poverty was, and shared. And sharing was a value which was very strongly nurtured by my father. He took very strong exception to any attempts to treat such children as other within the household. They were completely incorporated in the house. So there was that.

And, of course, I also came from a very large extended family on my father's side, and, again, sharing was part and parcel of that. Some of my father's brothers were very poor, so one really grew up in poverty, surrounded by poverty, but being privileged, and understood the responsibilities of privilege as being that of being part of the solution to the problems that you see around yourself.

Q: You said in your book that your decision to become a medical doctor was not necessarily based on the need to serve, but the desire to be free.

Ramphele: Indeed. Well, if you understood where I grew up, where the only professionals were teachers, policemen, nurses, and I couldn't for the life of me see myself as any of the above, so I had to explore what were the alternatives. I had not seen a single African doctor up to that stage, but I had read enough from my father's books about the medical profession to understand that it did give one independence, but it also was attractive, because one learned about how one's body worked, and there was a scientific basis for the profession. And I knew I had the capacity to engage in serious scholarly work, so I thought, well, that's what I'm going to do.

And I had no idea how one becomes a doctor, and that's the reason why when I applied to go

to medical school, I only applied in October, which was too late, because I just had no idea. But the rest of it is history. I wasn't one of those young people who say, "I want to grow up and be a doctor and help my people." I said, "I want to grow up and be a doctor so that I can have an independent life and I can understand the world better."

Q: I was struck by your description of your first year in medical school and how difficult it was in terms of the issue of food.

Ramphele: Yes. The issue of food was not at medical school. It was at secondary school.

Q: Secondary school.

Ramphele: Where we were living in a boarding school which was the manifestation of how the apartheid system treated young black people. It was a school run by the Dutch Reformed Church and had very strong ties with the National Party and the approaches of the time. Their approach was simply to say, "You are not fully human. Anything goes for you." So the accommodation was appalling. We had bed bugs. The food was appalling, and a lot of young people ended up with pellagra. I just was helped by the fact that I grew up in a home where I ate proper food, and if you don't give me proper food, I just shut down my system. So I refused to eat, and I became very thin, but very healthy because I wasn't eating any of the rubbish that was being served. That was the first half of the first year.

When I got home and told my mother what was going on, we then got together to do provisions for me which lasted until I came back. That's where I learned to bake, biscuits

and rusks, and did all sorts of goodies that kept me going. I'm not a big eater, so I just don't need too much to keep me going.

Q: Before we leave your childhood, I wanted to ask you about the role models that you saw in terms of crossing boundaries in the women's community and specifically your mother, what she meant to you.

Ramphele: Well, my mother, and, before her, my two grandmothers, my mother's mother, after whom I'm named, was a very powerful woman, who was very conscious of both her attractiveness as a person and her power as a woman. So there was never a question in my mind about the fact that women had a contribution to make and a special contribution to make. My mother's father was equally beautiful and very forceful as a personality. And her praise singing was legendary all over the region. She also instilled in me and reinforced the fact that women had a very special role to play and need not be subordinate.

Of course, my mother, being a younger woman, had more problems to deal with male dominance, so in a sense my grandmother had earned her stripes, so to speak, and my mother had to earn hers. It was wonderful watching my mother dealing with these male chauvinists, and that really gave me a lot of courage. And my mother is very courageous and very powerful and very articulate, and so I learned a lot from her. And as a child, I didn't play with other kids, because I really didn't know about their world, I didn't have much to share with them, and I didn't like the kind of bickering and the peer conflicts that really were around nothing, and so I stayed mostly with my mother and I learned a lot from her.

Q: You told a story about the day that she went over to the meat pot, and the significance of that story. Could you tell us?

Ramphele: Well, slaughtering around rituals or family gatherings is a very important activity, and men see themselves as the authorities when it comes to choosing what beast to slaughter, when to slaughter, and how to slaughter, and which pieces go to whom. And this had been in my father's household for generations. My grandfather was very generous. He had sheep and goats and cattle. Each time we got to his homestead, he would point out a beast to be slaughtered for us. But, you know, the men used the timing of the slaughtering and the allocation of portions of the meat to boost their own power. It was largely my father's weaker brothers who felt that this was their domain, where they were going to exercise this power.

And that's where my mother decided this was it, because each time this happened, they would (A), slaughter late, and (B), give us the toughest pieces of meat, which means in the end the children and the women used to have to go to bed hungry. So my mother decided on this particular day that enough was enough. She just let them do the cooking to ensure that the nice tender pieces were ready. She just walked over calmly and took the pot away and went on to dish it out for everybody. They couldn't believe it! It's the kind of thing that you do and to throw everybody off and make a big statement, because (A), they didn't think it was possible she would do it, and (B), they didn't think that she would sustain it. And she didn't make a noise. She didn't scream and say, "What are you doing?" She simply calmly went there, picked it up, did her thing, and that was it. And that really established a bond between the importance of nurturing, which was allocated to women, and the authority to nurture which was often denied to women. The tools for nurturing, which are

food and especially meat, were in the control of men. You had to make up your mind. If men didn't want to feed children, they shouldn't be cooking.

Q: Thank you. I wanted to ask you a harder question, also about your childhood. Thinking back, what were some of the first instances in which you really realized the tremendous race barrier set up by the system of apartheid? Because you were really growing up in a stronghold of Dutch Reformed, Afrikaner culture.

Ramphele: Well, that was very early on in my childhood when I was probably six or seven. There was a community conflict which centered around the Dutch Reformed minister who was in charge of the village where we were, refusing to have one of the old ladies who was the mother of one of the people living there to be buried in the cemetery because he said she was a heathen, which means she was a non-believer and therefore didn't belong. The fact that her children lived in the village and had been nursing her up to the time of her death didn't bother him. So there was a huge row, and the woman eventually was forcefully buried there against the minister's wish. And of course, after that the police were called in, and the people were driven off the mission station after a prolonged stand off between the church minister and the majority of villagers.

And you could then see just how brutal the police were and the language that was used. And, of course, after that one observed this church minister in operation. When I came back to the village after the conflict had died down my father sent all of us away except my eldest brother to his father's homestead, it was quite obvious to me that this man was a racist in every sense of the word. It was difficult to actually see this in operation because he kept himself away. And where he did interface with us, it was in the context of him

conducting church services or in relation to his being the kind of overseer of the school where my father was the headmaster. But the fact that my father would not allow him to treat him as a subordinate also shielded us from seeing his racism. But when one heard about how he treated other people, you realized that you're really dealing with somebody who was dreadful.

But it was only after my father's death that it became obvious to me. In fact, as my father was dying, it became quite clear that this man was a monster. To say to a sixteen, seventeen year old that "You have no right to dream about a better future, because your father is dying," when that child doesn't even know that the father is dying, I think that's the limit. If you'd thought of this person as a young person, as a child, in the way you would think of your own child, you wouldn't do that. But you know, he just was a very cruel, callous man. I don't think it was only racism in his case. I think it was a combination of cruelty --he was a cruel personality -- then add racism. Add male chauvinism. Then you've got quite a powerful mixture of obnoxiousness.

Q: As you're growing up and going to medical school, when did it become clear to you how pernicious the system of apartheid was, and how did you respond to that in terms of your own aspirations to enter the world of the extraordinary, as you said?

Ramphele: When I did my pre-medical courses at the University of the North, one became a lot more conscious of what was going on. But even then, the level of political activity at that time was very low in these universities, what were then called bush colleges, because they were set up for a purpose of being part of the grand design of homeland politics, that

you were being trained for the role of being people who work within the parameters set up by the apartheid system.

So it's only when I got to the University of Natal Medical School, which itself had racial segregation-- the medical school was called the Non-European Section-so it was quite clear that you belonged differently from where the rest of the university belonged. We were in a residence, which was a former army barracks, which shared a fence with Mobil Oil refinery. Now, just tell me how you can train medical students in an environment that is as environmentally dangerous as that residence was. The location of that residence was everything that negated healthy living. And so it became quite clear that one was dealing with a society in a system that treated black people as unimportant, that didn't care about their health, their future, and that was designed to demean you as a non-person, a non-European, or a non-white.

And that's where the politics of black consciousness really came to the fore under the leadership of Steve [Stephen] Biko and my eyes were opened. I then for the first time began to understand how all the jigsaw puzzle pieces fitted together. Once I understood that, it was quite clear that I couldn't simply passively be part of the system, but I had to be part of the process of addressing this. The way we went about it as students was to create an integrated framework, so that your life as a student was not a contradiction of political activity; your life as a professional was an extension of your political activity. And that's probably why even today, my entire life is a life of service as a vocation, and I couldn't possibly live in this country if I didn't participate in its reconstruction and development.

Q: Moving a little bit through time now to get to the Carnegie Corporation, I want to hear a little bit about your experiences in setting up health clinics and how that influenced you in terms of exposure to the kind of poverty that you were able to, and bring to the table when you were writing up the book Uprooting Poverty. So if we could go to the Port Elizabeth area and you could talk maybe a little bit about that period and how it shaped you and influenced you, also the experience of being banned, in terms of how you came out of that, where you fit into the larger jigsaw puzzle.

Ramphele: As students in the South African Student Organization [SASO], we became quite convinced that the only way we were going to have freedom in this country is to engage in restoring the dignity of people and encouraging people to be their own masters and mistresses, to be agents of history rather than its victims. And so during the vacations we used to have what we called creative development work camps, and so when I qualified, it was inevitable that my medical practice would be linked to my political activism.
But it so happens that I qualified in 1972, but at the beginning of 1973 Steve Biko and seven other leaders of SASO were banned, and he was banned to his home town in King Williams Town. Given our relationship, it was inevitable that I would end up working in that area, so I transferred, in terms of my housemanship or internship, from Natal to Port Elizabeth.

While I was working there, we started planning what I was going to do post my internship period. And that's how Zanempilo Community Health Centre got to be born. This was a project of the Black Community Programmes which was an NGO [non-governmental organization] set up specifically to give content to the self-realization of black people, their

self-reliance, and to set up models of how one could tackle some of the problems that poor communities were facing. Community health centers, for us, were one of those vehicles.

So I was the first medical officer in charge of that health centre. We planned it from scratch. It's a miracle that it actually ended up functioning, and functioning reasonably successfully, because we didn't have the benefits of experienced people helping us. You're not trained in medical school to run health centers, and there were no models on which to build, but youthful idealism is a great thing to start with.

So that's how that worked, but because Steve was banned to that area, a lot of the people who were activists were drawn to the King William's Town area, and we ended up being a community of activists. A lot of the activism happened around the Community Health Center, which had living quarters in a doctor's home, where I lived. From 1975 to around the middle of 1976, when there was that big explosion in Soweto, the Community Health Center was a hub of activity around addressing the problems of the rural poor, finding ways of getting self-help projects going, getting people to engage in activities that would earn them a living, but at the same time restore their dignity.

It was the only service that was available for many, many kilometers around. We used to have a mobile clinic that went around to the villages far away from the center, as well as an ambulance that went to pick up people from villages to the centre and in emergencies to the local hospital. Women, who used to die in childbirth, had an opportunity now to deliver in the clinic. We had a maternity section where people came, had their babies, stayed for a few days, and were discharged. And we had a very good system of referrals to the local hospitals.

So I picked up quite a lot of real medical practical skills when I was there, but I also learned quite a lot about activism. I also developed management and leadership skills, because I not only initiated the project, but I had to run it. I had to learn what budgeting was about as well as fundraising. I had to recruit and manage a team of health professionals. So it was an exciting period.

It was not surprising that the police would want to break up that community. The breaking up was a very traumatic one, because they detained some and killed a number of our colleagues, the first one being Mapetla Mohapi, and subsequently detained all of us for varying periods of time. I was in detention for four and a half months. I was released on my birthday in December of '76.

But then the releases were followed by banning orders and banishment orders, and mine came around April, to be banished to the Northern Province. When one thinks about it, it's probably a god send- it was fortuitous that I had been banished at the time of Steve's death, because in a sense it would have been very difficult to live on in the Eastern Cape after his death. But also being away from the community that supported one, one had to really rely on one's own inner resources. It was a hugely traumatic as well as a growth phase.

Q: Thank you. I want to move through that period, then. We need to get to the Carnegie period. You also had a clinic there, so you were also working in community health and poverty. I wanted to know when was the first time you met or heard of Francis Wilson and when was the first time you met or had any dealings with anyone from Carnegie.

Ramphele: Well, I met Francis when I was still in the Eastern Cape. He came to visit on several occasions at Zanempilo Community Health Center. His mother was living in the Hogsback just above King Williams Town, so that was his route home, so to speak. But Francis engaged us as a community of activists in really understanding what other models of development existed. After he had been to India, for example, he came and gave a talk at the Community Health Center about what was happening in India, what NGOs were doing, and some of the things that we could learn in terms of what we were ourselves trying to do. And so Francis, from 1975, '76, was not just a friend, but also a colleague who was interested in matters of development in the way that we were.

When I was banished to the Northern Province, after my son Hlumelo was born, I decided the only way to keep sane was to do what I knew best how to do, which is organize a community health centre and to have projects attached to that. And in fact, that centre, Ithuseng Community Health Centre, is still functional today, and the projects that we started then are still operational.

Francis came and visited in 1978 on several occasions, but the specific time when he came to talk about Carnegie must have been in 1980 or 1979 just talking about the idea and the fact that there had been a Carnegie Inquiry into White Poverty, and that it is appropriate that Carnegie should revisit the issue of poverty in South Africa in the light of its earlier engagement. But also because ironically, one could argue that Carnegie's Inquiry into White Poverty exacerbated black poverty, because the strategies that were adopted, including public works programs for the white poor, promotion of job reservations, segregated educational programs, all focused on promoting the welfare of white poor people at the expense of black poor people. I said Francis, about time they came back and cleaned

up their mess. So we had a chat, but I wasn't at that time hopeful that I would be released from my banishment orders, so it was simply chatting and talking. And Francis used to visit me quite regularly in the Northern Province, until 1982, '83, it became clear that the process of reform, which was being driven by Pieter [W.] Botha, was likely to lead to easing of restrictions, and my banning order was lifted in August 1983.

That's when Francis now vigorously started engaging me in what contribution I could make in the form of a paper as well as working together with him to structure a conference, and later on drafting the report that would come out of the conference. And that's how I got engaged in the process.

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Q: Tell me about the Carnegie Enquiry into poverty as you understand it.

Ramphele: My understanding of it was that it documented the extent of the poverty, its manifestations, and identified what people were already doing to deal with some of those problems, but also what other players ought to be doing -- the government, the private sector, and other NGOs. And, of course, the role of the international community at that point was very complex, because the South African government was very intolerant of outside groups coming in to tell them what was wrong with the country. So it wasn't surprising that when the conference was held, P.W. Botha just dismissed the report as the work of agitators who just wanted to create trouble, and that poverty was not as bad as it was said to be.

And the beauty of the way the Inquiry was conducted, using people on the ground who were working with rural, urban, periurban, and farming communities, is that you could not deny the reality of what was being communicated, because there were narratives of the people who were on the receiving end of this poverty. But there were also narratives of hope from so many people who were able to take whatever little opportunities there were to make things better.

And so I believe that what ended up being the published study in Uprooting Poverty came out of a process which itself was empowering, enabling, and gave voice to many, many people who were working quietly in little corners of South Africa without being noticed. And the nature of the conference was also a very creative way of bringing together NGOs, people from the academic sector, people who were involved in policy research, as well as people who were involved in implementing programs. So it was a very creative and cross-pollinating environment.

Q: It sounds very large and very diverse. How did you then take what came out of that and formulate specific strategies for change?

Ramphele: [Laughter] Well, that was a mammoth task, because the Inquiry's conference was in 1984, April or May, and the report only came out in 1989, so it took a long time. In the first place, papers that were presented to the conference had to be refined and published in a series of Carnegie papers, which are still available, which I think was a very smart idea on Francis' part, so that people's work is not lost in a big book. And, second, there was The Cordoned Heart, the photographs that accompanied some of the presentations, but also which were commissioned by Francis for Omar Badsha to go around

the country, really documenting the lives of poor people. It was a very important output which also helped to get our minds really wrapped around the issues that were coming out.

Then there was the UNICEF [United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund] commissioned study which they asked Francis and I to tackle, to look at, "Children on the Frontline", and I think those exercises helped to clear our minds about what it is really that needs to go into the big book. Originally Francis had the view that we had to have a committee that would sit and sift through the documents and then finally write the reports, and that it needed to be a joint output. Collaborating on any writing project is tough, but having a committee write a book, I think, was an almost impossible task. I mean, Francis and I were able to succeed in what we were doing because we were friends and we had a good chemistry between us. Even when I was mad with him or he was mad with me, we could still work it out. But in a committee system, I don't think it would have worked.

So in the end, really, it took Francis and I reading through each one of those 300-and-some change papers, noting down what we thought were the themes, and putting our heads together, sifting through, and eventually agreeing on some framework, which obviously was refined over time.

The issue of the title -- well, Francis must take the full credit for that, because I left to go to the Bunting Institute in the middle of 1988, with the manuscript complete, but we still had not settled on a title. And then we toyed around with a number of titles. In the end he called me one day and said, "Mams, how about this," and, you know, it just sounded perfect.

Q: Can you describe why it's perfect?

Ramphele: Well, to talk about uprooting poverty recognizes, first and foremost, that poverty had deep roots in South Africa. It wasn't something that you were going to clean up by running a little vacuum cleaner around; you really needed to go right deep and take it out through the roots. And it also signals that to be able to uproot poverty, you need a fundamental transformation of the society, to really start from scratch, because once we have uprooted a tree, you've got to plant anew, because you've changed the landscape completely.

And it also has other symbolic aspects: roots also give one the sense of something that has got dimensions and manifestations and advantageous roots gives one the spread. You've got tap roots with depth and you've got advantageous with breadth. So it goes right across the society into different nooks and crannies. So in uprooting poverty, you've got to look at all the manifestations and the dimensions of poverty.

I think it also helped that by that time we had really come to see poverty almost as a live thing, with faces, with dimensions, with an impact, and so it was easy in the end to see it almost like a tree that you had to uproot in order to give space for new life.

Q: In your view, what were the most salient recommendations that came out of the study?

Ramphele: The most important one being that uprooting poverty in South Africa will take fundamental socioeconomic and political change. That obviously wouldn't sit very comfortably with the powers that were then. And, second, that uprooting poverty is to take cognizance of power relations in society, so one has to address not just the issues of race,

but also issues of gender and issues of age, and the geographical differences between the urban and the rural and periurban. And, third, that uprooting poverty will have to be done in a holistic fashion, looking at issues of the development of the individuals involved. Education was obviously critical in that. But also issues of the environment, because those have an impact on the lives of poor people the issue of water, of sanitation, fuel, etc. And the importance of partnerships, that it's not going to simply be the government doing it; it's going to have to take partnerships between individuals, communities, NGOs, the private sector, the government, everybody working together.

Q: In the end, do you think the black poverty study has as much a positive impact as the white poverty study did a negative impact?

Ramphele: I think so. It was quite fascinating, looking at the RDP [Reconstruction and Developing Programme] program when it first came out. It really was another version of the recommendations that were made. You had to address issues of housing, of education, of water and sanitation, and look after the environment. Because the impact of the study before 1994, was in giving prominence and visibility to the work of NGOs and the positive impacts that would occur on making a difference to the everyday lives of people, even if you don't uproot their poverty, but at least give them hope.

Because one of the things that Monica [H.] Wilson, Francis' mother, had been told by a lot of people in the Eastern Cape who were poor, was that the most terrible thing about apartheid was the theft of hope. The work of non-governmental organizations before 1994 was really focused on restoring hope and getting people to keep their dignity, even if it was not possible to address their poverty in an immediate sense.

Q: In that sense, what was it like to work with the Carnegie Corporation? Did you have much contact with them? This is a way of also going forward in time to your work with the Gender Institute.

Ramphele: Yes, indeed. My first contact with Carnegie people was during the Carnegie Inquiry. That's when I first met David [A.] Hamburg, who I think is one of humanity's greatest assets and somebody you would be proud to be associated with as part of the human species. He has a huge intellect, gentle, a real *mensch*, as they say. And his speech at the conference was just amazing. I mean, when he was talking about-it's one thing to be poor and yet be treated with dignity, but when you're poor and treated without dignity by your fellow citizens, the immensity of that poverty is indescribable. That was really the essence of what he was saying, and how important it was for humanity to confront this problem.

I subsequently met him in the United States and have become very fond of him, and he's been my great supporter throughout my professional life since 1984. I was nominated as the first Carnegie Distinguished Scholar, or Fellow, through the Bunting Institute [at Radcliffe], in 1988, and that really opened my world to a space where I could sit down and reflect on what I'd been doing, including the research work which I'd been doing once I joined the University of Cape Town in 1984, after my banning order was lifted. Just having time within the context of the Bunting Institute, made a huge difference in the lives of many, many women. I was so inspired by it, I felt so nurtured by it, and I was so grateful for the opportunity, that I felt that women in Africa deserved something similar.

And from the time I came back in 1989, I said to my colleagues, "I really wish there was a way one could have a gender institute in Africa," because even though Carnegie supported some of us to go to Boston, we were not going to build a critical mass of women leaders by sending one or two of them every year, but that if we had a continental asset or a resource of that nature, we'd then be able to develop the critical mass of women leadership in both the academic environment, the political environment, and the broader society.

And that dream I carried with me until early 1990's that I really began to feel we should do it. I'm very pleased that we now have not just a functional gender institute at the University of Cape Town, but one that is very closely linked to the Forum for African Women Educationalists [FAWE], of which I'm a member, which is a continental forum of women vice chancellors, ministers of education, deputy vice chancellors, and other women policymakers in the education arena. Our brief is to promote gender equity in education. We've already had a major impact. We are the partner of choice for many NGOs and international agencies working in this area.

So the AGI, the African Gender Institute, is, as it were, the engine, the intellectual engine, that supports the work of FAWE so that we can create space. The same space that was available to me is now available to other women in Africa. We have had fellows or associates come in from all over the continent to spend three, six, nine months at the University of Cape Town, tighten up their work, and having time to really nurture themselves.

The first chair of gender studies and also the director of the African Gender Institute is

Amina Mama, who is a Nigerian woman, dynamic and fabulous feminist scholar, and I have no doubt that it is going to be a very important organ of civil society, located in an academic environment that really addresses the most pressing problem of Africa, which is gender equity.

Q: Could you talk about that a little bit in terms -- I read somewhere that you wrote that in the seventies and eighties it was very hard in the liberation resistance struggle to bring up the issue of gender and to have it be central to the issues of discussions even of poverty.

Ramphele: Yes, because, in a sense, the focus was on dealing with racism, and raising issues of gender was seen as being divisive. And there was also the view that feminism is an American invention and any African woman worth her salt would not be associated with being hoodwinked by American feminists who threw away their bras and so on. So the whole concern about gender equity was trivialized, and debates around it were made illegitimate. Then people also raised issues of culture: " It's against our culture for women and men to be doing the same thing. Our culture is very clear and specific about the role and place of women and the role and place of men."

And in the end, really, it took those of us who had nothing to lose to keep the issue alive. In a sense, we felt very passionate about the need for the liberation movement to see liberation in a holistic way. You can't have divided freedom. I asked, "How am I going to define myself as a free person if I become free as a black person and remain trapped as a woman? There is no way in which my body can be divided between the woman in me and the black person in me. And if you're going to address my freedom, it's got to be integrated." It was very hard for men to take that, because it raised fundamental issues

about their own personal lives, their own personal relationships, and, of course, men have a very cozy time in a male-dominated patriarchal society. Who's going to stop having his socks and his underpants washed and picked up from the floor? It would be nuts to expect them to react in any other way.

But in the end, we forced the debate. At least I did. I was supported by a number of women who were labeled as the rampant feminists and so on, but it didn't really bother me. I would constantly bring them back to the fact that exactly the arguments they're using about us being rampant, about being agitators, are what the apartheid system was using in terms of all of us in dealing with the race issue, that it's a contradiction for them to purport to be freedom fighters when they have this blind side to them.

But the real eye-opener for me in terms of how entrenched these views were was when I went as part of the University of Cape Town delegation to Lusaka. That must have been in 1990 no, earlier than that, probably, it was earlier than that, 1986, I think it was. And the hostility among some of the members of the ANC [African National Congress] in Lusaka to the issue of gender being raised was amazing. The women, the ANC women who were there, like Barbara Masekela, were obviously uncomfortable. They wanted the issue to be raised. We had discussed the format of the agenda before leaving UCT, and by the time we got to Lusaka, the item on gender equity was number last. Surprise, surprise.

And when we came to that item, the person who was chairing the meeting turned to me and said, "Mamphela, what did you want to say about gender?" That was enough. I just dressed him down and made it clear that it is not my issue; it is his issue. And if he didn't realize it

was his issue, then I feel very sorry for him, because the world out there is not going to tolerate male dominance much longer, the same way it's not going to tolerate racism.

I think that really created space for the ANC women who clearly, being in exile and living in a community which has very hierarchical rules, it would have been very difficult for them to be as open as I had been in attacking this kind of approach. But then it became quite easy to have a conversation after that with Barbra Masekela coming out very forcefully. You couldn't find a single male chauvinist in the room after that!

It is safe to say that meetings such as this created the space for the alliance of women who were part and parcel of the negotiations after 1990 to make sure that the issue of gender was on the agenda and in our constitution, on the bill of rights in every way.

Q: What are some of the specific goals of the Gender Institute? How will it work? Will it work with other universities in South Africa?

Ramphele: The Gender Institute is a resource which happens to be at the University of Cape Town because of my association with it, but it is a resource that brings together women and men who are interested in looking at issues of gender equity on this continent. It's very important that Africans are seen to be examining their problems from their own perspective, because it's very easy to dismiss gender literature from other parts of the world as not applying to us, because, you know, culture is a very nice excuse for not confronting problems. But it's very difficult to dismiss Mama's analysis of what happens in Nigeria with military rule. Or for somebody to dismiss what I wrote about what happens in terms of gender equity in the migrant labor hostels of Cape Town for example.

It obviously functions in the context of a University of Cape Town which stresses its regional focus. We have regional collaboration with the University of Stellenbosch, the University of Western Cape, and the two Technikons. But we also have very openly committed ourselves to a vision to be a world-class African university, and that comes with responsibilities to address the problems that face the African continent. So the Gender Institute draws from all of Africa's institutions. We have a selection panel, for example, that draws people from all over the continent, and we're in the process of putting together a board that's going to oversee the work of the Gender Institute.

In short, the work of the Institute revolves around academic scholarship, to encourage women to get into academia and to be first-class scholars, to give them space to come and write and to share in a seminar format with other women. And second, we also promote policy research. There is a lot that needs to be done to bring together the ideals and real policy work. And thirdly, to help guide implementation and to monitor implementation of gender policies. There is a lot that's being agreed to, particularly in this country, on gender equity, but there is a huge gap between those policies and actual reality on the ground. And the Gender Institute promotes work that really monitors that.

But we also work very closely with government officials. For example, we have gender equity units within many ministries, including the Ministry of Education, and we support them, to make sure that their commitments to gender equity are realized. And we also promote leadership development for women, so women in politics, women in many other fields of life have got a place that they can come to.

The good thing is that over the last two years we've been able to raise money from the Rhodes Trust in the U.K., to build what we call All Africa House. And the African Gender Institute is housed in that. And so it is able to connect with other activities around scholarly activities on the continent. As we speak now, there is a conference, for example, or a seminar which is being run in the All Africa House, which was arranged by the Social Science Research Council, the group that focuses on the African region.

So we feel very good about the fact that we have given content to our commitment to being a world-class African university so that we can really show that, yes, Africa has its problems, but Africa has the capacity to succeed in tackling those problems, particularly if we apply the intellects of all of us to those problems. And we promote intellectual engagement, because I think that's one of the problems of the continent, that many African leaders shy away from using the existing intellectual resources in the country or on the continent, and at the same time many African intellectuals have disengaged from what they regard as problematic politics, for good reason. But I think we need to find ways of bringing the two together, not to be his or her master's voice, but to demonstrate the unique contributions that can be made by putting intellectuals together with politicians and policymakers and addressing the problems that we face on this continent.

Q: Wonderful. We're five minutes over when you asked to stop. I'd keep going, but I'm going to let you make the decision.

Ramphele: Do you still have a question?

Q: Looking back to the time that you were working on the poverty study, and thinking now about the future of South Africa, at that time when you were working on the poverty study, were you aware that the changes that had happened would happen, and then also could you comment on what needs to happen now?

Ramphele: You know, one of the remarkable things about being an activist in the seventies, we, like many young people all over the world, knew we were going to change the world, so we were expecting the changes to happen. It was a question of when, not if. So one's work was seen as contributing to making that happen. And so I think the misguided view that freedom was brought to this country only by people in exile working on bringing down the government, it's really misguided. That's all I can say. It was a collaborative effort by the people inside who did many things, ordinary things, extraordinary things, and there were those in exile, of course, using diplomatic and other pressure to bring us to where we are.

But I also was privileged in getting to know Mr. [Nelson] Mandela before I went to the Gender Institute in 1988. I went to visit him in July 1988, at his invitation, when he was still at Pollsmoor Prison. It was a riveting experience, and it was the beginning of a long, long friendship which still exists today. In fact, even yesterday I was talking to him.

Because of my friendship with him, when I came back from the Bunting Institute in 1989, we continued to meet, and he was then transferred to Victor Verster Prison and I met him regularly. I was aware of negotiations he was conducting with the then government. I was aware of what was going on. So for me it didn't come as a surprise.

But the challenge is what should this country be doing to make freedom a reality in the everyday lives of people? The same poverty and, in some cases, worse still exists in the lives of many South Africans. I believe that this government inherited a bad hand, as it were, and I think they've done an enormously good job. They really have done a fabulous job in many areas in tackling some of the issues that we had identified -- provision of water, the issue of housing; addressing, in some cases adequately, in other cases inadequately, issues of health and education. But I think it will be up to this Minister of Education (Kader Asmal) to really get the education system right, and it is up to this President (Thabo Mbeki), who really is the doer, with Mandela as the prophet brought us to for the promised land. Now we need a manager who's going to help us to grow the vines in this promised land, to be able to make freedom a reality in the everyday lives of ordinary people. And I'm very excited about it. I'm very optimistic about it. I think we are on to a good thing.

Q: Thank you so much.

Ramphele: Thank you.

Q: Wonderful. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]