

## CCAC interview with Gille de Vlieg on 23/02/2023 - transcript

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**Interviewer name (and acronym):** Francois Lion-Cachet (FLC)

**Interviewee name (and acronym):** Gille de Vlieg (GdV)

**Name of translator, if applicable:** N/a

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**List of acronyms:**

TRAC - Transvaal Rural Action Committee

CODESA - Convention for a Democratic South Africa

SAHA - South African History Archives

AFRA - Association for Rural Advancement

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**START OF AUDIO RECORDING: 00:01:43**

**FLC:** The first question is about that interplay between being an activist and being a photographer. How do you see the relationship between those two aspects in your life? Are you first and foremost an activist or a photographer, and who were the influential figures that influenced you on this journey?

**GdV:** I mean, I really do see myself as an activist, who just happened to be a photographer during a particular set of circumstances, you know, because I really don't do much photography now, other than to please myself. So for some reason or other, I just felt that I needed to record what I was seeing because I was going into places that not many other white South Africans were going to. Then also linking up with Paul Weinberg by going through to rural areas. He was the one that really encouraged me to take my photography a little bit more seriously. And again, as I say, the word photographer - it still doesn't really sit easily with me. I really did see myself as an activist who happened to take photos. And then, as far as

influence is concerned, the type of influences were the people working for Afrapix and the work that they were doing, mostly in Johannesburg. There was this process that once a month, we would get photographs from all the other areas that had Afrapix photographers. And then they were sent out monthly to various anti-apartheid groupings and organisations. Some of the photographers were very interested in taking what I called “hard images” - well, what some of us called “hard images”, which were like news photography or journalistic photography. But there were some of us, including myself, who didn't necessarily want to take the front line photographs, but wanted to see the effects that the apartheid system was having on people's lives. And so, that's where I was very fortunate in belonging to the Black Sash, and then belonging to TRAC, the Transvaal Rural Action Committee. Yes, because it allowed me to go into places I wouldn't otherwise have been able to go. We went in as supporters of the people who were resisting removal from their land and various other issues as well. So we were already accepted as a group. And then I would always make sure that during our introductions, I would say I have a camera and is it alright for me to be taking photographs. Usually this was in a collective situation as well, because it would be some type of meeting or some kind of particular gathering that they had organised that we would be attending. So, in Thembisa, because I was introduced by one of the comrades, I had an accepted presence amongst the activists. So again, I wasn't coming in as just some journalist from some newspaper. I didn't really have to explain myself. In Thembisa, in the mid 80s, it got to the stage where I actually used to be invited because there would be some meetings. They expected me to be there. They would inform me about funerals. So again, I was almost expected to be there. So a very, very different scenario from the way that one has to work with commercial photography, on a day to day basis, where you're working for a newspaper, or you're working for a magazine or where there's a particular slant that they are wanting. I was just going in and generally capturing images that felt important to me and important to the people I was taking photographs of.

**FLC:** I'm interested in what you said that you weren't necessarily interested in what you call those “hard images” but rather those of everyday life. And I want to pose a question to you. Do you think that relates to a female perspective? A female perspective on life, a more feminine perspective, not going for the hard images but looking more empathetically?

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:07:29**

**GdV:** There were other photographers like Paul Weinberg and Cedric Nunn who did also take softer images. I don't think that one can necessarily draw a straight line between the genders here. I think particularly in Thembisa, I think there was... The fact is that I was a woman and I wasn't seen as threatening as perhaps another person with a camera. And in fact, I think the police ignored me initially, because they also were very sexist. And so it was only later that they became particularly aggravated with me and started trying to interfere with what I was doing. But don't forget, when I started going into Thembisa, white people weren't allowed in the Black townships. So just the whiteness of my skin drew attention to myself as well. But I did have a way of getting around, I managed to get permission for a short while until the police really realised what I was doing in the township.

**FLC:** That was the permission by pretending you work for a mining company?

**GdV:** Yes, it was Anglo American, as it happened [laughs].

**FLC:** I'm here for the big money [jokingly].

**GdV:** Also, the fact that the TRAC field workers were female, which was also very interesting, because that too created a scenario within the rural areas. There was one man, one leader of a community in Mathopestad; where the leader of that community, John Mathope actually said to one of the field workers, you know, women have taught us a lot of things and have helped us a lot with what we've tried to achieve. And we now want our women to come in and join in our meetings, in Iekgotlas. And so women were allowed to attend and this was in Tswana speaking communities, so it might also have been the fact that because they weren't Nguni. It wasn't Nguni culture, it was Tswana culture. You know, there was greater acceptance because it was much more communal insofar as people gave inputs. It wasn't like a chief dictating to the people about what was happening. There was a lot of input, and then a decision was eventually made. So it was much more communal in that way.

**FLC:** Yeah, that relates to the justice under a tree question that's coming up.

**GdV:** Very much so. But of course, it just happened with Nguni culture that people would meet under the trees too. But then again, as I said, it was more top down. Working in the North West province with mainly Setswana speaking people there, you know, you saw that there was a different way of behaving. And that was the way I got to know it best. That way I got to know better than perhaps the Nguni way, because I worked much more in the North West. And then a little bit in what was the Northern Transvaal.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:11:24**

**GdV:** And Helen Suzman was arrested there once.

**FLC:** Who was arrested?

**GdV:** Helen Suzman. Back in the day. It was one of the first communities that we had started working with to be reprieved, actually. And we never were quite sure why, but they were never removed.

**FLC:** You mentioned Paul Weinberg and that's a very nice link for us because he made the documentary, *The road to then and now*. We're planning to screen that as part of our upcoming programming. And then almost to respond to it from a more feminist perspective. It's mostly Paul's voice coming through, and those of others, but there aren't really women voices coming through as in the documentary.

**GdV:** I think Gisèle is the only female.

**FLC:** Yes. So you weren't included in that documentary?

**GdV:** No. And I think maybe because I didn't do the "now" bit. I'm not sure.

**FLC:** There were limits of opportunities for female photographers during apartheid and might still be so today. I was interested in hearing some of the challenges you faced, but also the opportunities you had. I mean, there's this intersectional interplay between your gender and your race, and some of the things might have proved as challenges, others as opportunities.

**GdV:** I was lucky in that I was still a married woman so I didn't have to look for a salary. And of course, that made a big difference because a lot of people had to have a salary to be able to survive and to be able to continue as photographers. So I was never part of that type of photography. Also, at the time, a lot of the newspapers in Johannesburg were employing black photographers because they were able to go into the townships and were less visible than white photographers. So there was quite a rise, I would say in the number of black photographers within the 80s period. I didn't know any females at that time, no female black photographers, they were all male - the ones that I came into contact with.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:14:19**

**FLC:** And white female photographers, including yourself?

**GdV:** Well, there were quite a few who were part of Afrapix. Gisèle was one, but we used to have different ways of working. Gisèle had been working for magazines and then she later came into Afrapix. She was very professional. And sort of did much more of the understated photography that showed apartheid, but in a very understated way; in that kind of David Goldblatt way. You know, when it's not in your face, but when you look at the image you realise what's happening, the discrepancies and inequalities.

**FLC:** Yes, she had a really nice retrospective exhibition at Wits Art Museum, that was a great exhibition. It's in the breadth of her work.

**GdV:** Yes. And she was one of the first to start recording, you know, the whole AIDS epidemic in South Africa as well.

**FLC:** The photos she took of that young boy, Nkosi Johnson, are quite poignant.

**GdV:** She was a lovely woman, she really was. A lot of her personality comes through in her images as well.

**FLC:** So you mentioned they weren't really any black female photographers during the 1980s.

**GdV:** Not that I came across, no.

**FLC :** And only a few white female photographers. How do you see the landscape having changed today?

**GdV:** It's difficult for me to talk about that. Because again, as I say, I've retreated away from photography. But to me, it seems that there's a lot more available, there's a lot more acceptance, of course, of female photographers. In fact, there's a searching after, I think, other ways of photographing from the traditional white, male type of way. I mean, I'm really generalising. And there are various workshops like the Market Photo Workshop where people can go and get training, and are given opportunities. But again, it comes down to the commercial issue. And I think all photographers are struggling. It's very hard. I don't think I could work in the way that I did before. Insofar as you know, where would I get access to outlets for my images? Being part of Afrapix was very important and of course, the Black Sash used to use my images in their magazines and things like that. But they didn't have a very large readership. And, of course, the other newspaper that came into being was the early *Weekly Mail*. We actually shared a building with them at one stage. So they used to use a lot of the Johannesburg Afrapix images, as well as *Vrye Weekblad*, those sorts of anti-apartheid newspapers used to take a lot of our images, much more so than the mainstream papers because they had their own photographers.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:17:10**

**FLC:** It's important what you're saying about photographers that are struggling today. And I think that it's not just the challenge about gender or race. It's an economic struggle.

**GdV:** It's much more about being able to make a living out of photography now. That seems to be the biggest concern unless you suddenly get a break and become a well known name. Graeme Williams has been looking at this quite a bit.

**FLC:** There's also the distinction between Fine Arts and activist photography. If you look at people like Zanele Muholi, they are managing to do quite well with photography.

**GdV:** Absolutely. And I also think that at one stage, there was a very strong desire to show black photography. And some of the folks - the white photographers who'd been linked to Afrapix actually had to start taking more of a back seat because of the push towards more equality as far as who's taking the images. And of course, it goes back to that debate of white photographers photographing black lives. I mean, I think that debate could go on forever and ever. But as I say, I feel I was lucky in that in both cases, I had an acceptance. I never felt estranged from the people I was photographing.

**FLC:** It's a very interesting nuanced debate or consideration that we also have here at the Court, especially the white male photographers who took photographs of black bodies. And that tension of the inequalities and the societal makeup that finds its way into the practice. But I guess it's about looking at it critically, as you can't really make a sweeping statement to just say, this is wrong.

**GdV:** It's hard and depends on the attitude. I think that you go in with - the other advantage, I was my age because I was an older photographer. I only started in my early 40s. So I think that also made a difference particularly in the rural areas, even though I didn't have grey hair at the time. You know, the fact that I

was older, I think, was an advantage.

**FLC:** And you also mentioned consent.

**GdV:** Well definitely consent.

**FLC:** Also informed consent. People knew why you were there, why you were taking the photos, where your loyalties lie, so to speak.

**GdV:** And it also enabled me to wander around various places, particularly Driefontein and Braklaagte. You'll see a lot of my images of people bringing home cattle or women talking over the wall or hanging up washing. I've always been fascinated by - no matter what's happening in people's lives - women are always having to do the washing, even if you've just been removed from one place to another. There's always washing to be done [laughs].

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:22:04**

**FLC:** As an aside, I probably won't put this into the transcript. My mother had this little sign up in the kitchen that said "Dishes are like God's grace, it never ends."

**GdV:** That's so true [laughs].

**FLC:** Before we move on, I wanted to mention something. It was about two, three years ago, I think it was pre-pandemic, that we had Greg Marinovich here. And he took this series of photographs called The Dead Zone, which was taken between 1990 - 1999, depicting that transition period and the Black on Black violence, but also the involvement of the apartheid security forces during the constitutional negotiations. He said something interesting, that he could enter those spaces where the Inkatha Freedom Party and African National Congress members were fighting each other and he was seen as impartial because he was a white man. And he specifically had access to areas where Black photographers would have been asked about their allegiance. So yeah, that's interesting how you said, during apartheid, Black photographers had access to certain areas rather than white photographers in other circumstances.

**GdV:** I can see how that could work because of the presumptions of the opposing forces. It might have happened less within ANC members, but it depended on those ANC members. But it's definitely within Inkatha, they wouldn't necessarily - being a very rural based organisation, they wouldn't necessarily have come up against a lot of white photographers. Because there wasn't a lot of photography that was happening in rural areas really. Then, of course, the hospitals are almost like another aspect of South Africa altogether, kind of separately, where rural and urban intersect but it takes on its own entity.

**FLC:** Do you know if some of your fellow Afrapix photographers also regarded themselves as activists first and photographers second?

**GdV:** I think they saw themselves as photographers who were activists, probably.

**FLC:** So that kind of makes it unique, it's a different take.

**GdV:** I think photography was what they were very interested in. And then activism was the way they wanted to do that photography.

**FLC:** Are you aware of other people who regard themselves as an activist first and photographer second?

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:25:06**

**GdV:** I haven't come across an individual. I think somewhere you asked me who do I admire today? Yes. And there is an organisation called [Activestills](#), which is based in... it's Israeli and Palestinian photographers who come together. And actually, they were hoping to do something with Afrapix. But unfortunately, politics got in the way and so it didn't happen. And this was fairly recent; I think they're really interesting. And they definitely go out to highlight what's happening to Palestine, by the Israelis. Again, it's not impartial photography, it's photography that's actually showing the horrors of what's happening in Palestine.

**FLC:** Thank you, there's this question that asks, whose contributions to a more equal and free South Africa aren't sufficiently recognised, that you think should be highlighted?

**GdV:** Definitely rural women. I mean they played a huge role in the resistance to removal from their land. And I don't think that they've been acknowledged sufficiently because South Africa has become such an urban-based society. And there is this organisation that grew out of TRAC, which was called the Rural Women's Movement. It is now called the National Movement of Rural Women. So it continues to continue, but in a somewhat different form. But there's still some of the women who were leading the rural movement, who are part of that, including Lydia Kompe, who was actually working for TRAC at the time, and Beauty Mkhize, who became the leader of the Driefontein community after her husband was shot.

**FLC:** Beauty Mkhize?

**GdV:** Mkhize, yes. She's from Driefontein and she's about my age, or I think a little bit older. And they continue to do wonderful work, but I think politically, the rural areas are neglected. And that comes to a question that you wanted to ask me later, I think what about land? And I do think that South Africa's failed its citizens when it comes to transforming the way that land is utilised. It remains to be seen as very commercially oriented rather than - you know, land has an emotional impact on people and I think it's not really understood sufficiently. Again, particularly when it comes to rural land, it's more than just land, more than just a piece of property that you can buy and sell. There's an emotional, physical attachment to that. Which also brings me to food security in South Africa. I think food security is one of our chief

challenges. I mean, we're very fortunate to be a country that can actually feed its people at the moment. And I think that, you know, this could be a huge political issue for the future if we start being unable to do so. And, again, I think this has affected how land has not been redistributed in some ways. Although, of course corruption crept in early to the whole redistribution of land. But we did go back - and you can speak to Catherine about this - we did go back to three of the areas, Mogopa and Braklaagte in particular, that used to be able to feed themselves. There they had sufficient crops to be able to make sure that they could survive from what they had on the land. Now that they live close to a small town - Driefontein, Mogopa and Braklaagte are all close to a small-ish town. The emphasis now is far less on having cattle and having mielie fields and sunflower fields and that type of thing. It's much more like I need a job to be able to get money to go buy from the stores in the town, which is very sad. And I think that's something that hasn't been addressed at all.

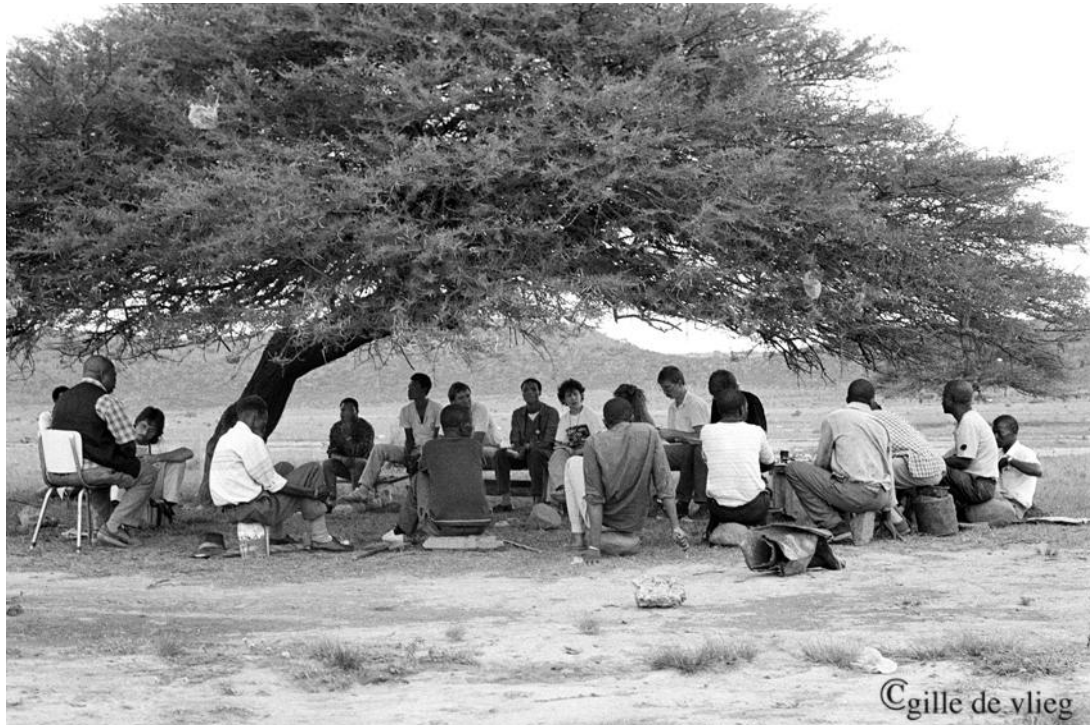
**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:31:13**

**FLC:** Having lost our connection to the land.

**GdV:** Yeah. And also, particularly with Mogopa, fortunately the last time I went to Mogopa, they had started planting again and it was looking very good. But it took a long, long time from the time that they were able to return back home to their families to the time that they actually started becoming productive again. Just the psychological, almost like post-traumatic stress, you know, of the removal and the wandering in the wilderness that they had to go through, it took its toll, so that when they actually got back onto the land, they were numb. And also, I think there is a psychological thing that happens to people that are exiled in some sort of way. You go back to a place thinking it is as you left it and so the shock of finding it's not that any longer is very strong and traumatic.

**FLC:** As you're speaking, I'm wondering who is documenting these issues via photography currently in South Africa, but it's not a question I'm necessarily expecting you to answer. I'm just wondering who's at the forefront of activist photography with land issues and the issues you're addressing? There's one photographer that I follow, TC Maila, who goes around the country and specifically focuses on rural areas, looking at that connection to the land and the value therein. I think that's also worth exploring for us. curatorially. I've shared my screen. Can you see your photo? I think it's nice when we're speaking about specific works to also be looking at them at the same time. So the question is just telling us more about this photograph.





*Meeting under a tree to discuss possible forced removal from land, Ntombi's Camp, KwaZulu-Natal (1988)*

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:34:52**

**GdV:** This was taken in 1988. And at the time, there was another organisation here in Pietermaritzburg called AFRA, which is the Association for Rural Advancement, it still continues today. And they were very worried about the work that they were doing because there were so many what was called “black spots” in what was then Natal. You know they were going to be moved into KwaZulu. So Ntombi's Camp was one of these. Some field workers from AFRA took us - and when I say “us”, it was various photographers, journalists - on a tour of these areas, which were mainly around the Ladysmith area. That's sort of much more rural, you know, going into sort of fairly deep rural areas, as one would say. And all of these were fairly small communities. Including another, Driefontein, a place called Wheeler's Camp with a whole lot of farm workers. One of the untold stories - or very little told stories - are the numbers of farm workers who were forced off lands by farmers who took over farms or who bought out farms and decided they didn't want these particular workers. These farm workers had nowhere to go because they'd been living there for generations, and they didn't even know who the owner of the farm was. They'd been working as farm workers down the generations and to be suddenly removed and told to go from the farms was horrific for them. So there were various camps that started being set up. One was Wheeler's Camp, which was also near this area, and people were living in tents.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:37:02**

**GdV:** Yes. I have a few photographs of the camp as well, which are also on the SAHA website. The

community leaders had basically come together. You'll see most people under the tree are actually men. So going back to the Nguni way of doing things; and then there's various white people who are these journalists. In fact, I think one might be Sam Sole, who's one of the *Daily Maverick* journalists. Anyway, the community was explaining to the journalists what was happening in their lives. And of course, they had this magnificent tree under which they used to hold their committee meetings as well.

**FLC:** It's so important to have this background information.

**GdV:** But most of the places that we went to at that time didn't have community centres, as they often do now, and we would meet - the tree at Makgopo was very famous. They had a sort of iron bar that hung from the tree and they would bang on the iron bar to announce that they were about to have a meeting. And then people would come to congregate under this tree.

**FLC:** So adding to the tree, we spoke about it briefly. You mentioned the Tswana and the Nguni and how it relates to this idea of justice under a tree at the Constitutional Court, in the Court's logo, and the architecture of the Court.

**GdV:** It's wonderful that they've done that, actually.

**FLC:** It also speaks to an interconnection with nature. And you've also spoken about how we've lost that connection to the land, and we've almost pulled ourselves away, and the only way we get an apple is by going to a supermarket.

**GdV:** I think all the discussion around the world environment - I think we've come to recognise how important trees are and certainly in some of the Western worlds, there are people who've made a very particular study of trees and the way that trees can communicate not only above ground, but underground as well. So that's very fascinating and how trees seem to recognise their own progeny and reach out. Apart from being a place to gather and offering shade, I mean, they're just so aesthetically pleasing as well. And of course, the support that they gave in transforming carbon dioxide for us. I'll give you a very brief story. Once when I was in England and feeling rather disconnected from land and earth, I was near a small little copse of trees, and I went for a walk and I just sat with my back against this tree. And the energy, the calming energy that it offered was just incredible, even though it was a kind of foreign tree to me because I wasn't used to that particular variety of tree, coming from South Africa. And I just realised you know, they offer this wonderful calming effect on one and just walking in a forest has an amazing, soothing effect. And then the dead trees even, particularly when you're in the bush, you come across a lot of trees that have been left - and they're like sculptures. I do love trees.

**FLC:** You're giving us beautiful poetic tree-hugging answers [laughs]. I've got two anecdotes versus just a general question. Have you ever read the *Overstory* by Richard Powers?

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:41:44**

**GdV:** I haven't read Richard Powers, but there's another guy from England who's done a lot of, his name just escapes me [Robert McFarlane, as below], but he's written all sorts of books about not only trees, but just walking on the land, doing some of the old trails in England.

**FLC:** I had the privilege to go to London and I went to visit the Supreme Court of the UK. And it was quite interesting for me because it's on the same square as their parliament. And it's this repurposed colonial English building that they've now turned into their highest court and they've got this marvellous, gigantic London plane tree right outside the front doors of the court. And I thought about this relationship between the UK as the former colonisers in South Africa and how our apex court is represented as a tree. But in the UK, they've got the tree outside - nature's outside, it's something you move away from. And that to me was quite poetic, how we've made the tree the court, speaking to this traditional way of gathering,

**GdV:** Having visited so many magistrate courts in the past for various reasons, seeing how cold and impersonal they were for everybody, other than maybe the people who were there on a day to day basis, you know, I think the Constitutional Court is wonderful. And I happened to be there at one time when there was this case of a test patient of a woman who was chosen to be treated and her cousin who is a male. And the women who came in with their rural garments to fill the court with traditional dresses and that sort of thing, and it was just quite wonderful. And the woman won actually. This guy I was mentioning is Robert McFarlane. He writes wonderful books and talks and he's very conscious about the need for - he's a professor at Cambridge. He's very much into trees and nature and you know, everything that it has to offer.

**FLC:** Next question, how did it come to be and how did you decide to donate this photograph as a printed work?

**GdV:** I need to blame Catherine [Kennedy]. She kept suggesting that I look at my images and make a donation. So when I did go through them, this one just stood out for me. I mean, I did offer a few. But I felt that this one was the one because of the logo, because of this synchronicity between it and the Constitutional Court.

**FLC:** And for those who don't know, what's the relationship between you and Catherine Kennedy?

**GdV:** Well I met her when she was running the South African History Archive. My initial contact was shortly after some of my negatives had been scanned by African Media Online by a guy called Reinhardt Hartszenberg. And she then asked me if the South African History Archive could have a copy of those scans and have them in the library, which I agreed to. And then Catherine being Catherine, she started to do wonderful outreach programs with the archives. And that's when we started working together on first of all, the Thembisa booklet, along with Dr. Tshepo Moloi who is now at UJ. And then also with Marge Brown, who was at that time teaching history at Roedean. And Catherine, she and I and Tshepo went out to Braklaagte, to Makgopo and did oral interviews. Unfortunately, we never got to the booklet. But there's a whole history of that journey on the South African History Archive website as well, along with

the images of the three areas that we went to. And we ran workshops there for learners, which were run by Catherine and Marge. And I took photographs with me - prints - and hung them up in the hall where we were doing these photographs. And it was very interesting, because immediately as the learner started recognising people in the photographs, their whole interest changed, and their energy changed. So it was really fascinating for me to see. And really what I intended by my photographs was to see younger people who didn't even know the history of their area, and they were interacting now because of the photographs.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:47:36**

**FLC:** You've already answered this question. I don't know if there's anything you want to add in. And it's that question about land issues. You've spoken about that.

**GdV:** Yeah, I did. I think I basically said what I wanted to say. But I'll just add in my opinion that if you do look at what happens after the colonisers leave - in South America and in Africa, and obviously in other areas, too - the issue is always left and it never seems to be able to be resolved. And it's always an irritant under the surface because other powers come into play. And again, it's usually the rural women who actually utilise rural land more than anybody else who are neglected. And unfortunately in South Africa, while recognizing traditional leaders who are mostly male, you know, they neglect the ones usually remaining on the land, the women. And those women very seldom have access to land, unless the chief happens to say they can, otherwise they have to have access to land through their husbands. And in some cultures, if a husband dies that land then goes to the next male member in the family.

**FLC:** And then there's this photograph - please tell us about it.



*Army & Black Sash poster outside CODESA 2 meeting, Kempton Park*

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:49:32**

**GdV:** That was at the discussions with CODESA out in Kempton Park. A lot of these are coming from the 90s. So this was 1992. And when we looked at the composition of who was doing the negotiations, it seemed that they were very few women. So we decided that we were going to go and do a protest outside the building where CODESA 2 was being held. And I say CODESA 2 because there was CODESA 1, and then there was a breakdown and then they got restarted.

**FLC:** It's an interesting contextual link with the previous photographs and you speaking to the differences in cultures between the Nguni and the Tswana and then also in the constitutional process: where are the women? That's always an issue.

**GdV:** Well it is. I mean, for me it's not just gender - it's attitude. This goes into psychological welfare and work and you know, Jung always said that every male should acknowledge the female aspect of themselves and every female should acknowledge the masculine aspect of themselves to be whole people. And so I feel that there's far too much attention given to women as just a gender thing. And you know, where people boast about how many women they happen to have in Parliament, but if those women are behaving the same way as the men, then there's no point in having the women there because it's just reinforcing the same old same old. And I have this outlook on the whole world and that the culture of male remains white male regardless of skin colour. The attitude still remains the white male,

almost colonial attitude, and unless it's broken down we're never ever going to get egalitarianism.

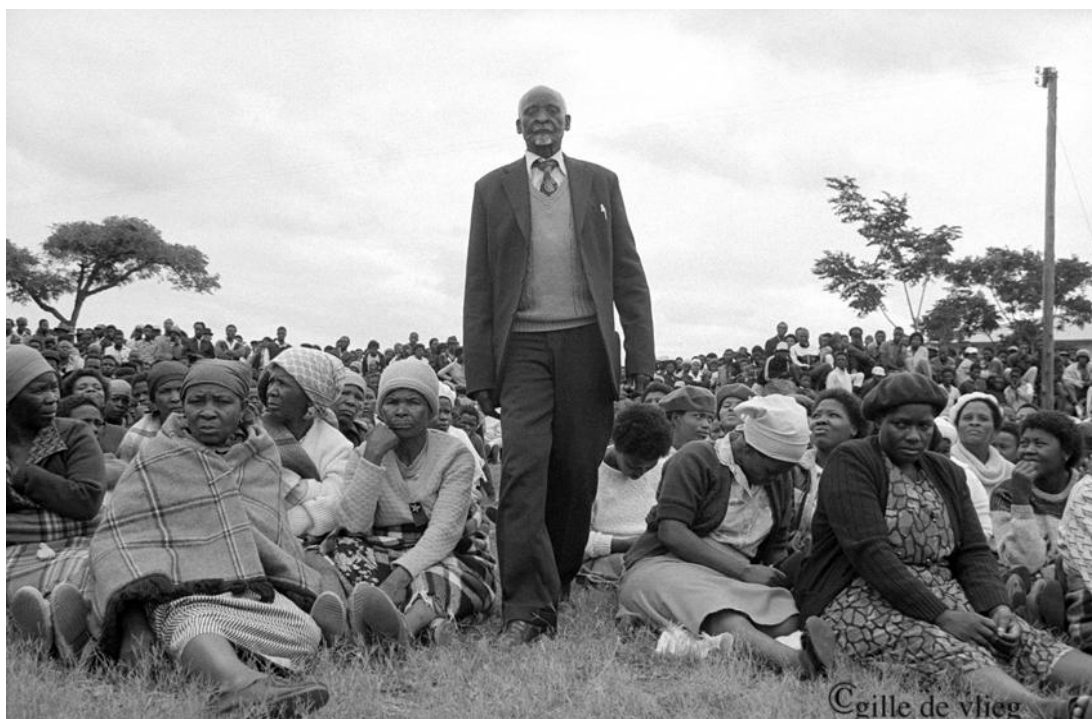
**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:52:04**

**GdV:** I'm not saying that all female energy is good. I'm not saying that at all. I mean, if you look at Margaret Thatcher, look at what a disaster she caused - she didn't do anything for feminism.

**FLC:** She also had white male energy.

**GdV:** I think recognising the more egalitarian side of society you know, recognizing the fact that we don't have to be violent, we don't have to have a defence force. Why do we have a defence force? Surely we can do better things with that money than just going along with "oh, well of course we've got to have an army, everyone's got an army". We're not asking the right questions quite often. Here we have this wonderful Constitution but are we actually asking the question of how do we get that Constitution onto the ground so that it's actually operating from the ground up, especially when so many rural communities remain totally patriarchal? I feel it here, even this retirement village that I'm in. And not because I am the age I am, so with other people of a similar age. And what the husband says goes for so many women because they never came out of that and ask the question "who am I?" other than as a partner to my husband.

**FLC:** The next photograph is interesting, because you've got Chief John Sebogodi and you've spoken about it in the North West, it was almost a bit less patriarchal. But what's the context, because you've got this man standing up with all the women sitting around him. Or what was happening here?



*Chief John Sebogodi walks through kgotla crowd, Braklaagte North West, 4 Feb*

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:54:36

GdV: He was actually walking to the table in front. There are some other images of the same thing, but you can see the number of women there at this Iekgotla. You know, and then I've got photographs of the woman standing up later and actually talking, you know, giving their input. Old women too, not just young women. He was the head of Braklaagte, a lovely man. He had been in the army in World War II so he always stood very upright. His wife was fascinating. Her name was Maria Sebogodi. She had resisted passes way before the '56 Pass March in Pretoria. There were rural women in that area of Zeerust who were resisting passes that the ANC didn't pay any attention to. And we only heard about it through a white journalist, who I actually met in another lifetime of mine. He was working for something called the *Golden Post* at the time and he had gone down there because the Black journalists who had been sent down had been beaten up by the white police of Zeerust. So as a white journalist, he went down - it's spoken about in a book written by an Anglican priest, or somebody or the other - and talks about these women who were actually arrested and sent to Pretoria for refusing to take out passes. So in fact, the family of Sebogodi had quite a tradition of resistance. And what the Braklaagte people were resisting wasn't actually removal from their land - it was the removal from South Africa to be put into Bophuthatswana. So they were fighting the loss of their South African citizenship.

[Next photograph is shown]



TRAC & Black Sash protest, Mafikeng, North West (former Bophuthatswana) 5 Oct

And this here is also Bophuthatswana, because TRAC became banned because of the work we were

doing with various organised communities that fell under Bophuthatswana. We became banned, and TRAC was banned, and so we went to protest in Mafokeng. I managed to get away from it actually, because I was busy taking photographs, I presented myself as a photographer, and not as a Black Sash member. Those women were going to be arrested and to be had up for treason.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:57:33**

**FLC:** Were they arrested?

**GdV:** Yes, and until such time as Jules Browde, who's a well known Johannesburg lawyer, and his wife was a Black Sash member, came through to Bophuthatswana and managed to get them out on bail. Once it got to the big lawyers, then it all got dropped. So this was just prior to the arrest.

**FLC:** I'm interested in you saying that you're first and foremost an activist, second a photographer. I'm seeing these women holding up the posters and I'm wondering, you standing in that situation, not holding up a poster, but holding up your camera, how the camera became a symbol of protest. You were busy taking photos, because that had particular value beyond just that moment. You could distribute the photos, and they could have a lasting impact. And more people could know what was happening on the ground. But how often were you involved in protests such as this one, where you were holding up a poster not a camera?

**GdV:** I started off doing that initially when I first joined the Black Sash. The first time I ever did a protest was along Jan Smuts Avenue which is where the Johannesburg Black Sash used to protest all the way along sort of from Rosebank right through to Wits. I remember thinking, I'm doing the right thing, I'm in the right place, this feels good. And I actually don't remember if it was the pensions or what we were protesting. But yeah, I mean, later on as you have pointed out, taking the photographs of women protesting or people protesting became more important. And I think, you know, the fact that I felt aligned to them helped with taking the images too.

**FLC:** This one...





*Stop Rape march, Soweto Gauteng 3 Feb*

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:59:54**

**GdV:** This one is very interesting. Yeah. This was very interesting because since 1990, there have been various attempts by various women's groups across the colour lines to come together in various ways and support one another. And because Black Sash had offices in the centre of Johannesburg - and, the South African Council of Churches actually owned the building that we had offices in. We could then actually come together and meet up with other women's organisations. This was actually more an Anglican women's based protest. And in fact, one of the women here - you can't really see but just on the right hand side of the banner, that's Leah Tutu. So I think she'd been very influential in organising this particular protest. And then on the left hand side is somebody who became part of an NEC, a corrupt NEC later in life [laughingly]. But you don't see the Sash here but we marched through the streets of Soweto, there were Black Sash members at the back as well sort of marching through it, because rape became a very big issue. I think it was also because women started to feel they could speak out about it too. I mean, it's an ongoing thing that hasn't stopped in any way at all - and that was taken in 1990.

**FLC:** Do you think gender based violence has become worse since 1990?

**GdV:** Yeah, I do. I mean, the truth about the killing of this rapper [AKA] hasn't truly come out. And there was one woman who talked about his abuse of her that *Sunday Times* wrote about. But apparently he wasn't this amazing guy that everyone talks about, he was really, you know, an abuser of women.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:02:36**

**FLC:** Gender based violence is something we're exploring more in the collection now. There's another photograph that recently entered the collection by the photographer Elisa Iannaccone.

**GdV:** She's amazing, I looked her up.

**FLC:** And it's this photograph of somebody standing inside of the Ponte towers in that opening of the Ponte, and this woman is wearing this very large dress, which is draping to all corners of the building. And it's also about reclaiming her her dignity, or stating her dignity after sexual violence. Another very powerful work we've got is the Amsterdam Rainbow Dress, made out of the flags of all the countries in the world where it's illegal to be queer, which speaks to that intersectional connection between not just gender but also sexuality and sexual orientation. Both of those female photographers aren't white. So it's interesting to start expanding our photographic collection to make it more diverse, and to have other artworks that speak to these issues. We'd like to tie them all together with your work too for our programming.

**GdV:** I think the other thing that isn't recognized sufficiently is the amount of gender abuse there is with rural women as well. Because they have no place to talk about it quite often. Thuli Madonsela actually - there's a clip with an interview with Thuli Madonsela on YouTube, where she talks about actually going to one of the places where we worked called KwaNgema, which is next to Driefontein. And she went there with her idea of how women could be reporting rape. And these women from KwaNgema were actually fascinated by her and told her that for them to go and report in the court, they felt it was like another abuse. So Thuli Madonsela said I actually learned from these women.

**FLC:** What can you tell us about these celebrations in Khutsong on 9 August?



*Women's Day celebrations, Khutsong, 9 Aug*

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:05:25**

**GdV:** This is a South African Women's Day celebration in Khutsong and Winnie Mandela was supposed to arrive. And I can't quite remember, I think it was because of one of the rural women belonging to the Rural Women's Movement who told me about it and asked me to come out. I went out there because there was an area I didn't know at all. I knew Carletonville, but I didn't know Khutsong. It wasn't a township that I had been into before. And these women had done a parade - well they had meant to do a parade in front of Winnie arriving in the vehicle. But Winnie never arrived so they did the parade anyway, and I took this image. And then they made me the speaker. I don't think I did very well other than to point out to all the young male activists who thought they were doing wonderful things by toy-toying in the streets while their wives, the mothers, the sisters, were actually home doing the cooking for them, and the washing and the ironing, and maybe they should think of doing it too.

**[Next photo]**



*Voter Education dancing 16 Feb Madlala*

And then this was wonderful. This was wonderful. Because of the Rural Women's Movement and when the election was about to happen, Black Sash decided that we would put out little booklets because Black Sash was known for tiny little booklets about this size, you could put in a man's shirt pocket. They were on various issues like pass laws, pensions, that type of thing. And then we put out this very good booklet on how to vote. I mean, obviously the process of voting. And I realised, again, that rural woman needed to know. And to actually help that happen, we ran workshops with members of the Rural Women's Movement, so they could go back into their villages, and they could give workshops to their community. There's another image taken the day before this one, I think it was where there are two rural women giving a workshop on how to vote to the community, with men present. And my subversive reason for wanting to do this was so that rural women would get some status within their community, because for once they knew more than the men. And so this was after one of those workshops and in fact, Lydia Kompe who I mentioned before, she's the woman on the right hand side. And then this was a blind woman. She's holding papers that we had printed with information about voting. And we also did a practice vote. All these women had all just done a practice vote and she then broke into this dance after doing the practice vote.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:09:16**

**FLC:** It's lovely knowing the stories behind these photographs. The next one:



*Women dance after signing anti-Bophuthatswana petition, Braklaagte, North West 10 Sept*

**GdV:** And this one was also empowering women again, again in Braklaagte. And as I mentioned to you, they were fighting the removal of their South African citizenship. So they had a petition that they drew up to say we want to remain South African citizens, which they were going to send through to the South African government. And after the woman had signed the petition, they then broke to this spontaneous dance and I was able to capture it.

**FLC:** What I like about these images, we recently presented a tour for the incoming law clerks. So twice a year, there's intakes of law clerks who work with the justices. And we went through the public gallery, and afterwards, one of the law clerks approached us and quite earnestly asked, what's the ratio between Black joy and Black pain in the collection? Because after doing that tour - and the artworks change constantly - but specifically the public gallery, as it is currently, I think everybody felt quite heavy afterwards, or that person specifically did. Because you've got all this remembrance, which is very important - and the documentation of the atrocities of the past, and even of more current day political and other violence issues, but we have very few images in the collection that depict Black joy. So I think showing these works in the court really adds to that missing element. I like the dancing. It'd be nice to maybe organise a dance in the Court foyer.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:11:14**

[Next photo]



*Tinkie, a praise singer, with Jill Pointer, Mathopestad North West 9 March*

**GdV:** It was spontaneous, it wasn't a set piece that had been planned. This was actually Mathopestad. Unfortunately I don't know Tinkie's surname, but she was a praise singer for the chief. And we had gone out there again with a larger Black Sash grouping. I'm not sure if this was the time when Helen Suzman came with us and was arrested. But anyway, I've always loved this image just because for once it shows a Black woman sitting higher than a white woman and the black woman doing the talking. Jill was a Black Sash member. And just a lovely way she's listening to Tinkie. I'm not sure if Tinkie is even speaking English actually. To me this became the sort of desirable image where we went there to listen, not to talk.

**FLC:** I want to ask you an offbeat question? Non-racialism, which is this constitutional ideal and something we should strive towards as per the Constitution, but some people are quite critical of it and have become disillusioned with the idea of non-racialism. What's your view on that?

**GdV:** I don't think there can ever be non-racialism. I think there can be a respect for all races and a sense of the value that all races have to offer one another. Whether you can ever get to a stage of actually not seeing race or not being conscious of race - I'm not sure. I mean, I've just been reading an article on how racist Russia is. There's just so much - racialism was promoted long prior to apartheid. All colonists brought in racism of one sort or another, some were more abusive than others. Although, I think what apartheid did was make sure that Black people recognized that they could only rise to a certain level - they were not worthy of being properly educated for instance. And I don't know how long that thread

continues to continue. I think it does until such time as people become self-aware and acknowledge the value of their own selves. I don't know if we can be non-racialist. Trevor Noah seems to think we do a better job than America and that we do talk about it whereas America pretends it doesn't happen.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:15:07**



*Elderly woman speaking against incorporation Braklaagte, North West 10 Sept*

**GdV:** Now here, this is the same meeting as Chief Sebogodi going through the crowd. So here's this elderly woman making her point standing up. There's another one [a photograph], which is a vertical image, where she's actually sort of pointing to the sky with her feet solidly on the ground.

**FLC:** So this photograph could actually be displayed alongside or connected to that other image of the chief.

**GdV:** I think so, because it shows that, you know, he was a much beloved chief, Sebogodi. I have images of him and I pumping water and he's talking to his pigs. So, I mean, obviously, it was still paternalistic. I think that he was a very loved man.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:16:12**

**FLC:** So that's the end of the artworks or the photographs I wanted to ask you about. And we've got that first print in the court as a physical artwork. And then we're looking at how we can maybe use these other photographs we've spoken about today in a digital format. So both the Ntombi's Camp photograph and

all these others, how do you feel about having them displayed in the Constitutional Court? And what does the Constitutional Court and its art collection represent to you?

**GdV:** Well, for me, the Constitutional Court has been incredibly valuable. It's like our foundation stone to what we want to achieve. You know, it holds all our hopes of a truly egalitarian South Africa. So having the work that I did displayed in the Constitutional Court is incredibly valuable to me, because my underlying thoughts were to record so that it will be seen for the future. Having been born at a time when, during the Second World War and being in England, and actually having my house where I was living bombed, I came to understand about Nazi racism very early on in my life - although not the depth of it, of course, and not how prevalent it is throughout the world. But there were always people who said they didn't know about the Nazis in Germany. And I thought what I'm seeing has to be recorded so people can't say that. Although the apartheid government tried very, very hard to prevent white people from knowing what was going on in the majority of the people's lives in South Africa. You know, when I first went to Thembisa, there wasn't any signposting to Thembisa. You know, there were no road signs saying "Thembisa".

**FLC:** Just a place hidden away.

**GdV:** And if you notice, even now - well it's hard to see now, because the township has spread so vastly. But every township was over the hill from the white town, so they couldn't be seen. It was a hidden society.

**FLC:** Yeah, you've already actually touched on my next question, which is the relationship between art and justice and the power of photography. That's something you've mentioned now, and also something that you've said in your other interviews. You took photos, so people couldn't say that they didn't know. I think that's the thing that comes through strongly.

**GdV:** And now of course, my delight is when young people want to know because it's really hard to actually get young people's attention about anything other than where they want to place their attention. And sadly, there are far too many young people within South Africa who don't even know their parents' history, and what role their parents played in the transformation of South Africa or the hopeful transformation of South Africa, because that whole role of storytelling seems to disappear. And then you go into homes now, the TV is on - even in rural homes, the TV is on.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:20:14**

**FLC:** Do you have any recommendations for the presentation of your work for us as the curatorial team?

**GdV:** I'm very delighted with where it is at the moment with my images, because it really seems to be in a spot where it integrates with the other artworks. And they seem to talk to one another, which is lovely. It's not something that I would want to necessarily interfere with or feel particularly strong about other than that it's shown with truthfulness.



**FLC:** Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to report as part of this interview?

**GdV:** Just my gratitude for the interest in the work that I've done. I feel very humbled by the fact that I now have an image hanging on the walls of the Constitutional Court. My first exhibition, actually, that I put up was - if you're standing at the front door of the Constitutional Court and on the left is a small room - I had an exhibition there. And Kate O'Reagan opened the exhibition. She was one of the judges who had been recommended by the Black Sash as well, we supported her being appointed as a Constitutional Court judge.

**FLC:** Are there any images of that exhibition still existing?

**GdV:** I need to look it up and just see what - Yes, because it was added to and was shown at Grahamstown as well and I do still have the prints.

**FLC:** Yeah, it'll be nice to see how that exhibition looked in that room if there's new installation photos, just for the historical record. Thank you so much for your time.

**GdV:** It was lovely. Thank you for also making it nice and easy for me too. Go well with all of your work!

**FLC:** Thank you. There's a lot going on, but it's a privilege to be in this space and to be doing this work. So even though it's a lot of work, it's still nice. Have a nice day. We'll be in touch with the transcripts. Thank you. Bye bye.

**END OF AUDIO RECORDING: 01:22:48**