

Carohn Cornell
Inanda Seminary staff, 1968-1970.
Interviewed at her home in Kalk Bay, Western Cape, 6 May 2009.

When exactly did you come to Inanda Seminary, and how did you come to arrive there?

I came to Inanda in 1968. I was there for '68 and '69, and half of '70. How did I arrive there? I knew someone who was teaching there, Mary Emma Kuhn—an American actually, but not part of the American Board. And I met her through a group called the Grail, it was a Catholic institute. I was two years out of university and looking for a place where—where I could learn—and, what—a place where I could learn more about living in South Africa and I had discovered, sort of accidentally, that I loved teaching, through teaching illegal night school two years before.

And where were you teaching night school?

I was teaching in Joburg, in a basement, sporadic police raids.

And who were you teaching there?

Adults, mainly Wits University cleaners, janitors, and so on... And so Mary Emma said, 'This is a good place.' And so I applied, and they said yes.

So when you started there, Lavinia Scott was still the principal. What was she like? This was the end of her very long tenure at Inanda.

A person of, I would say, great dignity, warmth, and discipline. I think she was up every morning at some ungodly hour, keeping up with her correspondence for some hours. Yeah, I think she was on top of things. She was a sort of late Victorian, with strong political interests, I would say.

How would you describe her political interests? What were her involvements?

Well, I just remember finding out, soon after I got there, that she had been invited to speak at Luthuli's funeral, and I remember her pride in introducing someone called Joyce Sikakhane. I can't quite remember the details, whether she'd been in exile—various banned people—

Joyce Sikakhane—she went to Inanda Seminary, in the early 1960s or something.

She returned, and she was with I think a Scottish partner, actually, I don't remember much of those details—it was just a sense of pride in past students who were politically involved, who were in any kind of leadership position... There was a sense that, this was definitely a past student to be proud of. So I think her political interests were probably via people she knew over the years, people she knew individually and—I don't remember every having a political discussion with her specifically, but it was just there, as part of the air you breathe.

[CC added in a 15 February 2011 note to MH: In 1971/2 when I was teaching in London, there was a gathering of "friends of Inanda" in London, Miss Scott must have been passing through, and there were several ANC exiles there—I remember Dr Conco who worked for the National Health Service—all obviously very respectful of Miss Scott.]

And what do you remember of the students that you taught there, your early impressions of where they were coming from, what their engagements were, that kind of thing?

I immediately have to say, I remember music. I just remember singing. I could probably talk all day about this, because I remember people individually. I discovered this when I started thinking

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about it, their handwriting and faces, how they reacted in class. I can say something general, which is that I found out quite soon what some of the cleavages were. There were students who were clearly from deep Zululand, who spoke deep Zulu, and who had all the politenesses associated with that, not meeting your eye, and so on. And, as others pointed out, there were students who didn't have 'complexion,' unquote, that meant they were not using skin lighteners, so those were beautifully dark, and apparently shy and reserved. So there was that sort of grouping. And that was most apparent when students were new... And then there were township students who were much vibier, and apparently more confident, and so on. And in particular there were the Joburg students, who clearly felt that they were a cut above the rest of the group--they felt sophisticated and so on. Always there was this strange thing of the English rule in the school, which I'm sure you've heard about. And so whatever I'm saying is filtered through that most of the time students were speaking in English. And so you're asking what was my impression? Energy, as a new teacher obviously I'm being checked out, and just--I heard afterwards, from various students, that what I expected them to do was initially very strange, because I suppose my approach, which was really by the seat of my pants, having not been trained as a teacher at that stage—it was a communicative, interactive approach with a lot of role play, and I suppose drama.

You only taught English.

I only taught English, yes. The students were initially, I think, taken aback, and then they just took to it and were extraordinarily good. And one of the things I remember most happily is seeing some of the students that would have been in that deep Zululand group coming into their own, especially through role play, because you may be personally shy and have a whole sort of politeness code that makes you different to other people and makes you come across as reserved and shy, but when you are in a role as Verwoerd, or you know the pigs in *Animal Farm*, or whatever, you can be transformed. All of those things fall away, and you can just come into your own, and be anyone's equal there. What else? I could talk all day about what I observed of course about students' lives, always through the language filter. I can remember individual voices, extraordinary singers, Saturday night performances. What do you want me to talk about?

You talked about the role play of playing Verwoerd, and pigs in Animal Farm. What would you say was the students' political consciousness, political awareness? To what extent did it manifest in formal political organization, if at all? Or was it more about debates and talking about events in the world?

No explicit conversation about formal political organization. But very clear [pauses] kind of respect, veneration for a range of political figures—Luthuli, for example, who had quite recently died. So the way political consciousness manifested itself was, mmm, a sense of 'We are oppressed,' of course—Bantu Education is a central way of oppressing us, so you can--you as a teacher—well, I as a teacher—found that you can appeal to people, and say, 'Yes, but look. I want you to think for yourself.' So the way it worked was, it was us—staff and students—against them--Bantu Education authorities. Because it was a private school, but it was still under inspection by the Bantu Education inspectors, who were white and hostile.

And how regularly did they inspect the school?

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Unexpectedly, that was part of it. I have to tell you about one thing that happened. It may seem strange, but the kind of drive to keep the exam that was called JMB, Joint Matriculation Board, and the drive to keep English higher, you know, as if they were first-language speakers of English—that was a political drive. Really, saying, ‘You may think, as apartheid education, that you can keep us down like that, but we’ll show you.’ So, that was essentially political. And that was, I think, the reason for the English rule too, which was problematic in lots of ways. [End of MP3 1] While it seemed that the English rule worked well as a strategy in its time, from where I sit now, particularly, I have all kinds of issues with it. The idea that you’d be punished for speaking Zulu, which would be work in the garden—lots of issues around that. But I think that the English rule was probably one of the reason that parents sent their daughters there, and I think that students took an ambivalent kind of pride in it. And I do think, as I said, that there was a strong political motivation. It was showing those inspectors, who kept saying that you should be doing English second-language, that you should be doing the other exam, not JMB—and I think this is a kind of political story. You’ve been to the school, obviously, so you know the layout—I had a class that was upstairs in what used to be called the Industrial Building, at the far end of campus, the other end from the chapel, and staff were at tea, and unexpectedly, these inspectors walked in. They didn’t have tea with us. Suddenly, there was this man who was coming to inspect my classroom. And I had to walk with him across campus to my classroom, remembering that the walls were papered with things about freedom, because we’d been doing *Animal Farm* as an extra, it wasn’t on the syllabus. First we had students do *Cry, the Beloved Country*, because it was almost like a translation from Zulu, and then *Animal Farm*, almost as a kind of foundation course, as they came into Form Four. Anyway, there we were, and I was thinking, oh my God. And we came up the stairs and into the classroom, and the walls were clear—everything, the kids had taken everything down, and I launched into a lesson we had done previously, which was about something completely innocuous. And they played along like you wouldn’t believe, as if it were new to them, just played along. And they were sort of, respectful, and participatory... it was a very high moment. So, you ask about how politics were expressed, and to me, that’s a highly politicized moment. Nobody was talking about ANC, or PAC, or whatever, at least, not loudly, but that kind of thing shows the consciousness.

Was there much involvement at that time between Inanda Seminary and the surrounding community?
Um—in the sense of visits?

It seems as if there was a great change over time in terms of how open the girls felt the campus was, and how related to the surrounding area the campus was...

Well, the demographics were very different. It was essentially in a rural area then. It is no longer. So it was really different. There were no visible informal settlements between Inanda and Durban then... It was very sparsely populated... Visits, there were all kinds of interschool visits, Ohlange, Inchanga, Mariannhill. There were a couple of other Catholic foundations roundabout. Adams College came to Inanda, but as far as I know we never went there, and it was really weird, because there were some white staff and some black staff who came along from Adams. The black had tea with us, the white staff wouldn’t—and it was just really clear the different trajectories at Adams, which had been taken over, and Inanda, which had remained independent. Visits, I

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remember walking to Shembe village with I think any girls who wanted to come, for the Easter dancing, and every year, I think it was just the staff, we were invited to Phoenix settlement for a meal with Gandhi descendants... And then there were people who came in. There was Mr. Champion, who had his own political history. The shoemaker. And there was the terrifying Dr. Gumedede, Mordecai Gumedede.

He was terrifying? I've interviewed his wife, Melodius Gumedede.

He was terrifying. He was personally charming and so on, but it was a terrifying occasion I think when he came. He used to be brought in—Victorian—perhaps six weeks after the holidays, when the girls would be at home, and essentially he was there for pregnancy checking.

Was student pregnancy a large problem during your time there?

I think I should start by saying I think a major motivation for lots of parents sending their daughters to this relatively expensive place was so that they would not become pregnant while in school. And there was this—this is why I call it Victorian—there was this terrible thing that would happen. A girl who was found to be pregnant would get formally named in assembly, in chapel, and I don't think the word 'pregnancy' would be mentioned, but it would be said so-and-so was being sent home. And I remember one awful time, walking down from the chapel, and there was a lovely girl, tall, friendly girl, standing with her bag, and everyone filing past. And who knows, she might have been raped, etc., but there she was told to leave. And another time, when a student, I think she was a Form Four student, died of pregnancy toxemia, in McCord's [Hospital]. And it hadn't been public that she was pregnant, she'd been going to McCord's, to the clinic—there was a vehicle that would take girls to McCord's for whatever—and there was actually at that time a nursing sister, a midwife, who was in the matric class, Janet Dladla, who had realised she was pregnant but obviously thought McCord knew as well—she had swollen ankles or something—she actually died. Yeah, otherwise it was just, who got sent away. It wasn't public very often—I can probably remember three examples in two and a half years. I hated that way of dealing with it. I could see what it came out of, but—

What was your impression generally of the single-sex education? Do you think that it was serving the students well?

Certainly it wasn't really discussed—there were issues around open days when boys were allowed to visit, all sorts of cousins would materialize, who perhaps weren't related, from Ohlange. So obviously there was a huge desire to actually spend some time with boys. I just remember being in the library and being on sort of policing duty and seeing one girl emerging from behind the door, clearly in a clinch with a visiting boy, and I just sort of turned away [laughs]. But I think the same thing as more recent research has shown probably applied, that the emphasis was, girls can do anything. Women can do anything. And it was a strong academic environment. So I don't think they suffered academically.

What did most of your students go on to do after they graduated? It seems that most went to University of Zululand. They called it Ngoye at that time.

Quite a lot did. I mean, obviously, before it was mainly nursing and teaching, and a number did go to do nursing, but quite a few went to Unizulu, a couple went on to become doctors—they

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obviously didn't train there [Unizulu]—one trained in Sweden. Some seem to have made it in business. But at the time, a lot of people were aiming for university, and it was Unizulu. And students came back after some time, two, three years, and they would say, 'We are really struggling. This is not a climate of thinking'—with a couple of exceptional, a couple of lecturers who were exceptions, including an ex-Inanda teacher, Miranda Alcock [Miranda Prinsloo when she was at Inanda] who went on to teach there, and who tried to keep up a sort of study group, discussion group atmosphere, that seemed to be foreign at Unizulu.

That's what I've heard from people who went there--that they felt that their Inanda education had been more enriching for them than university.

And of course, there was very strong political repression. I mean, there were student protests—I think Gatsha's got some blood on his hands from those days. Not only him, but that was part of it. There were protests about who was invited to speak, and so on. One of the very exceptional ones went on to have psychiatric help, I suppose... [15 February 2011 note by CC: That was Esther Maki, a brilliant but very troubled student, the only student I remember who refused to dance, who had a breakdown two years running before matric exams—diagnosed with adolescent schizophrenia at McCord's Hospital, a shock to see her there in a strait-jacket and to hear she was getting shock treatment. She was raving, partly in Jo'burg *tsotsi-taal*, about Vorster being her uncle, and violence ... Bitterly ironic that her boyfriend when she went on to university at Turfloop, Abram Tiro, student leader, was blown up I think by a parcel bomb at Turfloop after making a brave political speech.]

[End of MP3 2]

[Carohn is sharing classroom materials that she has saved.]

"The Dream Deferred," things like this hung up all over the place. These are probably the bits that students pulled down before the inspector came. Some other Langston Hughes ones I found were a bit moldy, so I threw them out. What you see is a sort of religious-political thing running through. And, Nozizwe [Madlala-Routledge] told me years later, I think Esther Cele [Sangweni] told me too, that we did a whole theme on "black is beautiful," which was, you know, a thing of the time. Readings, and so on, and we had quotes all over the place, and that was quite a shock. And there were articles against skin lighteners. Nozizwe said it was a good thing, it was a realization.

I came across a speech that Nozizwe gave at UKZN in which she said that she learned not to use skin-lightening cream at Inanda.

[Laughs] Yeah. And then they wrote some beautiful things about that... Maybe this one you should put on tape, it is another political memory. I remember coming out of chapel and as the students filed out, and all the way down, they sang this really loud and angry chorus, and it was a praise song for Tsafendas, who assassinated Verwoerd. It was an anniversary, I'm not sure if it was the anniversary of the assassination... and I thought that was amazing, to know the day, and to come straight out of chapel—and I never knew who started that, but there was a student at the front called Myra Gaboo, from Joburg, who afterwards died of a brain tumor, who was a big, bold Joburg student who had plenty to say. She was at the front, I don't know if she started it,

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but they were all learning it, the praise song for Tsafendas—because the way that apartheid really was making itself felt for high school students was through Bantu Education, and Verwoerd was personally hated.

Did you have much contact with parents, and families? What did they value about Inanda?

English—“like the old Standard Six,” people would say, like before Bantu Education—academically good, they’ll get somewhere. And of course people also thought education was the key, and English was the key to education. And clearly, so they won’t get pregnant. Like they would in day schools, in township schools, mixed schools. It was those three, well, it’s two really. That the school had a tradition. There were a couple of open days where parents might come, and I remember once meeting the mother of Peggy Nkosi, the blues-singing student, and she was from near Joburg, she had come for the day, I think she was a past student herself... I remember the domestic worker mother, a coloured mother of a wonderful student, a poetic student, Aloisia Ndlela. So I met fifty parents, maybe, over the years. And I visited some homes... it was nerve-wracking. [15 February 2011 CC note: For instance, going into Kwa-Mashu to visit Eunice Manyoni’s family at her invitation, and going to visit Peggy Nkosi’s family outside Jo’burg, and so on—trying to be ‘normal’ but always with fear in the pit of the stomach wondering if we were going to be stopped and if there would be repercussions for the families, because Liz Johanson and I didn’t have permits to visit which was the crazy legal requirement at the time, and telling myself they knew what they were doing – I think Peggy’s father actually was a policeman ...] When I went to London, Nthabiseng Bolofo [Thabiseng] really wanted me to meet her father in exile, and in the end we spoke on the phone a few times, but he wouldn’t see me, too worried about white South African, possible spy connections and so on... [Summing up generally.] It was a very good place to be... [Speaking of my other interviewees] When I visited Inanda years later – when Lucky Mnguni, Esther Cele (Sangweni) and Khosi [Mpanza] were teachers there – it came out that Khosi had a boyfriend who was a prisoner on Robben Island.

[15 February 2011 CC notes: And years later when I watched the TV coverage of Chris Hani’s death, there was Baleka Mbete, from Matric 1968, giving a keynote speech, I hadn’t heard of her for years and found out that she had been in exile so the connections were there, all right. The library, especially under Dumi Zondi, was very good for the time and the place—included lots of African writers when they were first published and lots of awareness-raising material, very respectable looking. Open days, like the centenary pageant, brought a good mix of people to Inanda. And there were regular guest speakers/preachers in chapel. I remember Alan Paton who preached about St Francis of Assisi and ‘Lord make me an instrument of thy peace’; the conservative old liberal Edgar Brookes, former principal of Adams College; Fatima Meer who preached about Gandhi. There were often visitors from overseas too—there was a sense that Inanda was part of a wider world and that girls could go far. Friday or Saturday night there was a cultural programme in the hall, next to the chapel, organized by a committee with student reps—a movie or a concert or a play, or music the girls danced to. I remember Fugard’s *Bloodknot*, about brothers with different race classification, presented by Indian actors who later became famous: the audience was riveted, such a painful topic which affected some students in their own families. Welcome Msomi, later famous for *uMabatha*, the Zulu *Macbeth*, came and did something (and fancied one of the girls who has become very well known since). The film *Zulu* (with violent

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black-white confrontations) nearly caused a riot ... On Friday afternoons we sometimes went in to Durban by car, we'd chip in for petrol and I think there was a set rate if it was a staff car. As a white woman if I traveled alone with a black man or men, no matter if it was the deputy principal or a minister of religion, that was circumstantial evidence of a contravention of the Immorality Act; there had to be another woman (black or white) or a white man there as chaperone ... This was too awkward to state bluntly so imagine the contorted arrangements. Young staff members who were there at weekends – Ennah Mbatha, Glenrose, Faith Gcabashe, Peter Lamoela, John Hartney, and I – sometimes used to go out together in Peter's car. The only place we could eat together was the Goodwill Lounge in the Grey Street area, or we'd get take-aways, and a few times we went to movies in a cinema nearby—until the day that the usher shone a torch on my pale face and we all filed out of our seats. A couple of times we went for a swim north of Durban but that had to be after dark so we all looked dark—always the angst about normal behavior. For the annual beach outing with all the girls Liz Johanson and I, and later Joy Bosman and Miranda Prinsloo and Ceri Llewellyn, had to get “nanny” permits as whites going onto a black beach, just as black “nannies” would be issued permits to look after their charges on a white beach—and like the nannies we weren't allowed to go into the water. Students would assume that white South African staff members were American because obviously white locals had to be racist and would never have wanted to teach at Inanda: after students stayed in my family home in Cape Town when they were coming to an ecumenical youth camp at Genadendal Mission Station, they asked ‘But where do you come from?']