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Dale: Okay it's the 17th of February 2010, and I am here to interview Florencia Belvedere. Thanks Florencia for making the time to do this, just for the record, state your full name please.

Florencia: Nadia Florencia Belvedere.

Dale: And before we get started on some of the more specific APF stuff, we are doing this with every interview; we just want to know a few things about yourself. Where and when were you born?

Florencia: I was born in Buenos Aires in Argentina on the 9th of April, 1971.

Dale: And all the places you've lived?

Florencia: Well I lived in Argentina from about when I was thirteen years old and then lived in the United States for two years, and then lived in Venezuela for another four years or so, if I am not mistaken, or two year's sorry, two years and then in 1988 I went back to the United States to do my university education and I was there until 1996. Since 1997 I came to South Africa, to Johannesburg.

Dale: Okay so you've been in South Africa for almost fourteen years now?

Florencia: Almost fourteen years, ja.

Dale: And just tell us a little bit about family, your parents, siblings.... are you married, children?

Florencia: No I am not married I am still single. I've got my parents who are living in Argentina both... well my dad is retired, my mom is a homemaker for most of her life, my sister lives in the United States, she is married and got two kid's and that is the extent of my immediate family.

Dale: Okay and just tell us a little bit of what schooling you've had.

Florencia: I did a bachelors degree, my high school education between...well between Venezuela, I lived in Caracas in Venezuela ja I said that, did two years of my high school there and two years in the United States. Then I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and I did my bachelors degree there in Politics and African Studies and then I moved on to University of Minnesota in Minneapolis in the twin cities and I did... well I started my PhD degree which took about twelve years to complete. I finished my dissertation in 2005 and that was looking at the history of refugee politics in South Africa and looking at the construction of the South African State through the lens of refugee politics.

Dale: Okay and just also the last thing on the personal side - what kind of work and jobs have you held since you've left school?

Florencia: Well, in between my bachelor's degree and university I actually did some translations, some of it very boring but it paid bills. Then I worked for about seven years as a... predominantly as a researcher for the Community Agency for Social Enquiry in Johannesburg and then I took some time off to finally finish my dissertation, which I was also again doing more research on a number of socio economic issues affecting the country at the time, gathering a lot of baseline data and analysing things

from... I don't know, it ranged from looking at refugee issues, but it also I looked at issues around metal workers in the metal sector, I did a lot of work in the Criminal Justice System. So, a number of socio economic research projects that I was involved in. Then I worked as a consultant after I finished my dissertation in 2005 I worked for about two years, two and a half years, I was working predominantly with Lawyers for Human Rights doing also a lot of work linked to migrants and Asylum seekers and also I worked with the South African History Archive on their Access to Information program and also did some work for ODAC as well and then bits and pieces and a lot of it was ...

Dale: I am sorry. Can you just say, what is ODAC?

Florencia: ODAC is the Open Democracy Advice Centre. I was doing work there on access to housing issues and then. A couple of other things that I did was I did a big evaluation of the Gender Commission, for the EU, it was a big EU project looking at Chapter 9 institutions and predominantly as a consultant, did also some work in translating. I did some work with ILRIG, the International Labour and Research Interest Group, I think it's called, did a lot of translating and working with people who came from Argentina, workers who were now at the head of cooperatives, trying to set up businesses after the economic meltdown in Argentina. So, it's been quite eclectic in many ways and then in 2008, in May I joined the Department of Home Affairs and I am now the Head of the Johannesburg refugee reception office and I have been there ever since.

Dale: Okay, now just shifting a bit... just a short description of how you became politicised, how you became an activist?

Florencia: Well I mean there's always... my parents always say that I was always... they called me the defender of the poor when I was a kid. I was always very critical in Argentina growing up, in the United States about disparities and wealth, about how people were treated in the sense of, you know treating people with dignity and respect. When I went to university, when I was in Chapel Hill, I got involved with a number of organisations, because up until ... first couple of years I was doing sports, I was a field hockey player and so a lot of my time was involved in sports and then I quit the hockey team in Chapel Hill and then I joined ... between working and the library and then joining we had a group looking also at exchange programs with Ghana at the time and then got involved with some of the anti privatisation activities on campus at UNC-Chapel Hill. So, from there onwards I also had an interest of what was happening in South Africa and linked to it and then ending up here in many ways. But also just ... I think the politicisation also came when I was doing my PhD in Minnesota, always this treatment as you're one of these third-worlders and being in a university with a lot of students that had that even though they're living in the United States they're extremely parochial and have a very jaded view of what the so called third world is about, so I was also always very critical at university but got ... I think I went back to more of my activism roots when I got here... when I got to South Africa in '97 and started to get involved, and also in part through friends, including yourself absolutely, participating in some of the activities of the Communist Party and becoming a member of the Communist Party and then having a whole palaver if one can say ... you know there were people within the Jo'burg central branch saying "but you're a foreigner and how can you be a member of the communist party" and I was saying what

happened to workers of the world unite, because the constitution said something about you had to be eighteen and a South African citizen which I wasn't. But got involved in working, I think quite actively, also and working as a treasurer of that branch as well and trying to do things within the SACP and also got involved in the Friends of Cuba Society, doing a lot of work around brigades, Cuba and trying to look at the issues, some of the lessons from Cuba and what was happening in Cuba. So, those were kind of the beginnings ... that was happening when I first arrived as I was doing my pre dissertation research, or I was meant to be doing that which happened to some degree. I was somewhat affiliated to the Education Policy Unit at WITS, because initially my focus was on education, so that's how... you know I think at a personal level I've always had certain principles that I want to live by and then finding different ways and forums to articulate those. I mean even in the United States also participating in marches in Washington DC in terms of issues of Central America and the School of the Americas and also it wasn't a constant activism, I think I would say as other people were at that time, but certainly committed to tasks that I volunteered to do and so forth.

Dale: Now you mentioned earlier on that you did anti privatisation work. What is your specific interest, why the specific interest in issues of privatisation for you?

Florencia: Because it's ... you know we can live in a society where everything is commodified, where we forget about, you know basic social justice, we can ignore how the majority of the population, not only in South Africa, but also in the rest of the world lives, and the gaps between rich and poor and I think that was such a shock, I mean when I came to South Africa, coming from Latin America, you expect that, but in this country it was just huge disparities and at a time when huge promises were being made about how everybody's working for better life for all, which very quickly became a better life for all who can pay and then again the principles and what was supposedly at the core of the struggle or what many people interpreted to be the core of the liberation struggle in this country. That was shattered in a few, not even in a few years, I think very shortly after 1994, especially with the adoption of GEAR that became very obvious that a lot these things were ... You know, you've got the most progressive Constitution in the world saying you've got basic rights to all kind of things and at the same time a constraining macro-economic framework that negates the possibility of achieving a lot of those things. So, it was also that it was looking at that and saying "you know for me coming here", it was saying ok, "I've got a number of skills, I've got skills and I can add to this", I am still an outsider, and I was seen as an outsider for a long time, not only because of being white, and then the kind of the history and the, you know, I don't want to call it baggage in terms of the association of white people and repression and me being white on one hand and my accent, my American accent also felt like, 'Oh no, here comes another American to tell us what to do'. So, it was very touch and go despite, willingly and very honestly wanting to be part of what was going on and a number of the struggles I tried to get involved in ways that I could to do what I could and offer what I had.

Dale: And how did you become involved in the Anti Privatisation Forum?

Florencia: Well, that was a bit; it was a bit of a sad way in a way, after a lot of the disillusionment of working or attempting to work with the South African Communist Party, right? At a time when one

would think that was one of the left forces that one could build on or struggle with, in terms of not forgetting what this transition was meant to be about. And then that space closing very quickly within the Communist Party, it becoming very centralised, a lot of decision making ... it was more like, this is the line from the top and you must abide by it and there was no internal debate, there was no engagement on a number of issues. So, that space became closed, very quickly and it was part of joining also initiatives by a number of academics, activists people, leftists, you know that were realising that there needed to be another space created to ensure that some of these struggles were taken forward because that wasn't going to happen with organisations such as the SACP which was also in alliance with the ruling party. And COSATU which was also again very focused on addressing issues pertaining to workers, organised workers and not necessarily to people who were not organised or who were unemployed. So, there was a big gap in terms of how to take struggles forward and it was part of, being part of some of those meetings that happened at WITS University in 2000 and then getting involved in the beginnings of the APF, of the Anti Privatisation Forum at that stage.

Dale: And you mentioned the different individuals and activists. Can you remember at the time, who were the main people that came together to form the APF?

Florencia: Do I remember? I remember there were a number of WITS, people from WITS, I think it was also, I want to say AIDC, the Alternative Information Development Centre and there were also, ja I remember WITS academics, there were also I believe Keep Left was there as well. And then a number of activists and unionist's I think that was also disaffected with what was happening in COSATU. I mean you were involved and I think if I am not mistaken, John Appolis was involved. I believe Trevor Ngwane was involved and I can't remember if by then the SECC was actually institutionalised as such, but that was already organisations or groupings in Soweto that they were starting to fight for, for electricity, you know predominantly for electricity the focus on electricity in Soweto. But I can't honestly, going back I was trying to remember who was there, I can't remember if SANGOCO was one of them. But I remember that as the APF we were trying to work with SANGOCO because of the war of poverty and their people's budget initiatives and I think initially, but then again there was the whole challenge that this was an umbrella of NGO's and then that limited I think the kind of positioning of where this new organisation was wanting to go and where as NGO's were more kind of corporatised, in terms of wanting to meet kind of funders needs and not wanting to rock the boat too much whereas the APF was basically saying , you know, no holds barred let's tell it like ...

Dale: As much as you can recollect, you came out of the SACP in this case, and then you mentioned the fact of closing down of that space.

Florencia: And your expulsion, which was another thing I remember trying to fight on that saying that this should be a basic debate, here about this. So, that was also a triggering point also and in addition to the fact, there were also people who were saying you know you shouldn't be in this organisation even though there was, there was always ... you know you felt at one level that comrades were so bloody ungrateful at one level you know. When you were needed to do things and to take care of things, you were a comrade, but when it came down to hacks within the SACP, then they would pull the card that

you are a foreigner and you don't belong here. So, that was more like thinking why should I ... you know, why should I give my energy and my time to a struggle where people are not wanting to think about what they believe and they're just willing to toe the line that comes from above.

Dale: What would you say - as part of that initial groupings and people that came together - how would you describe the reasons behind the formation of the APF? Why, at that particular point and time, why did people like yourself see the need to be part of something like that.

Florencia: Well, because it was also much more democratic, I think there was also much more space ... I think at the beginning there it was allowing a number of people coming from very different walks of life I think, or working in very different contexts to join this organisation because they had a common goal of fighting against, you know the onslaught of neo-liberalism that was coming, you know GEAR, it was the feeling of what this is going to mean, it was kind of putting the RDP aside and there wasn't, I think at that point there wasn't that judging of what, you know, who are you and what do you think you can contribute to this. It was more like if you believed in the goal, if you believed in that common objective there was that was a space. And it was very tolerant of a number, I think of a number of groups, I mean whether it was organised political groupings or whether it was individuals, it allowed that space that people could contribute in different ways and again it was very participatory compared to what, you know the SACP had certainly become and I think there was a lot more space for debate, and thinking, thinking out loud, you know, where do we come from, what do we learn from organising in the eighties, what do we need to go back to. There was that space, I think there was that ability and that's what was encouraging, people willing to continue to fight but in a different formation in some ways.

Dale: But what about the impact on what we would call the macro level? What other kind of things do you think lent themselves to the formation of the group of the APF at a macro level.

Florencia: Well again I think it was, at the macro level certainly I would say that I mean GEAR certainly was an introduction to the macro economic policy, what that meant in terms of kind of restructuring what the path that South Africa, the Government was going to go down to in terms of provision of basic services, of basic needs, this trickle down effect in economics that you know eventually the majority of people will get something. And also you know by then you also have the change of guard between Mandela and Mbeki, which also, you know the kind of the honeymoon phase, the reconciliation phase, the let's all get along and build the nation phase that I think that Mandela you know tried to forge during his reign. Then that became very different you know when Mbeki took power in 99, then it was much more of him having an agenda of this is what we are going to do and we are not going to apologise for the fact that we, ja ok all these promises, the RDP office closing, you know all of those factors. The closing, I think it was also the closing of that space ... and the realization that a lot of these things were becoming empty promises and seeing that, and also I think you start seeing a lot more unrest, I think people starting to become much more disillusioned with the government and rightly so. I mean you this was, you have six years after liberation and you're still being told be patient and eventually you will get the crumbs. So I mean at that macro level, those are the things I can call significant or what was encouraging the formation of the APF.

Dale: Okay, and earlier you mentioned the different kinds of components which came together. Do you think that at that early stage of the APF, that what I would call ideological heterogeneity ... was that a strength or a weakness in terms of the APF?

Florencia: I mean sometimes with some of the leftist groups, you know, never seeing eye to eye. Initially I don't see it as a negative thing, I actually don't see it as being a negative thing to be honest, because it was part of the collective that eventually was deciding the path and the majority of the people in it. The thing that, you know I think initially that was positive then you started getting much later on some of the divisions in the APF whether we are going to join the elections, whether we are going to put up candidates and you know what I mean, if you can't beat them, joining kind of attitude. The idea you know that you can reform from within, or whether you just kind of, you know replace things much more, you're never going to be able to reform something that is capitalist at the core of it. So I honestly don't see it as a negative, I really don't, I think it was necessary after kind of ... on the contrary, I think it was to galvanise some of the smaller groups, you know, how many of the in-fighting in small leftist groups in trying to come together in saying let's try to get much more of a united force and not get carried away by some of the pettiness I think that characterized some of the leftist policies, you know, maybe during the struggle, maybe right after 1994. But then it required kind of shaping the APF and you had to engage in those debates and so somewhere you've got to draw the line and what is on. I think it was also, it was a bit of a front against some of the mischaracterisation or the tendency of the government to look at an organisation like the APF as the ultra left organisation, you know what I mean, a lot of the attacks on the fact that a movement like the APF was being built and you know, seen as a threat and the aim was to kind of delegitimise it in whatever way ... that it was unpatriotic, so that was also in a way galvanising because everybody was being painted with similar strokes, so ja.

Dale: ... was there a process in the APF at that time in which you could say there was some founding principles or strategic vision that informed the APF, what were those?

Florencia: Well I think one of the key things was fighting against commodification of basic services - that was one of the things. Maybe one of the things about the APF at the very beginning, you know, we were more anti than pro something, you know pro in the sense of you know we were pro social justice, pro meeting the basic needs of the majority of South Africans allowing them to have access to basic services, whether it was water, electricity, education, housing, the basics. But I think we were much more about, we were saying, you know a lot of times we were saying well what is the alternative, the RDP ... but then there were debates about whether did the RDP actually go far enough. But it was almost trying to regain the ground that was lost in some ways as inadequate as the RDP might have been, you know what that means, they said we moved left, moved right or centre and at least trying to come back somewhere. But certainly it was, you know for me ... I always think about it as kind of going back to respecting, you know beyond kind of fighting against neo-liberalism and capitalism. What has always been at the core for me and it's always been ... I have never been a well versed political economist in that sense, but it is always about human dignity, about regaining and treating every human life with a basic dignity and respect and it was just a slap in the face for the majority of South Africans. So initially it was more about fighting

against privatisation on every front, you know what I mean, It was against in a broader sense against neo-liberalism, you know and trying to forge links much more at an international level, recognising that you can't just fight at a local level, but it was about decommodifying access to basic services.

Dale: Ok, and now just shifting a little bit. Describe some of the ways in which the APF was initially structured and how that changed from the beginning, let's say from the first two years of its existence because at some point in time those structures changed and there was more formalisation, describe that.

Florenca: Well I mean one of the things about the APF, unlike again trying to move away from a kind of centralised structure, where you have key academics, dictating or whoever dictating what the policies and what the path of the APF is going to be. One of the key focus of the APF was always on community organisations, you know people on the ground, they should be driving, there should be more of a bottom up organisation, rather than a top down. And what I recall, I think we had, I know we had Chair person, certainly had a Treasurer, but I can't remember when I started being a Treasurer, probably in 2001, I think it was when we started doing proposals for War on Want and there was also a Secretary. There were very few executive kind of posts and then what you had was representation of affiliates or at that time, or one wouldn't even talk about affiliates but representatives from community organisations and also individuals, but community organisations has a higher representation than individuals or political groupings, not individuals. Individuals you joined as yourself, but in terms of your rights, your voting rights, remember we were trying to be very careful to say those people shouldn't be monopolising what the majority of, you know, communities would want. So, I remember it being quite decentralised, we had to have some positions and some accountability, as an organisation, but the rest of it was ... at that level was, I don't think at the beginning we had, I mean I am talking 2000, but in 2001,2002 we had the Executive ... initially there were three positions but then they kind of developed into deputy chair person and deputy secretary and then you had the, if I am not mistaken, it was the coordinating committee that was happening with one representative from each affiliate, or like I said affiliates, we didn't really didn't have a formal process of affiliation at that time, it was more like communities were fighting and having to deal with a particular struggle in their community, whether it was education, whether it was housing, whether it was sometimes unemployment with SAMANCOR ... and then they would approach the APF and join in the sense of become "members" or participate in the activities of the APF, but there was a coordinating committee that I think had one rep from each organisation and that happened I think every two weeks we did that and then that was the APF council, which used to have, I think it was between two and three reps from the affiliates. So the bulk of the people who were attending our meetings or participating were community members, I mean for better or for worse. Sometimes I think that brought up debates in the APF certainly, because as much as one would want the bottom to drive, you know, if the people lead, the leaders would follow as the saying goes, but at the same time I think there was a realisation that there was a need for political education and conscientising because as much as there might be communities that were fighting for, against you know the privatisation of electricity or of education, there was a need to start galvanising those separate struggles into what was a common thread here, why are all these things happening, and there was a

need to give that direction without becoming authoritative or imposing ... but to move those struggles forward and to get that unity between the different affiliates. So, that's what I recall in terms of the organisation. We had a number of committees, I remember we had sub committees, we had the organising sub committee, I remember Rob Rees was involved in that with Trevor and then there was the capacity building or the education committee with Nina, Melanie, Debbie Byrne, I think Ighsaan also participated, I think KHANYA was part of that sometimes. I think we had our fights with KHANYA at that time if I am not mistaken there were some concerns ... and then there was also a media, sub committee I also remember there was Nic working on that and those, those were the main ones that I recall or at least the most active of the sub committees and also the activities of the sub committees where there was always a number of key activists who were part of those committees, again to give that direction. But then the attempt was made to get reps from the different affiliates to be part and parcel of those committees and a lot of the emphasis, I remember we spent a lot of time on the workshops on capacity building of different sorts, not only on substantive issues but also in terms of trying to develop the leadership. Later on I think probably around 2003/4 we were looking much more at how do we build women comrades and ensure that women were also respected within the APF. Because I mean we had to deal also with all that gender dynamics where a Coordinating Committee, or a Council where the majority of members were men, but yet when you went to communities and there were demonstrations or activities in communities it was women at the forefront of those marches and then the challenges that women had attending the meetings and being part of the decision making structure. But there were a lot of emphasis because I remember doing, you know what I mean, doing the budgets or doing the reports of looking at where did we spend money and a lot of it was on capacity building and then ... I think sometimes frustrating, I think sometimes it was to say, you know you wanted people at community level to be more, not skilled, but able to run with things much more and break that dependency maybe on some of the more seasoned activists or people who had been, you know, who were leading some of these committees and stuff. But it was required, it was necessary ... I never saw it as here we are as the APF indoctrinating people it was more how do you open windows into what people are already making links and making those, you know linking things to a bigger picture of ... why is your electricity getting cut off, you know this is about government policies ... so it was trying to make those links much more broadly.

Dale: Okay and then in terms of those early two to three years of the APF once it got formed and started its activities ... two things; One - how did you see the response of the ANC and those outside, unions, those that would be considered to be on the broad left but outside of those things ... their response to the activities of the APF and also how that impacted on the APF, that response?

Florenca: Well I mean I actually think, I mean like I said before, I think between the ANC and COSATU, I mean COSATU was also very, I mean I shouldn't generalise about COSATU because I think there were gems within COSATU, there were you know I remember the public sector workers, what was it?

Dale: SAMWU

Florencia: SAMWU yes, they were being affected because especially because of all these policies and you had SAMWU national being very progressive and very supportive of APF struggles and then you had SAMWU Gauteng calling the APF reactionary and unpatriotic and counter revolutionary ... I think the APF started to become a threat to the ANC because the APF, you know I think the alliance was an attempt to certainly, I mean not that they were very different at the end of the day, but you know you kind of co-opt the left, the unions, you co-opt what was left of the SACP into an alliance and now you've got this new body, or this new movement, this APF that is now bringing, you know airing your dirty laundry, reminding you of where you come from and what you said you were going to do and how you're not doing it and being vocal about it. I think the ANC got... you know the APF started to become very slowly a threat and certainly the ANC went out of their way to demonise the APF in whichever way it could and it's members and saying that they're all these disgruntled ex members of some organisation or another as opposed to people who are kind of true to their principles and continuing in what they always believed in. So there was a lot of demonising of the APF but I think that worked positively in terms of the APF and it's members because then it was a sign that they were paying attention and that we're doing something right otherwise why would the ANC bother to go out of their way to say all these things about the APF and it's members. So, I do remember, like I said, I do remember COSATU also being very reactionary, being very difficult to work with as much as there were attempts by the APF to say but workers who are members of COSATU are living in communities where their services are getting cut off of they're feeling the affects of privatisation where you know they are not mutually exclusive struggles but certainly the line was that this is ... these are a bunch of counter revolutionaries, we can't, you know, we can't engage them. I mean even the SACP never really went out of their way to establish links with the APF. I think there was an attempt at some point but that was, it was more a co option attempt really then it was to really a willingness to join the struggle, so in that sense ja, we didn't have a, you know, in that case I think that became more and more obvious towards the WSSD in 2002, well you know you got the NIA visits or they're wanting to find out and trying to negotiate with the APF, where the march is going to go, you know those things became ... the APF became more of a threat and I think especially after the WSSD where you got the APF, I mean my argument is the WSSD event certainly put the APF on the map and the APF had been on the map here and there with a number of you know lot's of demonstrations and sittings, the whole thing you remember with the Mayor, the cutting off of the water and people got arrested - the Kensington '87 - all those court actions and the constant harassment of activists and charging them with public violence and malicious damage to property, pulling on the kind of Gatherings Act and all of that, you know post WSSD. I think what happened with that event, when you mobilised, what was it thirty, forty thousand community members to join this march, then the APF grew, you know I think it went from what, ten or twelve affiliates to about double that and ... again this wasn't a force that was going to disappear, this was something that was gaining momentum and it's all during Mbeki's reign and as these policies started to hit home, you started seeing a lot more communities getting frustrated and wanting to do something about what they were living you know on a daily basis. So I think for the ANC, that was, that demonising continued, I mean there was always, it didn't want to take the APF seriously and I think after that the WSSD they probably realised it is not going away.

Dale: You mentioned the WSSD and before that the World Conference against Racism which was another large event and mobilising. Now those events were also attended by, and involved quite a lot of other what have been called new social movements and community organisations.

Florencia: That's right.

Dale: How do you think ... there are two parts to the question; one - how did the APF respond to the rise of a whole range of other organisations that were in other places in the country and how did they, how did the APF work with those or try to work with those movements and organisations?

Florencia: Well I think for the APF it became very obvious, that you can't ... that these things were not just happening in Gauteng where APF was predominantly working. What those two events allowed to do to some extent was to establish those links across a number of communities throughout the country and I remember I think it was in 2002 or 2003, that whole national exploratory workshop that was done, to start that linking of all of these struggles that community after community were saying similar things and how, how to start working, not just as localised communities, but how do we ... I remember trying to think should we have national days of activism/ action to start galvanising some of those struggles. So it was ... there was also the realisation that the APF at that time didn't really have many funds, and so in terms of resources generally, you know, how, how do we do this and it was through starting to think beyond kind of the localised struggles, but again this idea of joining them, they might sound very different, or on different issues, but they are all linked to the same thing. So the World Conference against Racism I think helped towards that, even though I do recall, but I was, I didn't go to Durban, but I remember there were people sleeping in tents and people giving money to eat, barely kind of eke a living through the whole conference and I think there was a dispute with one of the organisations in Durban, which I remember required some discussion and engagement in trying to either kind of patch that up or clear that up. I can't remember whether it was with the Concerned Citizens Forum, if I am not mistaken, but again it was an attempt to, I think it gave momentum to a number of the people who were joining the APF, to realise that, you know, even for community members to say we are not the only ones facing this, you know across the country there are communities who are in the same boat, so those, those activities also helped in that regard.

Dale: Okay now we are just going to shift a little bit. You mentioned quite a way back you became the Treasurer of the APF. When was that?

Florencia: I believe it was 2001, I want to say, 2000–2001, I mean the APF was formed July 2000 and I believe that I was working, we established contacts with War on Want and they wanted a proposal, I think that proposal went in around March and I think by then I became the Treasurer somehow, I think it was towards the end of the year, in 2000. I can't honestly ... I will have to go through my records to see if I've got something. But it was from the beginning, so it was challenging because all of a sudden here you've got this kind of nascent movement, that was trying to find it's feet and trying to figure out the best way to kind of structure ourselves, you know, what is our plan of action, what is it that we want to do, what are our strategies and on top of that now, we had to try to put that into some form to get

funds. Writing a proposal where you want to say - give me money for toyi-toying and you know what I mean, for demonstrations to have a presence and so forth. These are funders and you are working with a capitalist system and you've got to work within some of the parameters, what do you need to say in a proposal and how do you word the struggles and the anger, you know the passion in it, all of that with making it sound attractive to funders and not threatening that this is a rogue organisation that just wants to go and you know, I don't know, you know storm buildings and break windows, those kinds of things. So it was challenging to put together a proposal, you know what I mean, saying this is what, but it was more rooted in again, something that was very basic and was the basis of the struggle and which is human dignity, respectful human rights around the South African Constitution, things that were in the RDP, right to life, you know basic dignity, talking about basics, access to basic services and how to engage, how to make, give meaning to what democracy is about, get people, how do we get communities to participate in their own development and to be active and to be vocal in their own development, I mean how do we work to develop that so that they can influence, you know policies make their leaders accountable, you know make their government leaders accountable and so forth. So ja it was a bit, you know putting together budgets and stuff, I think that first round with War on Want was quite challenging, because we were not having an affiliation system at the time, or some way of saying formally, you know there's this community joining the APF, you didn't know how far it was going to grow so you are doing this budget and maybe it was for ten affiliates, but in the second year you were double that so now you got to stretch. I think it was a lot of running on the road, but there was also debates about, I mean I remember certainly with somebody like Trevor Ngwane who I clashed with a number of times ... who kept saying you can't put a budget on the struggle, and I was saying ja, no I understand but we also need to live in the real world. I mean we live in a society where we need resources if we want to mobilise people, we need to get a bus and you can't just pray for a bus, you've got to pay for a bus or if you want to photocopy materials for education sessions, you got to get a place, you got to get some food, you've got to get some people there, how do we make that happen as opposed to people trying to make contributions out of their own pockets.

Dale: That had been the case ... the APF funded what activities it was able to carry, up and until that time, out of members pockets.

Florenica: Ja, through members pockets. A lot of it was just donations, and people donating their time and you know, whatever they had. We even did that during the WSSD, of getting different people to contribute different things and banners and this, you know like Avi for instance. I think of people who contributed what they had it was a bit of hand to mouth, it wasn't established, there were no administrator who could run things in the APF, there wasn't a financial accountant who could do any kind of reconciliation of things, it was very incipient, it was very nascent. It brought up a lot the debates like you're going to structure what we are trying to do and we need to be much more free flowing and not be judgemental or determinative or what the APF is going to do, but at the same time you've got to say these are the kind of things that we think need to be done. The other fight that came with that, I think that was also for me, regardless of whether you are a movement or whether you are a government institution or an NGO, you got to have accountability, right, there always has to be

accountability and not just about funds, because that was one of the things, that people, someone must be accountable and realise there are limits to what we can do, you know. But there was that argument from Trevor saying 'we don't need to be accountable, you know, we are a movement' and you know I was saying ja, you know just because you are a movement, you also need to be accountable. So some of those things were hard, because there were also, a lot of times I think I was seen as oh, you know 'here comes Florencia to tell us what you can, what you can't do, you can't limit the struggle by the funds you have' and yes, I know in the ideal world we could, you know we would want to do lot's of things but reality struck, you know and that was the hard part about being in the APF at times, because I felt like I had to be the wicked witch of the west, you know I always had to say guy's, this is what is going on, we overspend her, we're doing this and, you know sometimes I think the association is 'oh you are a white madam telling us what to do' which I didn't appreciate because it wasn't, you know it is not me saying it, this is the reality, as an organisation this is what we have and I am just being a reminder here, because I am dealing with this stuff on a regular basis. So like I said, I think community members tended to understand more, tended to understand I think a bit more than some of our Executive members and that was frustrating thing.

Dale: So just going on from that. This clearly in what you said ... hold on a second - we are going to pause for right now ... Okay we are back on. So Florencia you were saying that some of the impacts and things that happened as a result of this funding ... how would you - I know it's a simple binary, but nonetheless - the positive and negative impacts of gaining significant resources for a young movement, like the APF at that particular time.

Florencia: I mean I think a lot of it was ... what I started to feel at one level with some of the resources, I mean were we were spending a number of resources for instance on education things and workshops and so forth, but there were a lot of things, a lot of times there were, they had to be centralised. We didn't have the ability to go to communities to build things you know what I mean to decentralise it. So even though we were doing a lot of these capacity building things, you know sometimes it felt like, is this really filtering through, we were spending a lot of money for instance on buses, on pickets, on demo's and sometimes I felt that because we had the money we could do that, but sometimes we were missing part of what is the policy, what is it that is driving all of these things that we are doing, you know? Yes we picket, we have a presence which is important because we had to build the profile of the APF, but sometimes it felt like okay, we have done that, now where were we headed with this, sometimes it felt that we've got the money, let's do it, as opposed to this is what we have planned to do and these are the activities that fall under that. At times it felt there was a ... also sometimes a level of entitlement. I think we started getting that with people saying 'no we, we must get money now' you know as a community - if one community got and they didn't, then there was a sense of you know, we should be getting money, and sometimes you were not really sure whether was it for a really fruitful thing that this was going to happen. So there was that issue of not allowing again, not saying that we are going to do this for the sake of we've got the funds, let's just do it but being driven by your, you know, your politics and your strategies and your, you know goals and that we're doing x, y and z to get to point b from a. So that, I think that was the thing, sometimes the danger, you know that you can get lost in

just doing things for the sake of doing things without having a clear vision of where you are headed with a lot of these things.

Dale: Okay and the positive aspects, if there were, outside of just being able to carry out activities?

Florencia: Ja I mean I think the positive aspects is that it allowed the APF again to put the APF on the map. When you've got resources and you can hit, I mean that was the thing, it was to be visible you know the APF had a presence, even the thing of just printing thousands of red t-shirts. The fact that the APF wasn't just a flash in the pan, it became a much more continuous thing, you know whether it was through it's newsletter, whether it was through it's capacity building initiatives, whether it was through some of the media initiatives. I remember when people went out with cameras, you know and started taking pictures and creating their own, you know putting things in the newsletters, documenting things for themselves, allowing them to become participants in these activities and empowering them. I think that was very positive to have a lot of those resources and again and to popularise the struggle and to put the APF on the map, to make it a force to contend with, that certainly was very positive. And the possibility of them having a home, you know of having an office where people could have a meeting place, you know where debates could happen, where discussions could happen, all of those things were extremely positive in terms of having the resources available. And then also to allow you to, you know, again to start thinking about what is our plan? Slowly ... I think the negative was, there was a tendency within the APF to not want to plan in advance, and sometimes you have to. When you've got resources and you've got to stretch them for quite a while, you need to have a sense of where you are going to go as opposed to saying, ok what is happening today, let's get three buses, because we are not going to go too far. That was the negative aspect, but the positive was that it allowed us to do a lot of things and to grow and develop.

Dale: Did the access to finance, significant financial resources, impact, if at all, on the structure of the APF and the way that it then ... how did it do so?

Florencia: Well absolutely. In that sense in terms of what we then started asking for, I remember. For one it allowed to have those resources it allowed to bring people in from different communities, which was, you know one sees it as very basic, but when you've got to pay ... I remember dishing out the transport money for people to come to meetings and that was fundamentally important to allow people to attend. You know if we hadn't had those resources then it would have become a top down thing where only the people living in Jo'burg would be the only ones attending meetings. So, in terms of that it facilitated something as basic as getting into a taxi ... for five rand or ten rand to get there. And then in terms of the structure, what we did as well is that we you know it allowed us also to decentralise, we started to have regional structures of the APF and to push toward that so that not everything had to happen in Joburg, you know, or in Braamfontein that then some of the activities could start happening within different regions, whether it was in the Vaal, whether it was in the East rand or whether it was in Soweto and so forth, so that you had more localised activities that could take place, more resources could go into organising more localised meetings, or door to door activities and really bring the struggle down to the base as opposed to some general demos that we would all go to.

Dale: Okay and now just again, shifting a little bit. By that time 2004-2005, well into the time period, the APF began to experience some changes in its own composition, not just new recruits or new organisations. Just describe some of those in your recollection.

Florencia: What I remember with that is that initially individuals could join the APF and have a say and participate, but then there was a move towards limiting also the say and the weight of individuals and political groups. Because I think what happened is that some of the political groups were starting to use the APF for their own ends and therefore a number of communities became quite critical of that and saying, you know what is your base if you are an individual or if you are a political, a small political left grouping, you know it is not your community you are representing, you are just representing your own specific interest of your organisation. So if I am not mistaken then representation went directly to communities and I think political groups still had limited representation, but there was ... what happened is that the individuals pretty much went out, there was a move towards, you know if you are an individual there is not as much room for you in the APF. At least I recall that, remember that I left in 2005, I kind of stepped down from my treasurer post in 2004 and I kind of left the APF. I mean pretty much by the time I started my dissertation research in February 2005. But I remember there were shifts towards that and there was also a shift toward also formalising much more the structure of the APF, having a constitution so that everybody knew their rights and obligations, how could an affiliate join, so there couldn't be affiliates that would just use this as ... you know we started seeing this unevenness in affiliates. In some communities you had strong affiliates, but then you had affiliates that had very little accountability, there were no mandates. This feeling ... I remember those discussions in the APF where there was a feeling that people would attend meetings, but they weren't mandated by their communities or they didn't report back to their communities and again the issue of accountability, then again is this just people who are coming to APF activities to get a meal, or you know other reasons as opposed to really being committed to fighting those struggles. So what I recall is ... those are the things that I remember about the structure changing a bit and I think also, I can't remember when the Exec expanded to have all the deputy's and then also just having like a paid administrator, I think a paid administrator came early, we started I think in 2001 or 2002 we had one person, but then we actually employed Trevor as the organiser. That was still during my time, certainly I think it was 2003/2004 that he was a paid organiser of the APF and then that also brought a lot of I think frustrations.

Dale: How so?

Florencia: Because there was a feeling that a lot of the attention of the organiser was going to his own kind of community for one and that the finances and resources were also on balance, were going to support Soweto as opposed to other affiliates. So, that started to create a lot of discontent in terms of just building the SECC and that brought clashes within the Soweto affiliate. I remember that there was no accountability of money spent and then also the SECC having it's own money from the Public Welfare Foundation and there were community members from within Soweto that I remember coming to me and saying nobody is accounting for how this money is being spent at all and asking me, could I help? You know as the Treasurer, you know could I intervene there to deal with that issue because people

were feeling that this wasn't fair at all and that the funds were not being used for the ends that they were destined to. So those were some of the things, I don't know if you were asking specifically in terms of the structure, I mean those remember it was five years ago, so some of the things, it's you know, fuzzy.

Dale: Sure and once War on Want, which became the core funder of the APF, came on board, how did that influence the APF's access to other funds and to other opportunities for resources?

Florencia: Well actually it started to, I don't know if it was the War on Want funds or if it was the fact that the APF was out there in communities doing things and seen to be doing things, that for instance we were approached by Oxfam Canada, that we got approached by, say for instance different organisations. Like Oxfam Canada had a angle on HIV/Aids and so it was a very straight link to say absolutely ... incorporating that part of capacity building and awareness into some of our activities and then also funding some of our things. I think it also, you know, I think in terms of having War on Want funds and people seeing that we could manage funds I think also probably facilitated access to other funders to say you know we do have funders but we want project specific funding so it also didn't become so scary for ... I think it also probably took away the perception of many people that this is a bunch of radicals out to destroy things, but that it is a movement that is trying to do positive things. And then so you had, I remember we tried with Public Welfare Foundation, Oxfam Canada were two of the ones that we did in addition to War on Want, but also the realisation that you know you shouldn't have all the eggs in one basket because if that goes, if the War on Want funding went, then you would need to kind of start spreading your sources so you have ways to kind of survive before something happens. But again, yes I think it was in part the track record with War on Want, but also I think the fact that the APF was serious in terms of what it was doing and was trying to be accountable and we, I think also we were very careful because we knew that one of the things that any of our opponents, whether it was the ANC or any of the other organisations might latch onto, you know mismanagement of funds to make headlines. So I think for me, particularly, I was very conscious of that, to say we need to have a clean bill of health so that, that doesn't become something that they can use, you know against us in that sense.

Dale: And how would you, I know that you had mentioned earlier on that when the initial approach to funders came there were debates within the APF and these obviously continued in various forms and ways. From your own experience and involvement in the APF how did you engage that debate with regards to the sides that were taken in respect of the impact that it had negatively, institutionalisation and so forth and so on? How did you see that ... after the funding came and once it became real and things were moving?

Florencia: Ja, I think I mean it's always been a debate, it's kind of a Foucaultian take on this, you know you don't want to be exercising power, you don't want to be determining what it is people are going to do, but you do need a level of structure. If you want to move people, if you want to have an impact, you need to have a level of organisation; you need to be able to do things. So, I think again, I think a lot of communities started to see the positive things about the funding and some of the debates to say you accept the funds ... we never misconstrued what we were about, honestly, I mean we didn't put in a

proposal that you want funds for demonstrations, because you are probably not going to get it, but if you talk about you want to do some active lobbying, it sounds good. So, it wasn't about selling your principles and what you were about, it was about how do you package that to make it sound good and something that funders could swallow. The form that it actually takes on the ground could be different or things like you know having to take funds to pay bail bonds for people who got arrested, you know what I mean, you are not going to talk about that, you are not going to put that in a proposal but you can still do that with funds and be true to what it is that you are trying to do. I think the danger becomes when, if you don't know where you are going, ja then chances are that you will get swallowed by the money and forget where you are going. But if you have a vision and you know where you are headed then you will use those funds to make those things happen. So that was always my argument, it wasn't because you are getting money, you are now capitalist like the people you are trying to fight, you know, we live in a capitalist society and you've got to engage with that reality and you've got to make use of those resources to follow your principles and your objectives. So, I think again, I think affiliates, affiliates could see that I think it was more debates that were coming from some of the leaders of the organisation, more than anything else, you know, stirring the pot and yet those very same leaders were on the side were trying to get funds for their own organisations and not for the APF as a whole, so that was the irony of it. Unless you've got some benefactors who can fund you, I mean you will need resources you know, money yes, but money to do all kinds of things you know and to make things happen.

Dale: Ok, just a few more questions. In those three, four, five years that you were there and watching the development of the APF, by the time that you left in 2005, how would you describe what it was that the APF was able to achieve? In two ways: one – internally in its own activities, you talked about capacitation, political education, in other words building a movement and a cadreship; and on the other side what it had managed to achieve in its larger context, of what it was doing in the communities and actually fighting against or for ...?

Florenca: I think internally if you look at ... I mean I think there were affiliates that really grew that got very strong, and they were able to sustain the struggles. I think we got to the point where you could see that the APF had grown, so internally you know ... you could see that we had moved. I think the concern was that I mean I had at the time, it was the unevenness at one level you know that is something, then also the fact that you know some members could come and go because for instance people might get a job and leave, so you had that kind of, you know maybe rotation of people or shedding some people, some new people coming in, in terms of the affiliates and that sometimes can be destabilising in a sense that you are trying to create continuity and build something, you feel like you are spinning your wheels because you are always trying to capacitate. I think by the time I left, they still needed to ... there was a lot of work that still needed to be done and in terms of building that cadre of people at a much more local level. And again it is a challenge because you have got to work against years of apartheid education and you've got to work against, you know basic things of writing letters or doing, you know and it is painstaking work. But it's the kind of work that needs to continue to be done otherwise it becomes a shell that just collapses on itself. So I think in that sense, I can say there were a number of affiliates that

took things on their own, that use the initiatives, you know if you look at Orange Farm for instance, you also did a lot of things on their own - setting up, with the assistance, I think it was of KHANYA at the time of the crèche, or the gardens or doing recycling projects or you know, where communities were trying to find their ways and continuing their own struggles in their own way. And I think other affiliates had fizzled, you know again, because maybe because their heart wasn't in it or they, like I said the moment people found a job they forgot about the anti privatisation struggles. That I would say was internally, again I mean it was a movement in the making at the time, not a finished product certainly, I don't think it ever is. And in terms of the broader scheme of things, I mean with the APF you started seeing the APF being invited to a lot more events, I mean the participation, the World Social Forums and then, you know that Water Conference, that focus on remembering Kyoto in Japan and being part of the Africa Social Forum, working with PSI I remember at the time it was also those links. So, it also started giving the APF much more international profile. You know sometimes I think some of that got personalised in the figure of Trevor Ngwane which I think was unfortunate because I think the APF was certainly much more than Trevor Ngwane, but I think sometimes the West requires an icon and it helps if you have an icon that you can link to something, it makes it marketable. But again, it bought the profile of the APF, you know internationally which before it didn't have and allowed it to participate in a number of international events at a broad level ... just to engage, you know, engage in much more initiatives which were much more third world or developing world initiatives and participate in those.

Dale: And on the domestic front in terms of changes in government policy, in actual practical things that people were struggling for on the ground?

Florencia: Well I mean, I think the focus on water for instance, with Phiri in Soweto that was a big thing, a huge thing. Well one thing was, I remember was with electricity, you know with Operation Khanyisa, the reconnections in Soweto that was ... I remember it was an achievement at that time, when you know, here you have the kind of resistance from communities who say, 'okay you're going to cut me off we are going to reconnect it', and then the reaction from ESKOM saying these are the Izinyoka, these are people that dangerous, demonising them, you know, turning them into these evil people who are trying to break the law, saying no we just want something pretty basic. The fight against pre-paid water meters which became, you know with Soweto becoming the pilot project for the rest of the country so the interventions in Soweto and the fact that people were pulling out the pipes as Jo'burg water was coming to put the pipes down or trying to install the prepaid water meters and pulling those out, like in Durban also with the tricklers and the movement, the activities there. Those put a bunch of dents on the kind of ability on Jo'burg water and the city of Jo'burg to go ahead with these full privatisation plans that they couldn't just steamroll or with these communities it would have to be an engagement. And resulting from all of those struggles and linked to that, the use of courts to strengthen that struggle of and the formation of the Coalition against Water Privatisation and the engagement through the courts and again fighting the legal ... testing how far do our constitutional rights actually go and how progressive are our courts in terms of respecting socio-economic rights in the constitution, which also, I think was a farce in terms of the constitutional court and what happened. But I think in terms of the, that court case relied on a lot of the work of affiliates that was being done in terms of their experiences,

their affidavits, I mean that formed the core of that court case, certainly in terms of the impact on a number of those issues. I think there were others, but I can't recall all of them. I remember there were things that were done in different communities, where some communities supported an independent candidate from some of the elections, of, you know, there were localised struggles that were as a result of the interventions of affiliates with the backing of the APF, with other APF affiliates. Or the issues around evictions and land I remember in Thembalihle working with the Landless People's Movement around that area there were issues of all those struggles. So those were the very direct impacts that one could say the APF was forcing these issues and having to get the government to reconsider. You know after we realised that, okay the memorandum goes so far, you know they will accept a memorandum, but then you got to follow it up with action, whether it was the closure of roads and the burning of tyres in Orange Farm. You know, to kind of say, we are not going away. And those were all community struggles that also were supported and were I think grown in many ways, with all the activities of the APF in the years of kind of hitting at the base, you know and trying to build that base.

Dale: You mentioned that you stepped down from your position as Treasurer in 2005 and more or less left the APF. Why particularly did you feel you needed to leave the APF at that time?

Florencia: It was a very personal reason. I needed to just you know finish my dissertation once and for all. I kind of cut off myself from just about everything and I mean for many years I was doing the books of the APF and devoting many hours to that, I just didn't have the time to do that unfortunately. It wasn't anything about I have lost faith in the APF but rather that I just needed to be a bit selfish now and finish this, which was an important personal accomplishment for me. And thereafter, I think with the closing of the space for the individuals in the APF, I think it became harder for me to say, okay, how do I participate in these things, you know what I mean, in some of the activities. And again it wasn't because I thought the APF has lost its cause, but it was time to pass the baton onto somebody else because I think ... and that was a true test and that is where the true test of the APF comes, it's whether it can progressively be handed over to those very same community members who have been part of the organisation for so long and can that be sustained over time. I mean the whole issue of skills transfer is a challenge, it is a huge challenge, you know because I mean I see it in my work now as well, you can't just assume the basics, you can't assume that somebody knows Excel, you've got to show somebody and spend a bit of time doing that. But it was selfish, it was very selfish, but as I said I just needed to dedicate more time to finish this because it was kind of twelve years in the making and had to be done. But it was a sad moment ... I remember stepping down at that AGM I think I had a bit of a heart attack with the guy who replaced me at the time, I was thinking I was trying to say 'you really need to focus and do this', but it was very nice what I do remember about that time was that there were so many comrades who came up to me and they kept saying 'you know, you can't leave us we need you, you have been instrumental', you know from the original attitude of some saying you are the white madam who is telling us what to do, there were people who finally, not finally, I think there were people who appreciated what I was trying to do and that I wasn't trying to be judgemental or authoritarian, but that they had to be ... ja, I was just trying to contribute my skills in the best way I could. But I wouldn't go and do public speaking in Soweto because nobody would probably understand what the hell I was saying,

but my skills lied in, you know, doing the finance bits, doing the reports, complying with some of the funders, whether it was procuring buses or whatever it was, and that is where my strength lied. By the time I left the APF I don't think it mattered whether I was white or who I was, you know but I think it was the fact that my actions spoke for who I was and then people recognised that and that they were appreciative of that. So it was ... it was sad, more then, you know I felt like I have been with the APF for quite a long time and leaving it behind, it, it's hard because it also formed part of my weekends, you know what I mean, attending meetings, or buying chickens for people in jail, or you know, doing all those things, but it was more just moving into a different phase of my life.

Dale: Okay I think that is it.

Florencia: Okay.

Dale: Thanks very much.

Florencia: You are very welcome.

