

Owning your Liberation History: Nise Malange on the work and lessons of the Culture and Working Life Project

This text was published online by ASAI in 2017 [\[LINK\]](#)

by Nise Malange, Mario Pissarra, Tasneem Wentzel and Scott Williams.

Note: Nise Malange, poet, activist, archivist and director of the BAT Centre, Durban, was interviewed by ASAI's Mario Pissarra, Tasneem Wentzel and Scott Williams. The interview took place at the BAT Centre on 24 March 2017, and forms part of ASAI's Community Arts Legacy Archive, funded by the National Lotteries Commission.

Transcription by Jedi Ramalapa



Nise Malange, March 2017

MP: Why would you say there was a need for the Culture and Working Life Project?

NM: I will link it with me and Gail Street. 125 Gail Street is where *Culture and Working Life* began. Those were our trade union offices. I was working there as an administrator who was dealing with all the workers complaints. Workers were not organised at that time, so one was exposed to a whole lot of issues that were impacting on the workers' lives.

One thing that always made me worried... We had *FOSATU Worker News* and we'd have piles of flyers and information about workers. Those piles would be sitting

there. You'll be giving them to workers and the workers won't take them. On this one particular day I was taking a statement. This young handsome man, he was about 21, he had to sign the statement. He just said to me, 'look sign for me...' and tried to smooth talk me ... So I said 'I cannot sign, this is your statement. I write it from you but you must sign it'. And there was a big issue and eventually when I told him the legality of this whole thing he eventually whispered in my ear, and said 'I cannot write'. That for me, there was something about it. A young person who could not read and write. And it bothered me. I had to get him to put a thumbprint, because he couldn't even hold a pen. The pen would go like this...I've seen it with old people. And then I started wondering about all that information that was sitting there that was about workers and for the workers. The newsletters, the books, the *FOSATU* newspapers and all the campaigns and information. How do these people then access the information? Some people go to the general meetings and that would be just one aspect of that information, and there was a lot going on at that time, the strikes, and we had to educate people about the strikes.

MP: Can we put a date on this?

NM: It goes back as far back as 1982. *FOSATU* had these education workshops. There was a lot of culture that was happening within *FOSATU* and that's where we began writing and doing things. I did that as an employee with the workers. And then this thing started growing, it started growing because now there were strikes and we had to do something for workers during strikes, do these plays so that they can learn.

By '85 that whole cultural movement was getting bigger. It was between the Gail Street office, the Dunlop workers (because it was walking distance), the Dunlop workers in Sydney Road, and the Dulton Hostel (which is where most of the gumboot dancers and maskandi musicians were staying). It was the Clover strike where most of the plays were coming from. So you had all of those workers coming to Gail Street. And we didn't have a hall in Gail Street, it was just offices. So we'd sit in the offices, workshop ideas for these things and it began to grow.

We then had a place that we were using in Clarewood, a big factory which was just an open hall. We started using that for the rehearsal of plays and stuff like that. With the formation of *COSATU*, then *COSATU* started its own workers' cultural desk. The workers' desk continued and we were doing workshops now for *COSATU* and there were Cultural Locals (what are now known as branches) and there were groups all over. Like I said, it started before *COSATU*.

I remember Wits used to host these education workshops and when we went to Cape Town and other places, all the workers' groups would get together and go and perform in these activities. When *COSATU* was formed, then people like *Ari Sitas* came to Durban and they joined us in terms of the workshops and research. They got money from the South African Catholic Bishops Conference to kick-start the research unit. A whole lot of research was conducted and then things were happening in '85, '86, and '87.

About '86/7 *Culture and Working Life* was formed as part of the South African Catholic Bishops unit within the Sociology department which basically was research.

And then it grew into training of workers, we had mobile workshops all over KZN. We were producing a Zulu magazine, a journal. We were doing all sorts of things within this unit. But it began in 125 Gail street with *FOSATU*, the Federation for South African Trade Unions, then grew into *COSATU* Workers' Cultural Desk and then from there with the transition, when the ANC was unbanned, then the Catholic Bishop's Conference started pulling out from most of these units and they wanted to give money to *COSATU* and stuff like that. So... but, that's the long and short... other worker's cultural movements existed before *Culture and Working Life* was formed.

MP: The way you describe it, is a very organic relationship between how this evolved with the different parties. But how would you characterise their relationship? If Culture and Working Life Project was at some point part of the University as part of the Sociology department, what would its relationship have been to COSATU as a structure, because surely there were different lines of accountability in terms of one being located within the University and the other one being located within the trade union movement? They can't be one and the same. There must have been some distinction between their roles and how did they support each other?

NM: I think *COSATU* Cultural Desk was basically formed to be more like *Culture and Working Life*. *Culture and Working Life* was first and foremost to do research. Some of the research that we did was about the 40 hour working week. We were looking at leisure. We called it a leisure-time survey. We were looking at how much time workers have for families and for leisure. That research helped us to push for companies to transform the canteens in order for workers to have leisure time. To have time where they can watch movies, they can read, they can write, they can paint within the canteens. So that was one of the outcomes.

What *COSATU* Cultural Desk was doing and what *Culture and Working Life* were doing, were two separate things. We were basically servicing the workers. We were researching about the lives of the workers. So there was an element of academic work, but there was also an element of the development of workers. Workers who have the talents in music, in visual arts, in writing. That's why *Culture and Working Life* was producing books of stories of the workers. They were producing poetry of the workers, we had the paintings. We were making plays and those plays were traveling the world. We had all these projects at *Culture and Working Life* which were informed by worker needs.

You needed to have that research in order to intervene. Employers respected that because when we argued we argued from a position of information. *COSATU* Cultural Desk, I'm sorry, up to now I really don't know what *COSATU* Cultural Desk was doing or did. But *Culture and Working Life* I am very clear, it was to research. It was to develop the workers that had talents on the shop floor. It was to assist workers who were either retrenched or workers who were on strike. To keep them because one of the strike's outcomes was that, employers would say we want all the workers to be in one place. So employers would send people to go and check, and all the workers would be in Clarewood. Also on the workers' side, because they were also trying to avoid scabs, workers had to register and put their name on a register. If

they didn't do that they would go and hunt them because they would have to face consequences, where are you when we are all striking.

There were all these things that were happening and the role of *Culture and Working Life* was very clear in relation to all of the outcomes of the research, as well as what the workers' needs were at the time. During that time, it was easy for the university. I mean if you drive a university car you get into particular areas. So that also helped, people were received more, not just workers that were aligned to the ANC, but all the other workers because workers were workers and that's how we treated them whether you are IFP aligned or ANC or whatever party that you are, we would work with them as a core group of workers and I think that was also the advantage of *Culture and Working Life*.

MP: Whereas COSATU wouldn't have been able to do that, because it would have been more polarised politically?

NM: Yes, COSATU would be more polarised.

MP: There were other cultural formations at the time. What kind of relations did you have with the Natal Cultural Congress, or the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW)? Which other organisations were active and related to the Culture Working Life Project during that period?

NM: The Congress of South African Writers was closer. COSAW was formed after CASA (Culture in Another South Africa) in 1987, around the same time *Culture and Working Life* was formed. We had a very close relationship with the Congress of South African Writers because they were kind of a developmental organisation. They also worked according to the COSATU structures, meaning they had Locals. Part of the slogan was to decolonise the mind, but also break the barriers of Apartheid. Our Locals would be across the borders of the so-called coloured, white, Indian communities. By 'mind' we wanted to make sure that we do away with the structures of Apartheid.

Culture and Working Life was KZN and COSAW was a national structure. COSAW was very strong here. COSAW here, in this province, helped us to kick-start. People were joining COSAW because there was no other organisation. And you'll have writers, film-makers, script-writers, you had dancers, you had visual artists and so when we look at COSAW's membership we then decided that we should help in terms of these other formations. So because the regional coordinator (Tiki Pungula) was a visual artist, there was a move to form the *Natal Visual Arts Organisation*. There were a lot of film-makers and writers that were connected to NAVAO.

All the structures that began, *Culture and Working Life* as well as COSAW were assisting in the establishment of the structures, as well as in terms of the training, the workshops that we were doing. There were other structures like the *Natal Organisation of Women (NOW)*. NOW, apart from being a political organisation they were also developing skills of young women and there was this whole history project, of these things that were happening here. We were also working with NOW, in terms of training the young women, especially the unemployed women.

Whatever structures that we had linkages with, those would be structures that were either people that were within *COSAW* or *Culture and Working Life* that would need some skills one way or another. We would form partnerships because we believe in networking, especially with organisations that had resources. *Culture and Working Life* had resources, *COSAW* had resources, *NOW* had fewer resources. We also worked with youth structures, like you would have the Chesterville Youth Movement, and youth organisations from Lamontville, Umlazi, and KwaMashu. Some of them left the country and they joined the MK. This was partly to document, because the university had those resources, to document their music and their stories and stuff like that. We used the university as an entity, because it had all the resources. Like we would go to the drama department to get theatre resources, go to the music department to get the music recorded, get the films through the Tomasseli's Centre for Communication, Media and Society, and so on.

It was a whole network. *Culture and Working Life* started this festival. We called it, a May Day Cultural Week. We were in this campaign for May Day to be a paid day. We started with that in the 80's, demanding that May Day should be a paid holiday for workers. It wasn't just asking for that - we were trying to cut the 48 hours that workers were working. They weren't given any time to rest. Everything that we were doing was informed by the research that either the industrial health unit, or medical doctors testing and checking the workers' health (such as Marc Colvin), were doing. There were a whole lot of networks of research units from university that were working together with the workers. You know, for me, I think it was the most vibrant time. It was a time you saw the country working together. One time I was in China I went to Shanghai and I saw how institutions were working with communities. And you know it pains me because that's what we had in this country.

We worked together and we did things, we didn't wait to get a mandate from anyone and things were happening. There was also the *Natal Worker History Project*. You would find that I would work with them because there were no boundaries. If there's a project that I am interested in, I'm in there. I would go in and work with them on that project. Jabu Ndlovu (activist and unionist), when she was killed in 1989, I helped them in that research. What we had was really holistic. It was a holistic networking of institutions, of organisations, of individuals.

We moved to Natal Technikon, now Durban University of Technology, because the University didn't have a space for us to run the *Culture and Working Life* culture courses. We had space there, we were based at University but our Saturday classes were happening at the Technikon. We would go to Eshowe, Eshowe High School, it was a white school. We had a space there where we can run our classes on Saturdays. We used the theatre, we used the visual arts facilities. The advantage was that we were coming from a university and we were doing something really, really good. And you find people were gravitating to that and everyone was coming to work with us. That's why we were able to reach the province and move to other provinces, and that university stamp was also giving us credibility. We were able to go to the factories, meet with the workers. There were no issues because we were embracing all the workers. We were training people, changing attitudes, the way they see things and stuff like that. I mean it was an exciting time. It was really exciting. Even when there were strikes.

I remember we had the Dunlop play, the first Dunlop play at Bolton Hall on a Saturday. The Dunlop employers came to watch the play and when they saw the play they decided that they're going to support the workers to do these things. Sometimes workers would have to lie to take sick leave in order to participate in cultural life. By going in and talking to the employers, it was great. Then you had The Long March, performed by the Sarmcol workers, which we were working with. We were driving to Howick and working with the cooperatives of Sarmcol. We were...the heart and soul of the workers. They were not looking at COSATU Cultural Desk. They were looking at us because we were providing the skills, the information, contacts and all of that. I think, for me, it's something that you can't repeat. I don't think that we'll ever have that again. For me those were the highlights.

MP: I've just known a little about the project over the years and never quite realised the richness of it as you have explained.

NM: You see I'm not lying, it just comes (*clicks and laughs*)... It's real, it's really beautiful.

MP: Can you talk a little bit about some of the work you did with the visual arts?

NM: The culture course was music, visual arts, and creative writing. I remember the first project that we did was a mural because we had a cultural centre inside Bolton Hall.

The irony of Bolton Hall... Bolton Hall was a rival of FOSATU, 127 and 125 were just separated by a garage. So when unions, the textile unions change and they merge there was a lot of space available. That's where we started with the actual courses. When the visual arts program grew, we spoke to Andries Botha who was still very influential and was there to give us space at the Technikon. Our visual arts was painting, sculpture and ceramics. They also used to do print making, because printmaking was quite popular and linocuts. Avitha Sooful was one of the people that taught classes.

At the end we'd have an exhibition of works and some of the paintings were then used in the poetry books that we were publishing. Most of the time we'd work around themes, because those things were educational. Maybe we'd work on the theme of Human Rights, and educate people about that. So there would be stories and poetry and the paintings that would be basically about the rights of workers and human rights per se. We would work on any other theme so we'd take the works relevant for those stories and use them as illustrations in the books, and for book covers. We took them through the process up to an exhibition and illustration and then at end they would take their paintings to their homes and we had some of the paintings at Alusaf. Because Alusaf which I think is no more now. In Richards Bay, was one of the factories that supported the arts. We'd have cultural events there, we'd have exhibition of workers' art, and people would buy the artworks from the workers as well.

The Northern Natal Locals were very strong in arts and culture. And one of the reasons why we then decided to start a program in Empangeni, Eshowe,

Gingindlovu and Mandeni. Those were really strong areas... We used to get as far as Newcastle as well, where we'll hire a space. That's why we were calling our workshop mobile, because we'll just get all the facilitators as well as whatever resources that we needed and we'll go and spend two days, running workshops with outcomes. Because all the workshops that we do we'd have an outcome. The May Day Cultural week, people would showcase all what they've learnt in the programs and they would participate as well. COSAW used to have a lot of workshops as well. There were a whole lot of events that were happening and these workers would participate. Workers, youth and women, were really united. I think that's why the issue of discipline we never had a problem with. The young ones were learning from the adults. And these are some of the things that we can't repeat now. I think that's why there is so much moral decay. They've found a platform and that platform has no guidance. Because we were all guided by the older people in what we were doing in the 80's and even in the 90's.

MP: You said the Catholic Bishops Conference withdrew funding and decided to direct it to COSATU. Was that the main reason for Culture and Working Life Project to have closed or were there other issues at that time that contributed to that?

NM: Just a correction I think they wanted COSATU to be independent. That's what we heard. I mean all the funders at that time were re-directing money to Government and I think the Catholic Bishops were not unique. So there were still other little funders like the Belgians and others that we continued with them. But when we realised that the situation is not going to get better we started losing people. People were leaving and we took a decision that rather than just allowing things to collapse, let's rather work on a process, and that process was winding down the project over a period of time. I think it was with the Ford Foundation, and Broederlijkdelen which is Belgian, I think two or three funders, that we will start winding down the project over a period of time.

By the last year I was the only one because those funders were very strict with the evaluation. We needed to evaluate the project. It gave me the opportunity to pay out people like Alfred Qabula that they should get money. Because in NGO's it's easy for organisations to just close down. It happened with a lot of organisations that were within the university. There was no money to pay people anything. We were able to take a process where we paid off retrenchment packages to people. And then I stayed on with the idea that we will then move the resources to Killie Campbell Library at the University. I would do the close out reports and make sure that everything is done, with the University as well. We don't leave University in a huge debt, or money is left at University. So I was able to do that, close the project, and pay out people and pay out the debtors and close the project. I was the last person to leave. *Killie Campbell Library* at the University. I would do the close out reports and make sure that everything is done, with the University as well. We don't leave University in a huge debt, or money is left at University. So I was able to do that, close the project, and pay out people and pay out the debtors and close the project. I was the last person to leave.

MP: That seems like a very unique story because my impression is most organisations just fell apart at that time, whereas that sounds like it was a managed process.

NM: It was a greatly managed process. I'm really happy that most of the organisations I've been with we've done that process, considering that we were people that were quite aware of the workers' rights. We had people that were not going to be able to go back to a factory life. They were at retirement age and you can't just dump people and say work until your last day and you go with only your salary. The board and the funders were okay with the decision. You needed to get buy in from the funders as well. I'm quite happy, I think that's what also made the relationship that we had with everyone to be a good one. Some of the people like Qabula passed on. We made sure that we do things in a human way, and we don't just jump the ship and leave things hanging from people's lives. Also for the University, because one wouldn't like to go back and they say 'hey you left us with debt'. I've seen it. I mean I came here (BAT Centre), and there was a huge debt. I didn't know what to do. Those things are critical for organisations, even today, that organisations, when they know that they are in the process or when they see the signs of closure, that they treat people accordingly. The donors are always open minded about those things.

MP: What would be the relevance of a project like Culture and Working Life today? Which of those functions that you played would still have a relevance that you think is not being fulfilled by organisations today?

NM: The research element of Culture and Working Life. People always feel like research is not important. Research is very, very important in whatever we do. Documentation and archiving is very, very important and that's what we are struggling with at the moment. That's a huge, huge gap. Preserving, in whatever format that you can preserve information, photographs, videos, is very important. I believe that when you work with people you need to preserve the stories. You need to preserve whatever they give you. There is the huge gap in this country. I've seen this during the 2012 centenary of ANC. People were looking for information. We went to the *Malibongwe Conference* in 1989/1990. A whole stack of things were sent, good resolutions and everything, no one knows where things are. A classic example is COSAW... when I think... I pain, because there was so much that came out of people's lives, and photographs of people that have passed on due to violence, people have given us stuff and all of those things are gone. No one seems to know where they are. I'm a freak in terms of archiving and documenting. I just feel like those moments are important.

I accept that there are certain things that are just for memory and for your eyes only. But when you work with people I always believe that people will come back to you. The generations will come back to you and ask for certain things. 'You've worked with these people; do you have anything?' I come from a situation where my family lost everything, photographs and everything. There's nothing that takes us back to our own growing up. That's why for me this is really important. I keep everything. Some of the people I don't even know. At one stage when I started here and Facebook was becoming famous I would put this thing online and just ask. 'Where is this person?' 'Where is that person?' 'Can you recognise yourself in these pictures?'

There are so many pictures. I know that those families would love to see those pictures. Some of the guys have passed on. But there's no space. I try to give some interviews and some stuff to people that are supposed to be archiving. Then you go and ask for a particular thing and somebody tells you, 'oh, it's in my home!' What is it doing in your home because you're an institution? Sometimes you go and find boxes of information, and it has never been catalogued. It's the same thing that happened with *Culture and Working Life*. Same thing that has happened with a whole lot of organisational stuff that was really critical. You can't find that information, people don't know.

FOSATU Worker News, I wanted my stories and poetry. Then you're told that, if you find time go to Wits, to this department that's where it is. If you go there, it's not catalogued, or somebody will tell you, 'oh I have some stuff in a box in my garage, I don't know whether they're still in good order'. I just wish that that there was a space where you're happy that if you donate stuff, it's going to be captured. I know that it's expensive but I think we need to lobby for our country to make resources available, because this is the country's heritage. This is the country's heritage and it's not happening. *Culture and Working Life*, to come back to your question, those things were very, very, very critical. Publishing workers' stories, publishing their lives and all those things for me were important and they are not happening.

MP: I think when you talk about it being expensive, universities have the money. UCT has a full digitisation unit with 15/20 people working full time. But it's about the priorities. So where they've got archives of organisations like the Community Arts Project. We managed over the years through working with them to get them to work on some of the stuff, but again it has records from the organisation from the 70s, records that survived for 30 years and boxes are not catalogued properly. And the will is often not there, I find it's almost a kind of advocacy thing because it can be done, it's just that there's very few people who feel that that history is important. Maybe with the people who lived that history they value it, but because it hasn't been written properly into broader mainstream stories, other people don't really know it.

NM: It's not just about being written it's also research. I find Master's students, PhD student from abroad coming. I get emails, I get phone-calls, I get people coming, begging me for interviews. At one stage I was writing for another organisation in the US, a workers' writers group. I just stopped. I just find *ukuthi*, why should I be...?

We are still perpetuating the past. Astrid von Kotze tried with adult education and master's students. One of the things that we also tried to do was to document the history of the *BAT Centre* and its formation- that whole process. It was difficult to find information. I mean, when I came here in 2000, already there was a whole lot of information of five years that we were not able to find. That's one of the things that made me to go and look for *Culture and Working Life* information. I found that it was not archived.

It's not about one person writing, it is about getting the students, involving the students. The students are talking about decolonising education. What are you going to decolonise? What are you going to have if they are not researching? They are not writing about the history of the 70's, the 80s' that's not very far from them. For me

that's the issue, and those I think are the debates. This is what makes the youth today to feel that old people should not be involved in things, that the old people are not so important. You can't be made legends. We see now this whole legend movement. They're becoming like a group of people, when there's death, you see them standing there mourning. Who's capturing the stories from them? Because a hundred of them have not written anything.

Joe Mafela performed and more, did anyone important say, 'you started comedy you know', 'you did this and did this'? Ask students today, those are platforms. I think what *Culture and Working Life* and UKZN did was to engage them. Students and workers in one platform. These issues would be discussed by students and workers. University workers and workers that were coming from outside, so that they can see the importance. I had students who were following me from the University of Durban Westville, students that were following me because they wanted to document and record what we were doing. They were very keen and interested. What happened to that curiosity? For me, that's the sad part of our country. It's not even amnesia, it's neglect. It's feeling that... I think we started it as old people. We felt that certain, particular histories belong to me and not to anyone else. 'I was the one who was on Robben Island', 'I was the one that was in Pretoria Prison', 'I was the one', and individuals started owning the liberation history. Even the young people, I mean you will find a child just in prison in Pietermaritzburg for a month, who's now like, 'I'm this political prisoner.' What is a political prisoner? Sometimes I remember my uncle who used to work in the labour movement when he used to talk about these things. I hear myself sometimes just raising the very same issues that they raised but feel like we've done better because we recorded them, but where are those recordings? It's not about writers but it is about making sure that there is money for students to do research.

I had a guy who's now my friend who is an attorney. He was doing law at university, he needed to be in a law-firm but he could not get any internship. He came to me. He did research on the struggle songs and even now as an attorney, he still talks about that because it gave him an insight somewhere. Some students finish Masters, others have Doctorates, but they have only done research in terms of their studies and nothing else. That's where we need to begin with the institutions. They need to inculcate a culture of researchers, a culture of students that are interested in the history of the country, in making sure that there's proper documentation of the history, (not to blame it on the people that are supposed to be writing), but inculcate that culture.

When I first came to the *BAT Centre* that was happening. It's no longer happening. I host students from abroad. I have an old lady from Canada who has decided that she's going to rent a place because she wants to spend time with me. She wants to come here and she wants to learn. We're giving people that information and they are getting their Doctorates and they are moving ahead and at least they publish and they send us copies of their research, which is better, but why is it not happening in our country, why aren't all these institutions doing that? That for me is the big question.

TW: It's very interesting what you saying about universities and institutions because I am a student at UWC at this moment. And there's a big issue with archives and....

NM: Big issues with Mayibuye, I've used those archives there...

TW: And also at Iziko Museums, what's happening there. It's also like you speak about it, there's a lot of bureaucratic elements that even if you are motivated to collect and store, conserve, preserve your heritage sometimes, bureaucracy makes it impossible. There's no other option for things just to slip through your fingers which is very sad. I have a big appreciation for documentation and archives, that's my passion, but as a student that's very disheartening because...

NM: As students you're the ones that are saying decolonise education. I think that's where you need to begin. You find a few groups of people, you find one person that can listen to that. You make examples of what is important and find money because you can't just wait for university. Find money. The money where you can do that research and don't stop. Don't stop doing that and maybe one day they will see what you guys were asking for. I mean I went to the Mayibuye Centre, to look for stuff that I saw that they had. When they were saying they were digitising at the time I was there. I had the catalogue, those catalogues that they've made. Half of the stuff no one knows. I did research with SABC, I was looking for footage. I also do documentaries and you just find stuff that you took two days just trying to find...just going to each and now writing on those that 'this is Richmond' because you know you've experienced that. What happened after us where we can't say 'oh I know this person' and write a name, 'I know this area, I know this event, I know this occasion', you know? That's the opportunity that institutions are losing. It's very sad because we are going to lose a lifetime of history. We are going to lose a life-time of the visuals of all these things that would be maybe two decades? Because I think after 2000 or 2004 I don't know what has been happening.

TW: So would the digital platform be another way of archiving and storing and documenting histories or collecting histories also?

NM: Collecting history, I think it's important, I mean I've seen it with *SA History Online*. When I got comments, my home is Cape Town, and some of my nieces and nephews who don't know about my work, (I have lived here in KZN for more than 30 years), who would phone and say 'hey, we found you in *SA History Online*'. It's those that are curious again and how do we make it acceptable? It's important that it's there but we also have to make it accessible. Even if we start from high schools. My grandson, he goes every day to the computer room at the Primary School in Berea because he is fortunate that he is in a school and at that age he is being exposed to computers. Then he tells me of things now they see in computers... and now 'Gogo I don't want your iPad I want you to bring your computer'. 'Why don't we buy a computer, a pc at home?'. We didn't have a pc, now he's saying buy a pc because he wants to learn and have access. But how many, how many kids, how many five year olds, six year olds who have access? How many old people have access?

We have a multimedia centre here at the *BAT Centre*, at least it gets utilised by visual artists a lot, which is nice, because that was the whole idea. The musicians too, which is good because that's what we wanted to do. How many places like this would allow people to just come in and spend an hour or two? It is very important that that happens. It shouldn't stop you from doing that, come to us, look for money, go ask for recommendation letters for you to do the work. Get support from all of us, we will support you. I want to see young people from this country doing that. If we have to donate, you have to come and stay in my house, you want to do research, we have to find money for you. It has to happen. We can't just wait for universities to wake up. I mean universities are now under a lot of pressure as well, there's so much pressure, but it doesn't stop you from fulfilling what you want to do. We're here.

I have young people here and then sometimes you don't think that they have interest. One would ask me... 'Oh I picked up your poem, oh tell us!', and then you start talking and they will say 'why don't you, have a seminar?' I said 'you're not interested', but we don't know! So we're all at fault. We're all at fault because sometimes we feel like it's not important. I mean, I've never been a person that wants to blow my own horn. But I'm learning now that if I have 50 students every year and I have all these other people, let me tell you, because when they come here they go to university, they do things. I have a group of poets that are interested and in that way I still feel that I'm still more like *Culture and Working Life* but managing this noisy building (which was supposed to have soundproof, but that's life), the little that you can do you just have to do it because there's great talents. I mean kids want to do things. There's lack of resources but whatever you have make it work and that's what I'm trying to do here.

SW: You spoke about the poems that you wrote and about the poems that the workers wrote. And then you also spoke about the challenges of preserving data and information when it's stuck in people's personal collections in their garages and they don't have an appreciation for it. How did you go about publishing those things because obviously the publishing houses weren't going to be publishing it, it would be dangerous for you? So how did you go about publishing and do you still have some of those things?

NM: We published. I mean we had Art Printers in Durban, which is one of the old printers. We designed and edited and everything and then we'd take it to the printers. I think the last book that I did in 1994, Peace Poetry with my friend, we collected poems of peace and we put the book together. We printed it at Art Printers, and then we took it to book binders, so we actually did the whole book we published.

That's what I still do here, get the ISBN number and publish the work. You have to deposit to libraries and that's what we did. We published books and we had our own distribution network. Books were sold everywhere; one time I was laughing looking at the receipts (*laughs*) of people buying these books. We did it, we never waited for publishers, we did that. I still talk to people today about that because it's just one of those amazing things.

I mean even with libraries, we had our suitcase libraries. We collected books and workers would come and young people. We'd give them all the books that they've

ordered. They would take and they would return them, and they get new books. There was never an obstacle. We were darers and you dared to stop us! Sometimes I laugh at myself for some of the crazy things.

I remember one time, I'm stepping out of what you were asking, I will come back, the Dunlop strike, I heard that there was a strike. There was a whole lot of nonsense between the workers and the employers. I took my VHS camera and had a friend who drove me to Sydney Road and I was click, click, filming. There were army, there were police, there were special branch. I was filming and doing the interviews. When I came back I realised that those cameras you have to make sure that you put the sound on and I didn't have the sound! (*laughs*) You'd have to remember, you know, going back to the workers asking them questions and stuff.

I mean we did everything. We published, we distributed and we had these books in libraries. I had each of the books. I used to have five copies but there'll be someone who would want copies and I would give. Now what I am doing with people who want those books, I just scan them and send to them because we have a library. Everything that we did then, we managed out of all that to get a library here at the *BAT Centre*. It's a small library, a multimedia centre, it's small with ten computers but I've been able to do exactly what I wish people could have access to. Most of the books we published are there. This lady, the daughter, the big rape case. I was showing the mother one of her stories from the book after they came back from the exile they were here. She couldn't even recognise herself because of the trauma and stress that she's gone through. I mean I was so shocked, I gave her the copy asking about them because I felt that it was very important for her as part of trying to gain her memory back to have that, to see herself when she was active in the arts... So the books are very important, but they also... sometimes they haunt you. I get haunted by them. I get haunted by the stories, get haunted by wanting to know where are all these people now because I've lost touch with some of them. You want to know because you don't see them anywhere. It is that because it keeps on, it keeps on asking questions. You yearn to know where they are today be it workers or youth. Some of them I meet them, I can't even recognise them.

It is a beautiful history that I continuously tell my children. When we meet people and I would say, 'ai I don't recognise them', and they would laugh. I go back to those stories and stuff. I have few copies of the *COSAW* magazines that I have kept, some are gone. I was involved in *Speak* women's magazine. The nice thing that we did with *Speak*, we catalogued all the issues that we gave to women's organisations or to universities. Also the collective members had bound copies of *Speak*. We're trying to make sure that that history remains.

I think that goes with me wherever I go. I'd like to make sure and this is what I'm doing at the *BAT Centre*. I've started a whole succession planning with the new staff, with the people here. I want to make sure that people don't come here and don't find things. That people must know that you must leave the legacy, you don't go and leave things just hanging for people. I'm just hoping that the kids that are here, they will continue with that as well in making sure that they keep files, they keep things properly they document. We had a whole lot of photos. I got involved in the project of the legends, the musicians and we googled them. In 2000 when I came here you couldn't find them. If you google now you'll find them because we're continuously

putting things on our website and on Facebook. We doing that because we're trying to find information about them as well. I'm a freak for art history. I want to know things and I want to know people and I like to keep things. I like people to know where things are.