



Interviewed: Ismé Bennie

Oral History Clip Title: A Very Limiting Society

Theme: Leaving

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(Ismé)

When I think back to London, it was a long time ago. It was the, you know, swinging sixties, I suppose. It was very, I'm trying to think of the word, gruddy. We didn't have a lot of money, we smoked a lot, we went to pubs, but I was always responsible. I had a job and I paid my rent and it was probably a very good experience for me at the time because I had a much better understanding of what was going on in South Africa with apartheid. I think it changed all of my attitudes.

(Interviewer)

Can you tell me about a particular experience that may have happened?

(Ismé)

Well the one I tell quite often is about two or three days after I arrived in London. I got on a bus and the conductor was Black. He started telling all of us "move down, move down". I thought "how can a Black man tell me what to do?" And I thought, you stupid girl. You're in England everybody is the same and I think that kind of started it. I was not happy when I returned to South Africa because I realized, having lived in London, that it was a very limiting society. In London if I felt like going out at night to a pub at midnight, I could go to a pub at midnight. South Africa was...very different. Women, girls didn't go out by themselves at night. If you didn't have a date you didn't go out. In fact, I had a friend whose mother locked her up on a Saturday night so the neighbours wouldn't know she was home without a date. It was that kind of society, that sort of attitude to single women. I think that was the main part of, the personal part of it, why I didn't like being there. I felt very restricted and then I suddenly, you know, my political awareness had increased so much after London. I just found the apartheid situation so...made me feel so...uncomfortable, unhappy, unaccepting.

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